

A solo show by Christine Laquet
June 2013, Long Island City, New York

CR(I)SES AD(JUST)MENTS (COLLAPSED)

focuses on the monstrous metaphors that were born out of The Great Depression of 1929 and those that have yet to arise from the 2008 Great Recession. In 1933, just four years after Black Thursday, King Kong became a popular icon in the historic birthplace of finance, simultaneously embodying the savage, the transgressive, and the monstrous.

Five years after the recent economic crisis, how do we connect the figure of the monster to contemporary life? What is its possible embodiment today? Using historical documents, in the creation of performance, drawings, and films, this exhibition is proposing to reactivate and short-circuit established narratives.

This book accompanies the exhibition. During her 6 month residency at Flux Factory (NY, USA) Christine Laquet invited different writers to contribute and reflect on her research: artists, performers, art critics and historians, curators and collaborators. The book includes contributions by Arnaud Gerspacher, Chennie Huang, Christine Laquet, Mille Højerslev Nielsen, Robert Steijn and Julien Zerbone.

Voir p.5 PDF Mille



Like a Ferris Wheel, Exploding and then Falling to the Ground – the Early Carnival and Monsters

an essay by

Mille Højerslev Nielsen

We have a nice time here. But remember, carnivals come cheap. What matters is the day after, when we will have to return to normal lives. Remember that our basic message is «we are allowed to think about alternatives». Remember. The problem is the system. It forces you to be corrupt. In the same way you get coffee without caffeine, beer without alcohol, ice cream without fat, they will try to make this into a harmless, moral protest. A decaffienated protest (...) we allow our political engagement also to be outsourced. We want it back.

—Slavoj Žižek

Occupy Wall Street speech (extract),
October 9, 2011-

On Thursday April 18, Flux Factory was the scene of a collaborative performance created by visual artist Christine Laquet and excuted by deaf actress Alexandria Wailes and jazz drummer Gerard Faroux. Laquet previously asked the two performers to work around the above quote from Zizek. On the evening of Thursday April 18, Wailes was wearing a tight black dress decorated with sparkling white-silver pearls. Faroux looked like he had just stepped out of a cool, clean 80's music video. He was suited up in white baggy clothes and with a cap covering his silver-blond hair. The two of them were placed opposite to one another in the room. Wailes reacted to the vibrations in the floor created by the sound of the drums, Faroux's rhythm adjusted. Faroux, to the dancing gestures of Wailes' body. Even though the starting point was a written text, the two were only to communicate through movement. Never once did they let words float out of their mouths.

Language is a political, cultural and social tool (wo)man uses to maintain hierarchies and seperate the good from the evil. The non-verbal performance could be said to serve as an example of how words construct or deconstruct our perception of our surrounding enviroment.

The performance *To gain your own voice, you have to forget about having it heard* was part of the carnevalistic exhibition experience, entitled CARNE VALE, which I initiated, conceptualized, and later curated. Through a dialogue with the artists CARNE VALE seeked to investigate the cultural, social, ethical and political implications of the early carnival through an exhibition, daily performances and a video screening program. The exhibition as a whole and the individual artworks were developed and executed around an essay I wrote. This essay, No Man is an Island, Entire of Itself – Collectivism in Arts and the Early Carnival, functioned as a curatorial frame, an artwork and the center of CARNE VALE.



By examining Christine Laquet's current artistic project CR(I)SES AD(JUST) MENT'S (COLLAPSED) viewed in the context of CARNE VALE, and by repeating the thoughts behind No Man is an Island, Entire of Itself..., this essay will describe and perform a synthesis of common hierarchies by unfolding the etymological meaning of the words 'carnival' and 'monster'.

Farewell to the Flesh



CARNE VALE was themed around the concept and history of the early carnival and took its title from the Latin 'carne vale', which is the

etymological origin of the English word 'carnival'. In its widest, most general sense the early carnival embraced ritual spectacles such as fairs, popular feasts, competitions, comic shows, dancing and open-air amusement with costumes and masks, giants, dwarfs, monsters, trained animals - in short, all the 'low' and 'dirty' sorts of folklore tradition. I find the Latin 'carne vale' especially interesting because it holds a double meaning, indicating both a removal and a transition.

On the one hand 'carne' means 'meat', referring to the last days where one could eat meat before the fasting of the Lent. On the other hand 'carne' could be translated as 'flesh', suggesting 'carne vale' is a 'farewell to the flesh', where one let go of his/her former everyday self to embrace, instead, the carefree nature of the carnival.

As a piece of visual culture, the early carnival was a sight of disorder and survival connected to bodily experience and sexuality; it was characterized by its grotesque, chaotic, and violent nature. The Russian philosopher, literary critic and semiotician Mikhail Bakhtin describes:

«In the world of the carnival the awareness of the people's immortality is combined with the realisation that established authority and truth are relative».

The carnival describes a utopian vision of the world seen from below and critiques 'high' culture. In Bakhtin's manifestations of this type of life, he refers not to the isolated individual, not the private and egoistic, but to the collective body of all the people.





To warn and to instruct

With the exhibition CR(I)SES AD(JUST)MENTS (COLLAPSED) Laquet wants to examine how the figure of the monster can be constructed and embodied today. What structures of power and discipline lie behind the idea and need for a monster? How does the monster as an imaginary figure control the individual, the group and society? Is the concept of the monster and its social, cultural and political implications to be understood as something purely negative?

In the same way, 'carne vale' holds a double meaning, the etymological origin of the English word 'monster' has an interesting history. The word 'monster' derives from the Latin 'monstrum' as a sign that something was biologically abnormal within the natural order. It usually equates to something wrong or evil; a monster is, in general, morally objectionable, physically or psychologically hideous, and/or a freak of nature. The term can also be applied figuratively to a person with similar characteristics like a greedy person or a person who commits horrible acts. However, the root of 'monstrum' is the verb 'monere' - which doesn't only mean to warn, but also to instruct, and forms the basis of the modern English verb 'to demonstrate'. To demonstrate something (display) and to demonstrate against or in favour of something (protest) is also deeply rooted in the nature of the early carnival. On the positive side, the carnival aesthetically explores collectivity. From a critical perspective the carnival exhibits social formations as class hierarchy, political manipulation, sexual repression and paranoia – as well as the difficulty for the broader public to see and address these issues. To put it short, the carnival was a catalyst and an actual site of symbolic struggle; the American literary critic and author Roger Sales explains:

First of all, it was licensed or sanctioned by the authorities themselves. (...) Secondly, although the world might appear to be turned upside down during the carnival season, the fact that the King and Queens were chosen and crowned actually reaffirmed the status quo (...)

Both the concept of the monster and the concept of the early carnival are vehicles for social protest as much as they are methods for disciplining or suppress that same protest. Thus, the monster is as much a sign or a warning as it is a revolt.

What is socially peripheral is often symbolically central

CR(I)SES AD(JUST)MENTS (COLLAPSED) takes its conceptual point of departure from the Great Depression era of 1929.

In 1933, as a result of this economic and social crisis, the monster of King



Kong was created. King Kong later became a strong iconic manifestation and a way of collectively dealing with and escaping from the Great Depression. Today, five years after the recent economic crisis in 2008, Laquet wants to question what kind of monstrous imagery surrounds us. Instead of exploring contemporary examples of monstrosity, the artworks in this exhibition are able to (and should) speak for themselves. With the monster of King Kong, and with the previously quoted example by Sales, it becomes clear that what is socially peripheral is often symbolically central.

Still I See Monsters

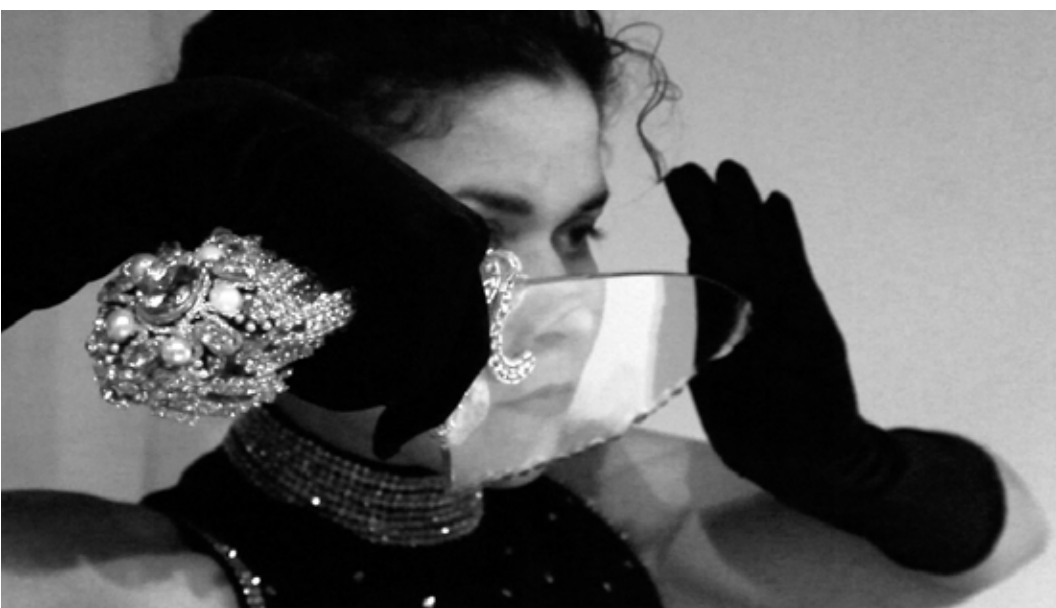
With its embodied contradictory meaning; *CRISES ADJUSTMENTS COLLAPSED* and *I JUST COLLAPSED*, the exhibition title frames ‘the monster’ as something both general and very personal. Uncovering the history of two major economic crises (1929 and 2008) *CR(I)SES AD(JUST)MENTS (COLLAPSED)* tells us that not only do these crises have political, cultural and social consequences for our society, they also affect the individual and the way (s)he navigates and positions his-or-herself in the world – locally and globally. So far, this essay has been mostly focusing on ‘the monster’ as a metaphor for collective actions and collective mindset in comparison to the early carnival. In addition, how behaving and thinking collectively can be understood or experienced as both a sickness and a cure. But this essay has its embodied contradictions too. Its title – *Like a Ferris Wheel, Exploding and the Falling to the*

Ground – is lifted from a song Still I See Monsters by American singer, Ryan Adams, which tells the story of a personal crisis. The monsters he sings about, only exists in his head, bounding him to and reminding him of his past. Only by exhibiting and facing these monsters, is he able to create his own image of the person he wants to become.

« Baby, I know you cannot hear me now
'Cause you're fast asleep
But I love you now
Colors inside your head go spinning around
Like a ferris wheel
Exploding and falling to the ground
Oh, people are screaming, people are screaming
My baby, she's dreaming
Oh, people are shouting, people are freaking
I'm just staring at the ceiling
Waiting for the feeling
Oh, oh but when she calls,
I know she's the one
Makes me want her harder
Makes me want to be a little stronger
Still I see monsters
Still I see monsters »

Could it be, that the same idea of the individual and imaginary monsters embodies the collective fear generated by the economic crises of 1929 and 2008?

Monsters not only create a safe ground to collectively share hopes, dreams and fears, they also feed and sharpen the collective mind. By representing all that is considered evil, monsters bring about positivity because they force (wo)man to think of ways to escape the different crises, created by man. Monsters reminds us that life in all its complexity is worth living and is worth fighting for.







On monstrosity

Arnaud Gerspacher

Now at last one's own wishes, straining impatiently at the leash, can be tossed something nourishing to eat, meat cut from another. So that those wishes grow big and strong. And one day have big fishes in the ocean of the top management floors dancing attendance. Yes, Nature means business. And happily we chain her up, to score against her will if need be. Futile for the elements to roar. We are already in the waves!

—Elfriede Jelinek, *Lust*¹

We have to stop thinking monsters with faces. Today they are all limbs. There are no deviations from nature. There is only joy and violence.

Or let's put it this way: there are monsters and then there is monstrosity. The monster is individual – a symptom. Monstrosity is a set of relations – a nebula. A monster is bred from a monstrous set of circumstances. I think it's rare if not impossible for a monster to be *sui generis* or readymade, even genetically speaking. Yet it's very possible (and, in fact, all-too common) for the non-monster, for you and me (presumably), to be harbored in monstrosity. As one of its nodes, its polyps, its cells, or, if we've been promoted enough, its organs.

¹ Elfriede Hulse Michael Jelinek, *Lust* (London; New York: Serpent's Tail, 1992). 79.

Examples:

THAT MUSEUM is not a monster. The set of relations between artist, work, waste, precarious labor practices, neo-bourgeois café serving dishes predicated on a level of violence towards any number of animals that should make any purportedly perceptive art lover cry, and a directorial board whose business practices are often one and the same with the object of critique of its artists, IS MONSTROUS.

THAT WOMAN is not a monster. The set of relations between dead animal draped on her shoulder, tailor-bred living animal on a leash, over-sized gold watch, and the coercive materialist mode of existence that bends her away from more interesting possibilities in life, with the willing help of sitcoms that inform a safely regularized and slotted subjectivity, IS MONSTROUS.

THAT MAN is not a monster. The set of relations between libido, internet, pornography, flows of traffic advertisement and capital that churn out more-often-than-not abused and exploited bodies for sad sex, which represent one of a limited set of options for economic gain for those with only their bare life to give, IS MONSTROUS.

THAT WALL STREET BANKER is not a monster. The set of relations between six figures that gorge the wife and kids he loves, loop-holed regulations, a social meritocracy of being born in the right place right time and predicated on the ability to grovel, to white lie, to fudge it for self-interest, and a job that affirms the company's position within a cynical understanding of a realpolitik economy, all while circularly engendering and emboldening this economy, IS MONSTROUS.

THAT SOLDIER is not a monster. The set of relations between nation, hermeneutically ill-read religions, the euphemism of “collateral damage” that masks the fleshy blood bursts of boys and girls in harm's way, and the inability to see into the fog of war and mediality, IS MONSTROUS.

AND SO ON.

Of course, all of these individuals could also very well be monsters. They might even be well rewarded for it! But what is certain is that each set of relations is a monstrosity by gathering together obscene contradictions, which either lead to or dissimulate violence. Often both. It is the sublime without separation – or separation in bad faith. We should listen to Peter Sloterdijk

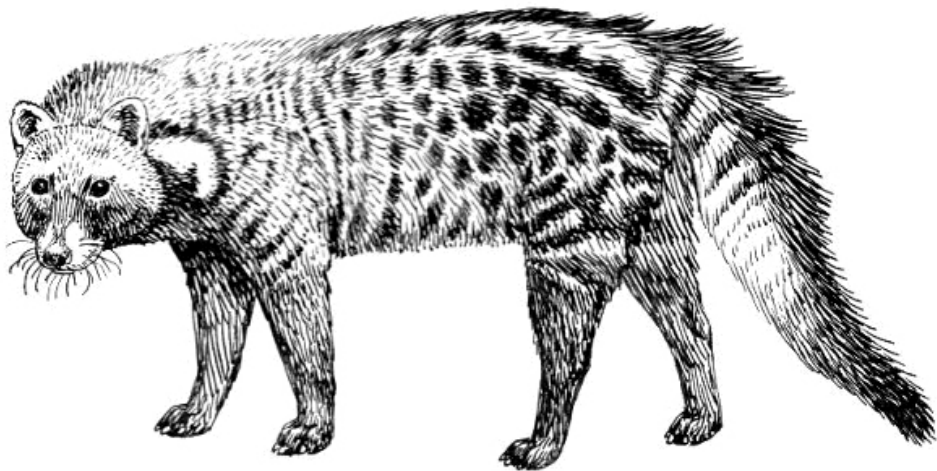
on modernity and the monstrous, from whom I've taken my cue:

To be modern, one must be touched by the awareness that, beside the inevitable fact of being a witness, one has been drawn into a sort of complicity with the newer form of the monstrous. If one asks a modern person, 'Where were you at the time of the crime?', the answer is: 'I was at the scene of the crime' – that is to say, within the totality of the monstrous which, as a complex of modern criminal circumstances, encompasses its accomplices and accessories. Modernity means dispensing with the possibility of having an alibi.²

We are witnesses for a monstrosity from which we are its members, and no longer do transcendental signifiers provide alibis, even though nations and gods continue to be invoked in the worst possible ways (maybe art too?). More insidiously, there is little demand for alibis today, even if one could be had. The scene of the crime has been seamlessly incorporated within the smooth functioning of everyday life. The very real moments of living out complicity with violence usually go unnoticed and free of judgment, and we live in a time of increased self-monitoring – at both individual, social, corporate, national, and ecological levels – that either amount to token forms of monitoring in the service of gain and respectability, or to *de facto* no monitoring at all. Left to our own devices, it's all crimes and misdemeanors, and the monstrous does very well for itself.

There is an air of judgment here, and you may think it stinks. It's certainly inconvenient, but I'm not sure we have a choice. We're thrown into the monstrous whether we like it or not. We either let the pus fill our subcutaneous bodies on the skinless surface of a monstrosity for which we are its epidural agents; or we ask more of ourselves, risking social cred and sacrificing over-developed pleasure principles in order to starve the monstrous, instead of all the others no less harbored by its reach, if less well fed by its wealth. And let's not say these are "first world problems." This phrase maintains a perverse martyrdom in search of a worthy cause, while bolstering a disingenuous desire to be less well-off in order to appease a solipsistic world guilt. There are neither first nor third world problems – there are only shared problems forever linking the fates of organic and inorganic forms within a symbiotic, co-extensive, and immanent plane. Those others out there suffering, both human and nonhuman, couldn't care less about our guilt. It's the originary violence that concerns and troubles them.

²Peter Sloterdijk, "The Time of the Crime of the Monstrous: On the Philosophical Justification of the Artificial," in *Sloterdijk Now*, ed. Stuart Elden (Cambridge, U.K.; Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2012). 165.



Extended Example 1: the Civet Cat.

In his lectures published as *The Century*, Alain Badiou appraises both totalitarian and fascist monstrosities, along with the monstrous side-effects of liberal humanist capitalism, which is so much more slippery and harder to fight (like punching mist or white noise), especially since it both “won” the twentieth century and advertises itself as having a monopoly on history, rights, and democracy. For better and for worse, the post-revolutionary zeal and passion for the real of the sixties and seventies gave way during the past thirty years to the latest Restoration – and I know no better definition than Badiou’s: “A restoration is above all an assertion regarding the real; to wit, that it is always preferable to have no relation to it whatsoever.”³ This lack of relation, this distance in bad faith, which is upheld in both (non)words and (non)acts, is the life blood of monstrosity. It’s what maintains whole networks of obscene sets of relations, keeping them well-oiled under the polished veneer of one-sided progress.

Badiou and Sloterdijk are very different thinkers, but here we find an affinity between the two in regards to the effects of immunity, fear of contracting the real, and the autoimmune disorders of a culture that myopically understands its existence solely in terms of its own pleasure. For Sloterdijk it is cynical realism, anthropotechnic histories of immunological spheres, and global foam. For Badiou, he puts up the consequences of immunological social consolidation directly: “we know that when enjoyment is what every life tries to guarantee for itself, when it takes the place of the imperative, what one

³ Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans., Alberto Toscano (Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007). 26.

inevitably ends up enjoying is atrocity.”⁴ It’s the fateful gap between the imaginary and symbolic on one side, and the real on the other – a gap that provides delusional levels of security, homeland or otherwise. Badiou’s ultimate diagnosis is one I think Sloterdijk would agree with: “The century ends with the obsession of security, under the dominance of the following, rather abject maxim: It’s really not that bad being where you are already; it is, and has been, worse elsewhere.”⁵ So let’s write our books, get our tenure, curate our shows, and enjoy ourselves because really life is so bad it’s actually quite good for us. Enough. The point is to interrupt this insidious gap in the name of joy and not violence. But who will stick their necks out and actually sacrifice the sacrificiable? Or, more importantly, sacrifice *sacrifice* itself, if that’s even possible?

Badiou gives a number of statistics courtesy of this latest restoration. Here’s one of them:

*Let’s suppose we want to provide the world’s total population with a quantifiable access to nutrition, say 2,700 calories a day, as well as access to drinkable water and basic health resources. This will add up, more or less, to the amount of money that the inhabitants of Europe and the United States spend a year on perfumes.*⁶

Let’s emphasize the set of relationships between the frivolity of perfume on one side and the minimal demands of subsistence on the other. But this is far from the only relation. The capillary extensions of the monstrous outrun us on all sides. For the moment, I’ll chase the figure of the civet cat. Traditionally, one of the central ingredients in the fragrance industry, which can be listed as “natural” and even “organic,” is animal musk. One of the main sources of musk scent is from the civet cat in Ethiopia. Although a synthetic alternative exists, in all likelihood the secretive perfume industry continues to use the animal version. It’s estimated that 97 percent of civet musk is exported to France. These cats are caught in the wild, held in makeshift crates approximately the same size as their now nonambulatory bodies, starved, and, every ten days, musk is forcibly extracted from their anal glands. If they get sick or cease to produce, it is cheaper to let them perish. Slavers overthrowing the dead and dying.

4 Ibid., 79.

5 Ibid., 66.

6 Ibid., 28.

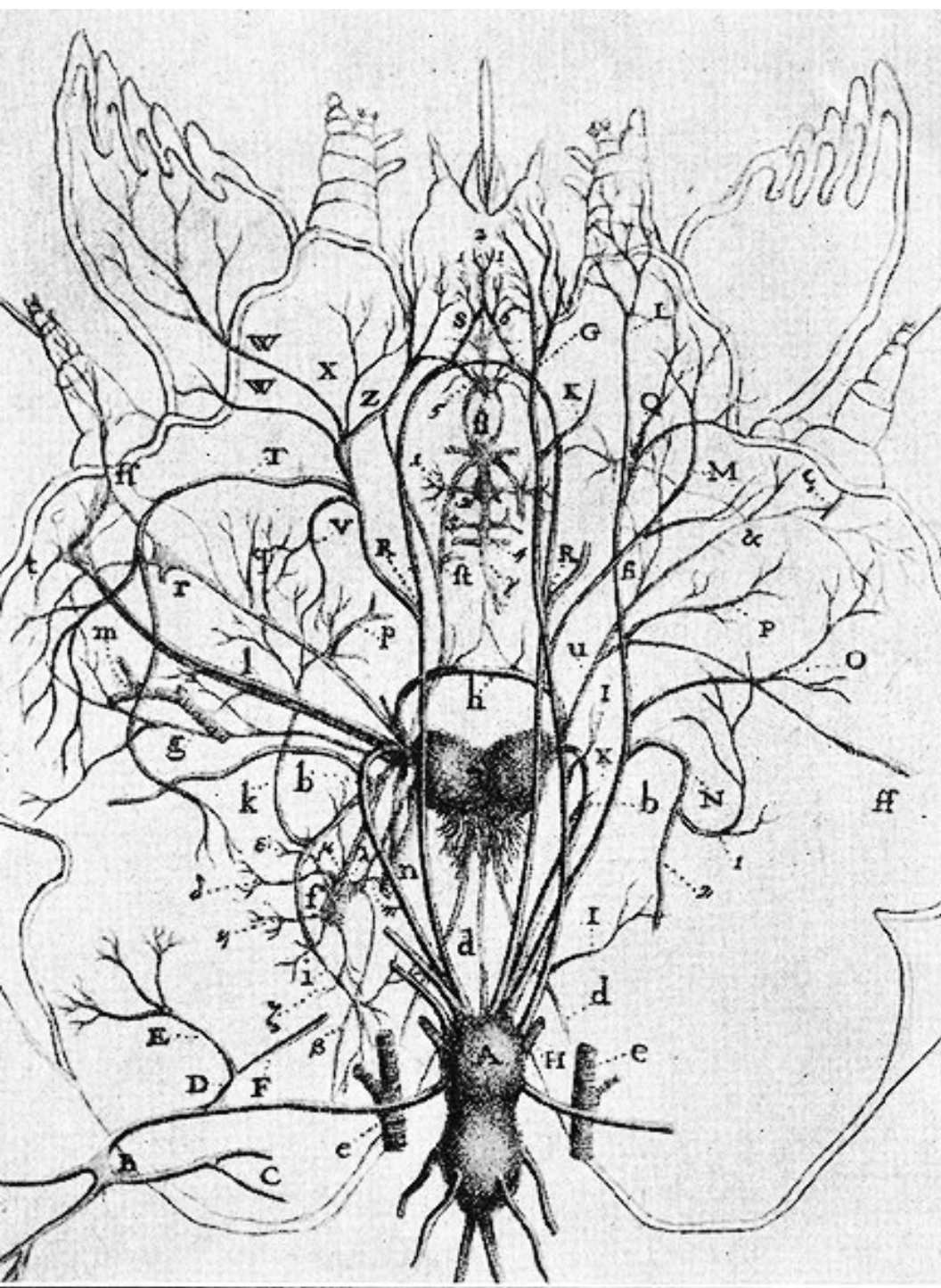
7 See “Civet Farming, an Ethiopian Investigation.” World Society for the Protection of Animals. 1998.



Are these Ethiopian «farmers» monsters? Again, I think one should dwell more on the monstrous set of relations underlining these violent operations. When asked if he ever uses a vet to care for his civet cats in captivity, one farmer tellingly replied with a laugh that “he did not have enough money to provide medical care for his own family, let alone for civets.” It’s a cynical (and almost understandable) realism that’s operative everywhere to one degree or another. It’s a globalized Jean Valjean syndrome. Stolen bread is now human and nonhuman resources that are more likely to go rewarded than punished, of which the civet cat is one of innumerable examples of cruel and violent bio-trades and trafficking—glands squeezed dry, organs harvested, businessmen relieving themselves inside young girls with impunity, and so on. All is impeded will and preferences disavowed. The ugly side of will-to-power. The dismal, sad, anonymous, meaningless dead-eyed suffering lining the base of so many industries, both legal and illegal, but all unethical and before the law.

Extended Example 2: Obama and the fly

What to make of the fly on one of the president’s hands, which he deftly crushed between the other during a recent interview? Two instincts were at work here: one to land, the other to kill. But this goes uninspected. Some genuinely saw this episode of the fly (and evidently, there have been others) as his needing more Christ in his life, or that these little beasts are doing



nothing less than giving away his true identity as the Antichrist (Beelzebub traditionally lording over the flies). Others I assume found conscious or unconscious reassurance at the head of state's dexterity, precision, and efficiency in exterminating unwanted life, keeping the sterile environment of governing clean and safe from invasive pests. Is it not tempting to see the long arm of the president as symptomatic of the reach of a drone program that strikes with equal precision, both discriminately and indiscriminately? When did killing become the go-to instinct in a purportedly judicial democracy that hopes to set an example for the rest of the world? Would it not have been better, if not easier, to capture alive? Obama is neither the Antichrist nor a monster, but as someone who has been promoted far more than most, he powers and is powered by a monstrous set of relations.

This is the moment when you say to yourself, *but it's just a fly*. Quite simply, it's good social policy to help the most helpless indiscriminately. *And what's with all these animals in here anyway?* I'll put it as directly as possible: human violence has always been conditioned and prepared by its set of relations with other animals – which is to say, the road to monstrosity has been paved by eyes wide shut in the face of pain for power. The testing ground for war, sexism, racism, exclusion, torture, totalitarianism, fascism, and violation is found here. And considering all we share and learn from those who are more and less like us – joy, touch, emotion, collectivity, suffering, mourning, recognition, signs, communication, and all the things we now know to be far from celestially anthropoprietary – it is one of the largest historical betrayals. Coming back to the fly: are not the aerodynamic possibilities of military drone flights predicated on our longstanding fascination and observance of winged creatures? Is it not from them that we were given the gift of promethean technology, and does this not change your view of both its worth and worthlessness? The monstrous is only possible through historical roads taken that should not have been. It also goes to show that only the human animal has had the capacity to become monstrous – that the nervous system of monstrosity is the weak limbed and large brained who became the only animal who saw fit to create systematic forms of violence for its surplus-value. What a reversal! What so many have long deemed our inherent rational superiority has in fact produced our biggest ethical flaw. That was the longish version. Here is the short: The future of ethics is posthumanist.

The Eichmannization of Everyday Life

When prompted to write down my thoughts on the monstrous by the artist Christine Laquet, whose work equally inspects its relations, my first move was to read Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. In a way, coupling Badiou's reading of the twentieth century, in which both winners and losers are complicit with the monstrous, Eichmann becomes the emblematic anyone living in sets of relations that both carry him away and make him a culpable organ of violence. Consider her following description:

*The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to think, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else. No communication was possible with him, not because he lied but because he was surrounded by the most reliable of all safeguards against the words and presence of others, and hence against reality as such.*⁸

Does this not augur quite perfectly the sedated subject of Badiou's coming definition of restoration who deems it preferable to not have a relationship with the real whatsoever? Note: the crucial fault is a lack of empathy – the inability to think from the standpoint of somebody else. The inability to think limbic-sentiocentrically. And as Arendt's description of Eichmann makes clear, it is not inherent antipathy, but one coerced by perceived orders and a will to succeed and be promoted. It is that banal, something that upset a lot of people. Re-reading her text as accounting for a heuristic subject position, which might describe a fascist and market liberal equally well, is disquieting. In both cases, one thoughtlessly tows the line in the name of a personal, national, or economic program – and if all goes wrong, one will have to reflect on the monstrosity that carried them away and supported their strength in numbers.

It is very likely that Eichmann, while embodying the stupid and cynical bureaucrat partly responsible for organizing the flow of human extermination, also saved a number of Jews from being sent to the camps⁹. It would be beyond grotesque to see this as justifying or absolving him, or as an indication that he did all he could inside the monstrosity of the Nazi program. Whatever good deeds he may have committed were probably as

8 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 49.

9 Ibid., 61.

banal as his evil ones. But is there not a similar logic at play in fascism's opposite, namely liberal market capitalism, when a company throws out a philanthropic bone to appease those critical of its gluttonous practices on the ground? Or when a company goes green in hopes of off-setting policies that nevertheless remain unsustainable? Or when a CEO donates to medical research while churning out products that spread disease and slower forms of death? Or when a developed country sends aid to geographies where it also commits war crimes or financial violence? When someone like Slavoj Žižek critiques these structurally monstrous forms of philanthropic or humanitarian efforts, it can feel like a cheap shot. But when seen within this analogy, it is difficult to dismiss. Why are the supposedly reasonable and level-headed so quick to take these off-setting or token gestures as grounds for justification or absolution? Or that we are doing the best we can within the monstrosity of our own various programs?

Eichmann also thought of himself as a sort of Pontius Pilate, wherein only his "official soul" carried out the crimes, while his "private soul" was against them and washed its hands clean¹⁰. Is this not the propulsive energy that keeps all monstrous sets of relations going? Is this not the cynical bipolar subject who has the luxury to pick and choose its engagements with the real, or, in Sloterdijk's terms, the enlightened false consciousness resigned to an understanding of the world as full of necessary evils, in which you'll only be taken for a sucker if you stick your neck out in fearless speech for futile politics or lost causes?

Arendt faced the fact that the non-monster could nevertheless be harbored within monstrosity, as its fuel, as its organ, and as its party favor: "Despite all efforts of the prosecution, everybody could see that this man was not a "monster," but it was difficult indeed not to suspect that he was a clown."¹¹ Problem is, there's a clown at every turn gatekeeping access to exclusive events. And clowns can be scarier than monsters, since they both mask and offer themselves up to the monstrous in myopic pacts for the bells and whistles of success. The awakening of an inoperative community of non-monsters within the monstrous is our only hope, which is scary in itself, as the non-monster is so often easily tempted to become its obscene opposite – in thoughtlessness, as carried away, or simply by being yourself.

10 Ibid., 127.

11 Ibid., 54.



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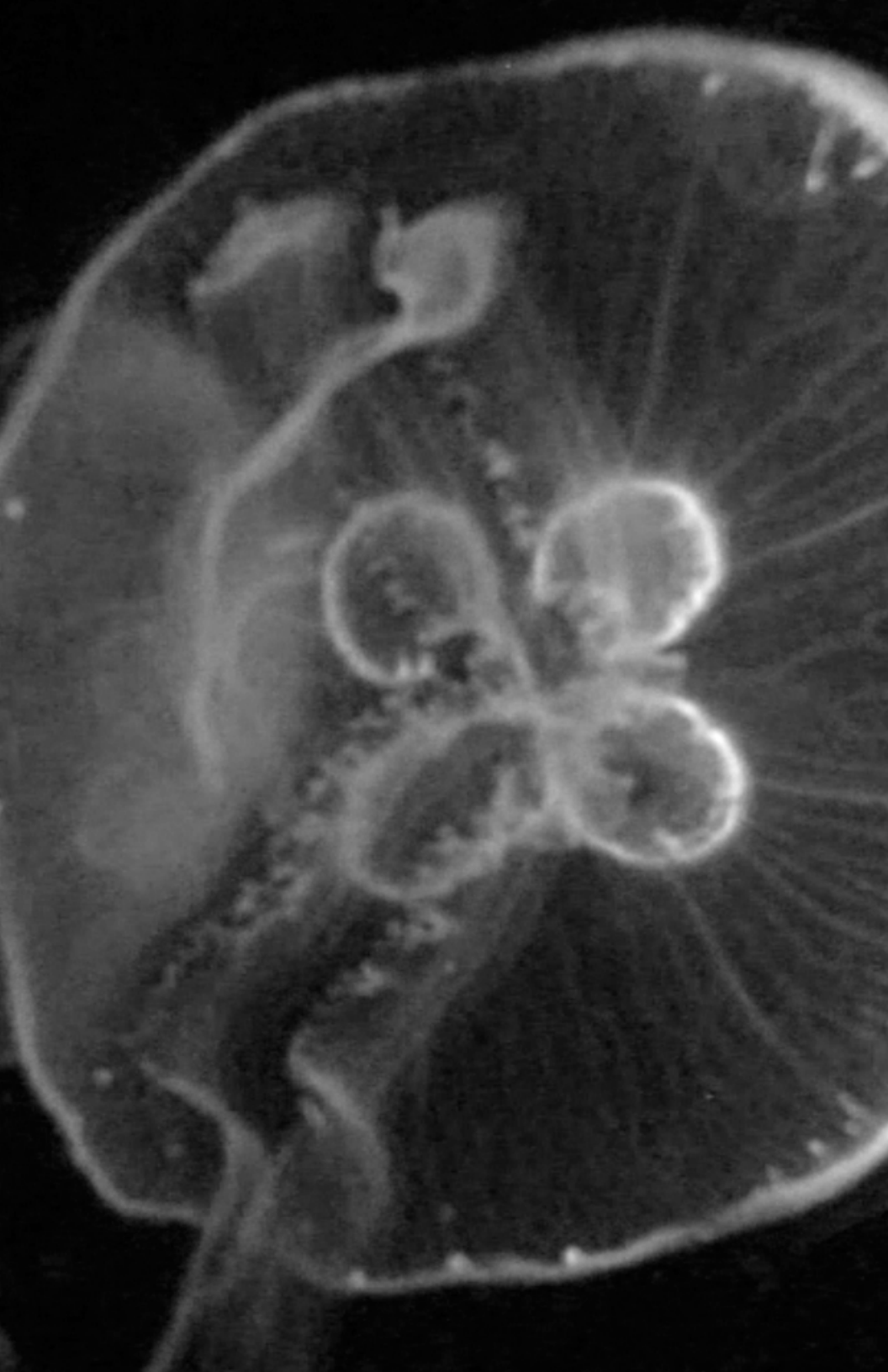












PART 1

As if by love possessed.

Christine Laquet

Situation

Two people are walking down Wall Street : Dr Hawkins, a specialist in monsterology and the visual artist Christine Laquet, questioning who, where and what is the contemporary monster... ?

CHRISTINE LAQUET :

Hi Dr. Hawkins ! Thank you for accepting this interview, I'm very excited to have the opportunity to meet you in NYC ! So, now we are in Wall Street to talk about your research on m-o-n-s-t-e-r-o-l-o-g-y- (monsterology)... Can you tell me a bit more what it is precisely about ?

DR. HAWKINS :

Yes, I'm a Dr. in monsterology! Monsterology is actually a study of the many supposedly mythical beasts that inhabit our world, but more precisely, I study the monstrous forms of everyday-life in a capitalist world-system.

CHRISTINE LAQUET :

Its... monstrous transdisciplinary ?

DR. HAWKINS :

Yes, we live in an age of monsters and the body-panics they excite. The global economic crisis that broke over the world in 2008 certainly gave an exclamation-mark to this claim ! I began this specific research, more seriously, after reading a Time magazine article in 2009, declaring the zombie 'the official monster of the recession' !. I've been surprised, though not particularly agreeing on the « zombie form », but this article was, interestingly enough, bringing up the idea that : « If there's something new about today's zombie, it's his reliability. Sure, he's an abomination and a crime against all that is good and holy. But also, he exemplifies some real American values too. He's plucky and tenacious — you can cut off his limbs and he'll keep on coming atcha. And he's humble. You won't find zombies swanning around and putting on airs like some other monsters I could mention. They're monsters of the people ». They were even finishing their article by wishing a « Long live (or is it die?) to the zombie: the official monster of the recession ».

CHRISTINE LAQUET :

'zombie banks', 'zombie economics', 'zombie capitalism', even a new 'zombie politics' in which the rich devour the poor... !

DR. HAWKINS :

Yet, it is a paradox of our age that monsters are both everywhere and nowhere. And this brings us to the 'nowhere-ness' of monsters today...

CHRISTINE LAQUET :

Let us begin with the everywhere... I believe that the very insidiousness part of capitalism has to do with its... in-visibi-li-ty?

DR. HAWKINS :

... With, in other words, the ways in which monstrosity becomes normalized and naturalized in the everyday-life! What is most striking about capitalist monstrosity, to our surprise, is its elusive ‘everydayness’, its apparently seamless integration into the banal and mundane rhythms of quotidian existence.

CHRISTINE LAQUET :

... Ways of seeing the unseen... (I see the sea and the sea sees me!). The unseen operations of capital: that reality of the unseen forces of capital !?...

DR. HAWKINS :

For the essential features of capitalism, are not immediately visible. To be sure, many of their effects can be touched and measured. But the circuits through which capital moves are abstracted ones.

CHRISTINE LAQUET :

You mean, like a process of real abstraction – in a world of universal market-exchange governed by money?

DR. HAWKINS :

Let me come back to the origin of this word: To abstract [Latin: abstrahere, ‘to draw away’] is literally to separate, detach, and cut off. And capitalism abstracts (detaches, cuts off) labor and its products from the concrete and specific individuals who perform unique productive acts, treating all work as effectively identical and interchangeable.

CHRISTINE LAQUET :

The hidden circuits of capital through which human capacities become things, while things assume human powers...

DR. HAWKINS :

Yes, in an age in which capitalism has become as invisible as the air we breathe! In their insistence that something not-quite-real is at work within global capitalism, some occult process of exploitation that conceals itself. Capitalism is both monstrous and magical. Crucially, its magic consists in concealing the occult economy – the obscure transactions between human bodies and capital. Meanwhile, the mainstream political economy emphasizes the magic of the market which is regulated by Adam Smith’s famous ‘invisible hand’.

DR. HAWKINS :

Yes, ‘As if by love possessed’¹ has been borrowed from Goethe’s Faust! The mass of machinery to which workers are subordinated in production assumes the form of an ‘animated monster’, a monstrosity endowed with a soul and intelligence of its own. By reducing people – sentient, creative, passionate, loving, hating, desiring humans – to property, capitalist slavery imposed a death-in-life.

CHRISTINE LAQUET :

I believe that Monsters have colonized much of mass-culture! They are positioned as heroic outsiders, markers of nonconformity and perversity, representing all those marginalized by dominant discourses and social values!

DR. HAWKINS :

Arguing that monstrous otherness is projected onto those who do not conform to cultural codes and norms – those, for example, whose language, sexuality or skin-color are ‘different’ – postmodern theory tends to celebrate monsters, seeing them as the excluded who bind together dominant (normative) identities.

I am on the side of the monsters as signifiers of the radical destabilization processes of identity and difference that devalue otherness.

CHRISTINE LAQUET :

Thank you very much Dr. Hawkins! ...

The interview has been inspired by :

Monsters of the Market, Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism, by David McNally, Ed. Brill, LEIDEN • BOSTON 2011

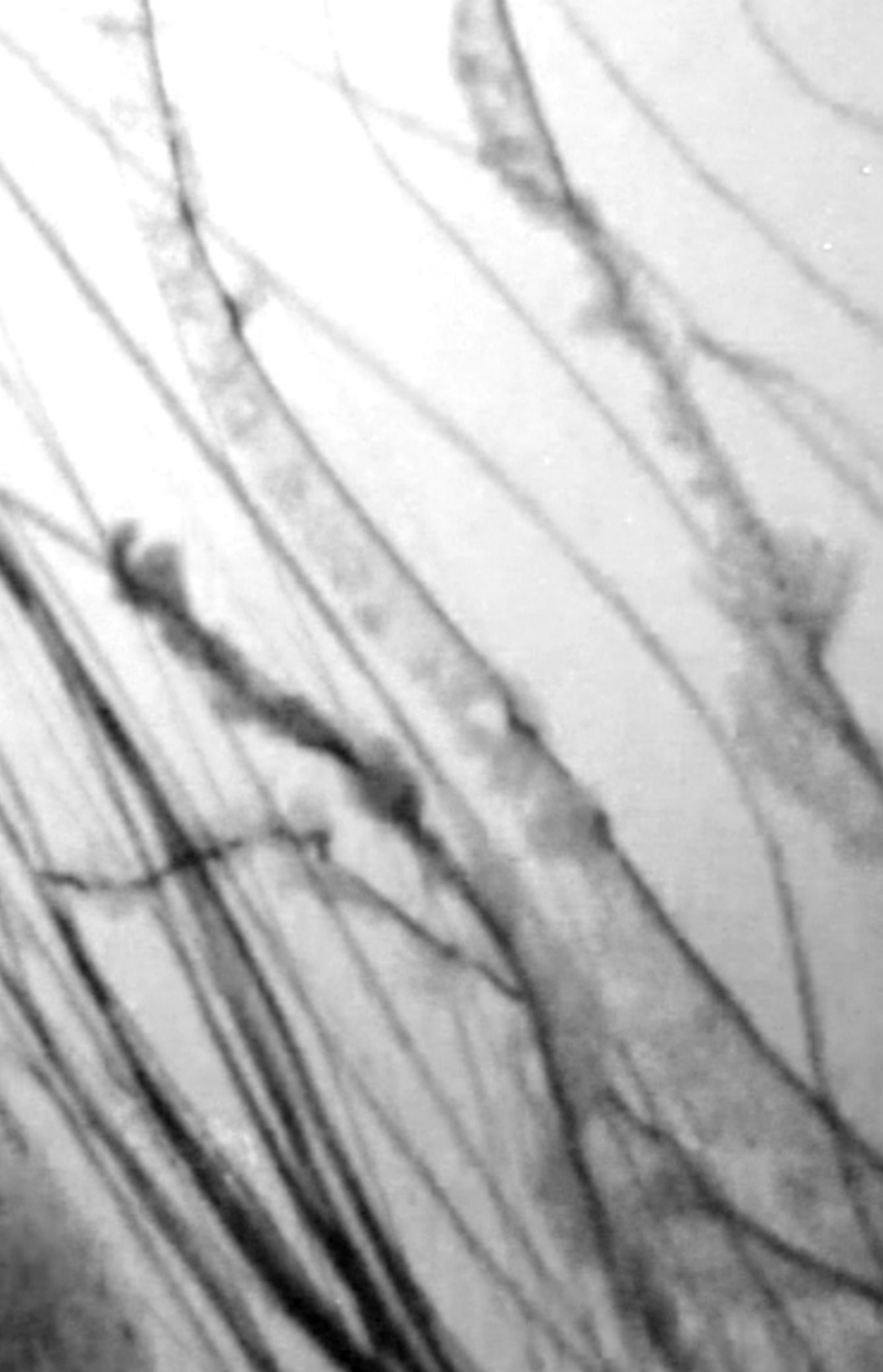
The interview was written by :

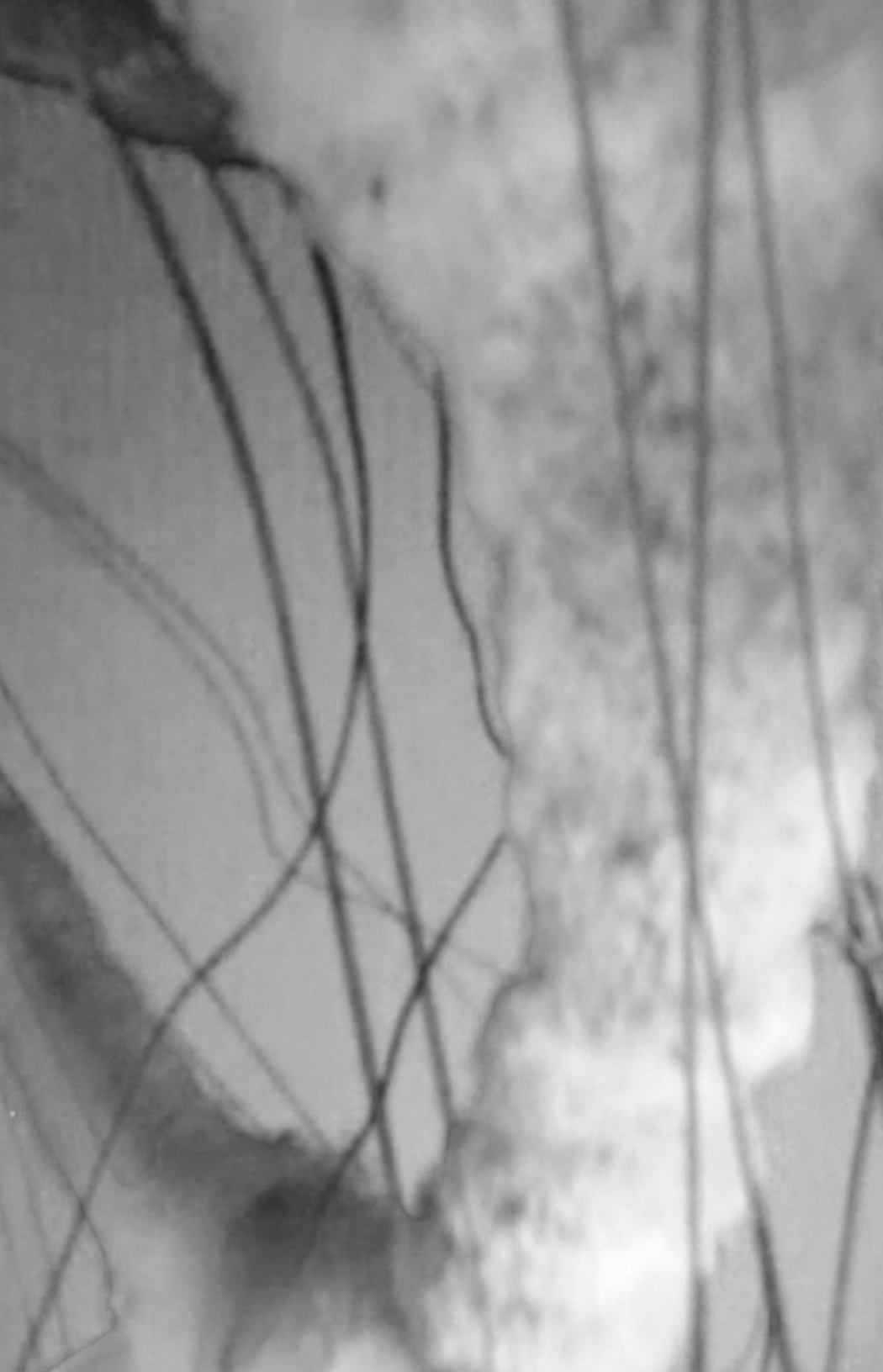
Christine Laquet and it occurs as a Voiceover by Lena Hawkins in Christine’s video titled *As if by love possed*, 2013.

The interview is:

meant to be viewed with images of jellyfish swimming juxtaposed against the voice on screen.

¹ Marx 1976, p. 302. See also p. 1007.





PART 2

In the last instance.

Christine Laquet

A few days after my arrival in NYC, I met Pierre Camilien, an incredible person I must tell you about. He was born in Haiti, and he is the type of person that is combining several lives into one. He lived in different cities before he moved to NYC and became an American citizen. Very attached to the belief in collectivities, he is very involved with social, political and philosophical matters. Pierre went to an art school in Belgium and since then, he's created a variety of works. One of his occupations has been his work as a glass blower and it is through a passionate conversation we had about glass that I suddenly realized that GLASS was a clue material relating to my research.

Pierre introduced me to the history of glass. Even though I've made a glass sculpture myself, I realized more through our discussion, how the material is certainly the main invention of our civilization. It is a magical element of the Western culture, but not only for this side of the world, but let's say for all Human culture: from a very ancient time, to our present days. I began to speculate on how important it is a substance for me to get through. A transparency to reflect on, a fragility to provoke, an immersion into the light it gets penetrated by or a modeling form to permit thoughts to arise... Through the history of this precise material, am I approaching the M.O.N.S.T.E.R.?

The history of creating glass can be traced back to 3500 BCE in Mesopotamia. This inorganic solid material that is usually clear or translucent is hard, brittle, and stands up to the effects of wind, rain or sun. Glass has been used for various kinds of utensils, mirrors, windows, cars, planes, modern architecture, computers and more. The ideal way people do communicate today is through the Internet, and through Fiberoptic (a plastic matrix reinforced by fine fibers of glass), which is lightweight, extremely strong, and a robust material. Fiberoptic facilitates the light displacement from one point to another more quickly than any other communication means.

So glass is a permanent element of our culture. It became such a wisp, that it tends to disappear from our view while its "power" is getting even more developed. Its tentacles are expanding around the world to spread our lives, our information systems.

The Internet is one of the main (if not the main) ways of communication today. But can one control the flow of information through the Internet?

Considering that most representatives of power (governments, corporations entities) strive to control and master the flow of information, this fact always leads us to question how free is the access to information? or how far can the information be manipulated? Can this quest of the right information be the higher fight of our days? Is it the most powerful place, where any fear can be created and spreaded around? Could this be where our contemporary monster is housing or hiding? Laws are not really effective to control the beast: it has no face, no body, no smell, but it is powerful, sudden and radical. No-one has control on it, not even the media when they imagine having a hand on it, it can blow back into their face. It makes it hard to compete or to fight with this abstract beast, which is getting even bigger with every additional world crisis.

In the last instance, following the flow of our conversation, Pierre kept quoting the Romanian-French sociologist and philosopher: Lucien Goldmann, whose one of most preferred theme is about a “human community and collective consciousness”, or to go further, an ideal “world community” capable of expressing the common humanity and positive aspirations of mankind.

So far, how not to think about the “collective imaginary” while considering the “collective vision” of a community as the way to create an effective counter-power?

It is interesting, even compulsory, to look for these common aspirations which can then be generated by this upper-community, as a new phenomenon that will not collapsed or evaporated.

Assuming the relation between abstraction and reality is always about the expression of our human dimensions without limits, the Monster can never triumph in that fight for life and survival.

Forces of nature.

Chennie Huang

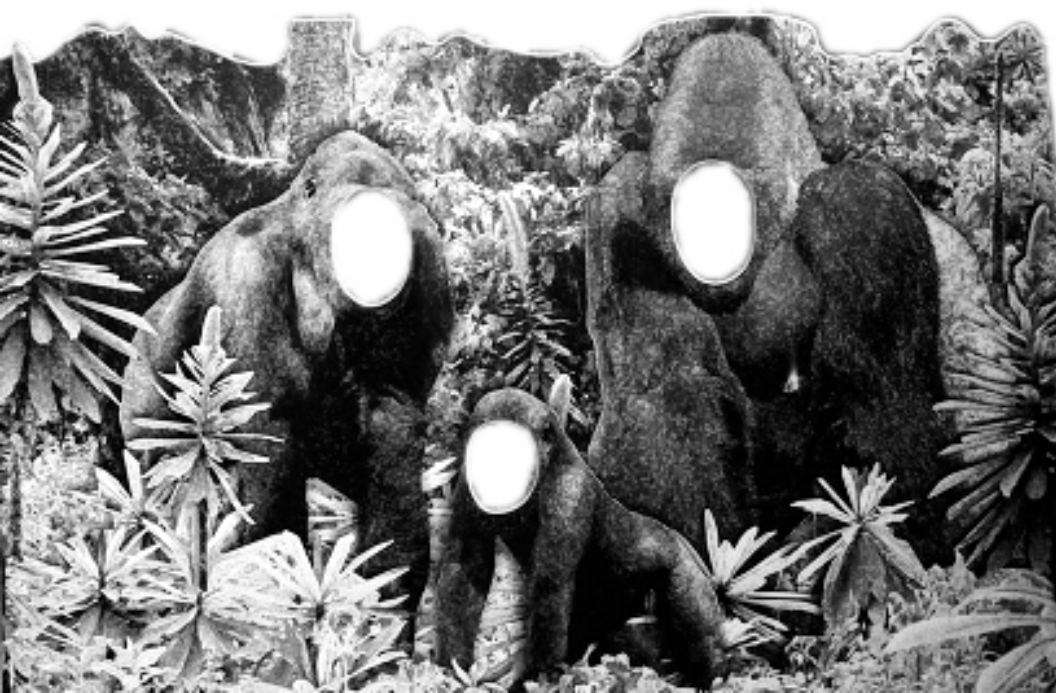
Forces of Nature was originally written as a blog post in CH Reviews. Later, upon request of the artist it has been revised for this publication.

Quite by accident French artist Christine Laquet and I met at a Thierry De Duve lecture hosted by Stony Brook University's art history and criticism department that took place in February. Like most accidental meetings, there was something of a mysterious fate at play. At least in my case, for at the time I had an intuition that I should get to know her better than just exchanging a few words over wine and cheese during the reception that followed the talk we both attended. But for the next few weeks, I didn't see a trace of Christine nor did I remember to get her contact information that evening.

Then in March, when I visited the Armory Show I took a particular fancy to looking at some works consisted of trees and branches that were half-way withered and abandoned. It was at one of the booths, and to my initial annoyance someone's head nudged into my field of vision as I attempted to get to the details of one particular image. Quickly as the head turned toward me, it was Christine and I instantly recognized her. From there, we exchanged information and I proposed to do a studio visit in the near future.

This little chance meeting transpired a lot more of our common interests and somehow our ways of seeing reciprocated. Much to my delight, I discovered her works to be elegant as well as intelligent. At the Flux Factory where I visited her studio, it was half filled with books by anthropologists and philosophers from Philippe Descola to Claude Lévi-Strauss and others on the subject of chimpanzees and natural behaviors of wild animals. In the other half of her studio, it was filled with her studies and experiments for more recent projects that included images of King Kong, historic documentations of people that lived with chimpanzees and guerrillas. The studio also had a few objects and drawings that she has been experimenting- such as drawings with the use of Japanese ink on transparent sheets of fabric and examining the transparency of the fabrics by different kinds of light-projections. It was fascinating to listen and watch as she demonstrated her own technique of testing the ink's resilience to the fabric by rubbing and then projecting light to see the various grey areas.









By another chance meeting, Christine met Robert Steijn, a performer and a dancer from Holland who is based in Vienna. When the two met, they instantly felt an affinity toward each other and decided to collaborate. The latest collaboration was done as a part of Christine's solo exhibition called *Une brève histoire de tout* (*A brief history of everything*) that took place in 2012. The performance was a dance-like enactment of a ritual between a hunter and his prey and named *You should never forget the jungle*. The performance was about 40 minutes long and in which the two performers utilized props such as a hunting knife, a piece of animal fur, a hunting horn and a drawing on fabric by Christine that served as a backdrop for the scene. The enchanting narrative of the piece along with the atmosphere of a ritual performed with apprehensive tension captured the audience. With a sharp knife suspending in the mid air, the artist tempted her own limits of fear and anxiety to the foreboding harm. In this piece, both performers pushed boundaries and tested their own limits. Amid the silences, sharp cries and physical convulsions of the performers mimicked a struggle between a fierce hunter and an animal that was about to be sacrificed. The performance was like an allegorical love story between the animal and the hunter, as the relationship between the hunter and the animal slowly transformed into a kind of mutual compassion and guardianship.

In a series called *Ways of Seeing (the wolf) / (the hind) / (the deer)*, Christine painted images of animals Inspired by video footage shot in the wild with a special camera. With the camera that allowed her to film in the dark, Christine was able to capture the animals in their natural habitat. What was interesting about these large drawings done with Japanese ink on sheer fabric was her diligent experimentation with shifting light and dark areas while working with the natural colors of the fabric. The transparent fabric offered a translucent effect, and by leaving certain parts unpainted Christine managed to bring forth the physical presence of these animals. As the animals emerged from a dark void, the space that did not come in contact with the ink gave a certain aura to the animals' physical presence, in other words they seemed to be coming off of the drawing into real life.





In 2011, Christine was invited to Korea for participation in a three-month artist residency with Gyeonggi Creation Center. While there and yet by another chance meeting Christine made the acquaintance with a local shaman. Through intimate interactions and mutual trust formed based on intuition, she became fascinated with how the shaman perceived the world. In reciprocation, the shaman also became very fond of Christine and wished to take her in as a daughter. By doing so the shaman wished to transmit her vision and knowledge vicariously to the vision and body of Christine.

In this process of initiation and experimentation, Christine began to understand more about shamanism she also found a certain connection for developing her own work. As in her own words she described her feelings as:

What interested me in being in contact with the shaman community is that I felt a strong 'liberated desire,' Through a para-sensorial sensibility, an artistic creation and rituals, it produces a kind of 'fourth dimension.' What I mean by a 'liberated desire' is that it escapes the impasse of private fantasy ...²

Then she went on to say that:

What counts is not the authoritarian unification, but rather a sort of infinite spreading. Shamanism points to the attribution of life, autonomy, power, objects, 'other-than-human persons', where the majority of social relationship is reduced to the magical matrix of things.²

From a shamanic performance called *Fortune-telling*, Christine produced drawings that appeared in scribbles-like formations. It emerged as if a map of the fortune-teller's mind and described of the visceral impact exerted from the physical presence of her inquirer. It showed the fluidity of fortune-telling to be that of a non-linear story-telling. Much like our memories, in the way that the present, past and future have all been fused into one continuous entity.

In a book published to accompany her residency and the works produced while at Gyeonggi Creation Center, Christine quoted from

² *I see the sea and the sea sees me* by Christine Laquet, a publication by Mediabus with the support from Gyeonggi Creation Center in 2011.

Ways of Seeing a book by John Berger**. In which John Berger started our by saying:

*Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. ...*³

Later in the book, John Berger also pointed out that the use of language was limited in its ability to accurately and fully explain all visual phenomenon that we encounter. Since words only conveyed the interpretation of what was seen and not the actual thing itself, therefore he also said that:

*... we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.*⁴

Inspired by his text, Christine explored the ambiguity between the visually perceived and the physical existence of the subject in question. This idea was present in her earlier photographic experiments when she took photographs of a horse lying on the grass but turned on its back. When looking at the images, one would feel a little disoriented while the figure / ground relationship seemed to be reserved. In such a way that the horse could be seen as if in the midst of a run or lying on its back. In this sense, the gravity of the image also seemed shifted and turned upside down. Meanwhile the horse's back almost looked as if a back of a human being, its curved spine and illuminating fur conveyed an almost human-like sensuality. For these works it pointed out the ambiguities of our visual perceptions and how we would try to find our footings in the world based on these seemingly irreconcilable differences. Hence, Christine took this a little further into exploring the psychological aspect in our interpretation of certain conventional visual cues.

To further her research on what distinguishes human from an animal, or the transformation from one to the other, Christine has begun a new series of

³ *Ways of seeing*: based on the BBC television series of John Berger; a book made by John Berger, Sven Blomberg, Chris Fox, Michael Dibb, Richard Hollis. Published by the British Broadcasting Corporation and by Penguin Books Limited in 1972.

⁴ Ibid.

work that explores the nature of beasts. Her focus also explores the beastly-nature within us humans as well as the fictional beasts that we conjure up by projecting cultural images and assigning stereotypical attributions to the "unknown creatures"- of those that we do not yet fully understand. Further more and relating back to the intuitive nature in communication, she has been experimenting with its innate non-verbal aspect and how one receives and sends out signals to one and other. For these ideas, Christine has been planning to stage a performance in which most of the interactions would take place beyond hearing and responding to verbal language. Therefore, the performers would rely solely on their intuitions as the compass in the journey of communication and interaction. No matter human or beast, verbal or nonverbal, forces of nature drive us all without our conscious control of outcome. As with this chance meeting I encountered Christine, it went from the initial introduction at a talk, to an unplanned reunion at an art fair. Then when I visited her studio and proposed to write about her work while in return, I find myself writing this piece for her book by her request. We seem to be running in a circle toward each other, and then we are off again to yet another unknown until some day we shall meet again.



Aimé Césaire

A TEMPEST

Based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*
Adaptation for a Black Theater

Translated from the French
by Richard Miller

Ubu Repertory Theater Publications

Ambiance of a psychodrama. The actors enter singly, at random, and each chooses for himself a mask at his leisure.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES: Come gentlemen, help yourselves. To each his character, to each character his mask. You, Prospero? Why not? He has reserves of will power he's not even aware of himself. You want Caliban? Well, that's revealing. Ariel? Fine with me. And what about Stephano, Trinculo? No takers? Ah, just in time! It takes all kinds to make a world.

~~And after all, they aren't the worst characters. No problem about the juvenile leads, Miranda and Ferdinand. You, okay. And there's no problem about the villains either: you, Antonio; you, Alonso, perfect! Oh, Christ! I was forgetting the Gods. Eshu will fit you like a glove. As for the other parts, just take what you want and work it out among yourselves. But make up your minds... Now, there's one part I have to pick out myself: you! It's for the part of the Tempest, and I need a storm to end all storms... I need a really big guy to do the wind. Will you do that? Fine! And then someone strong for Captain of the ship. Good, now let's go. Ready? Begin. Blow, winds! Rain and lightning ad lib!~~



Monster:

Repetition or Deficiency

Sarah Walko

When I woke I was lying sideways in an alleyway covered in sweat. My head was so heavy the stones gave way, collecting the water running down my forehead and forming little pools. With my ear to the watery stones however, I heard something. The stones told me, stand up and walk stright down the street until you get to a small yellow house and go inside. You will find her there and she will make everything heard. I stood up and walked into the city, picking up locks of hair that lay all over the ground as I walked. The house was at the end of the street. I walked inside and found her.

She told me we needed to do something with our hands. We would remake the city. We would make a miniature version of the city again, an architectural model of sorts and undo what was done. We set out to include every building, street, tank and bridge. Every tower antennae and courtyard. Every curbway line, fence. Every melted stone. Elevation, ventilation, condemnation, basic basin alignment, cemetery, boundaries, a river, lake. Every pier, pavement center, line, tax lot, sewer main. Every power line. Every power line and every meter, hydrant, manhole, and bench.

We made the small city with the table cloth inside the quiet house behind the closed door. We built a miniature city right there on the floor. Then we folded it up, square upon square, smaller and smaller square upon square until it fit into the palm of her hand. And then she told me to swallow it and when I did I felt all of the petrified dragons in relief that live at the tops of the buildings. I felt all of that fire. I felt the moldable bricks and the narrative of uncountable kings.

The architecture is never what it appears to be she told me. Sometimes arches are really words, and words are really arches. We walked outside to the backyard she handed me a shovel and we began to dig. We unearthed relics and the rest of the bells that were unringing. We looked into the quietest parts of the sentences and saw rich alluvial deposits. We found books with many errors, a boat full of birds, resuscitation, approximation, enhancement and endure.

We walked back into the house and moments later the windows blew open. We stood still and she pointed toward the door and suddenly, it blew down. The house surged past 130 hertz, all the hair on our heads stood up, the vases cracked and the heaps of arrows they contained spilled onto the floor pointing in every direction and I didn't know where to look.

She told me, just continue to swallow. I did as I was told, thinking perhaps together we could swallow all of that fear. It is said that the gods have no eyes and we knew standing in that room there was something unworldly with us. We stood still, searching for a place to look, looking for a place to place the past so it was past. We knew we couldn't let it inhabit us anymore. We listened to all of the objects in the house and the dead and we knew what they were asking us and what the stones had instructed us to do, make everything heard.

We grew nickel in our throats and softest metal that fuses with the lightest element in our stomachs and made this alloy that no one yet invented. We began to understand sound was our army and it is quite difficult to fight an army that one cannot see. Originally all sounds were original, but now, any sound, no matter how tiny, can be blown up and shot around the world. And that clank, which indicated we hit a place, the place, where we were about to enter a new cycle, shot around the world. So all at once everyone heard. If cannons had been silent, they never would have been used in warfare.

We had always thought monsters had three and four sets of hands and feet or three heads. But now we knew they were formless. We pulled out maps of the world and plotted intensity against frequency. We brought out the notes in the chromatic scale, each an army of sound.

There were no books in the house but if there had been all of their spines would have broken at the same moment. She told me they did on the other side of the world where all the people were sleeping. The sound of it, a sound they had never heard before, woke them because it belonged to other worlds. Glass window shards were all over the floor, a road we had to walk on to get out the door. We went slowly, just one foot and then the other.



City thoughts of a jungle fetishist

Robert Steijn

Brussels, May 2013

I have an invitation for an art-event. I go. There are a lot of people. I rest on a chair at an empty table. Four men join me. The famous artist and three of his assistants. I feel important. They act as if in an informal meeting. They talk. I listen. The audience watches. They never listen to what I have to say. My mind drifts. On the table there is a pillow, pens and notebooks. I take a pen



and make the embroidery on the pillow even more beautiful. I want to escape their intensive talking. I take the pillow with me and leave the gallery. The audience looks at me but no one says goodbye. Afterwards a friend visits me at home. He is an art-collector. He is in panic. He says, I am a thief now. The pillow is a pricy art object and I destroyed it. He says, I must pay so much, that my life will be ruined. I feel ashamed and stupid, I didn't know. Yes, you are right, I am indeed half human, half snake, half man, half woman, but I am not a destroyer. I just reconstruct the way people perceive social realities.



Brussel, May 2013

I buy three different colors and only use one color to paint two of my nails. I decide I must think more before I buy. I am in a warehouse to buy a birthday cake. It is Sunday morning. I see a huge crowd of people who want to buy clothes. I see the hands who made these clothes, somewhere in Bangladesh or China. The marble decorated walls of the luxurious warehouse let me see the bare brick walls of an overcrowded sewing factory. In the people who

are spending their money to follow the latest fashion, I see the people who must work 6 days a week and still don't earn enough to support their own family. They all have a heart, dream about the future, have sexual desires, and fears. Like me, who decides now not to buy any new clothes before all my other clothes are outworn. Become shamanic, and start to see double to get rid of consumerism.

Amsterdam, May 2013

In the Netherlands they start an advertisement campaign to convince the people to trust the future again. They think we are depressed thinking about the current economical situation. With big pages in the newspapers, they let us believe that the financial crisis will pass soon. They want us to stop being careful with our money, they want us to take the risk to buy a new house, or to think about having a second child. On television, our prime minister even told us that we must change our car sooner. We must think of buying a new one, even when the current one still functions well. Yes, we must help the market by spending our money like crazy! Why should I listen to these politicians? They are right, I am depressed, working at an art academy, in a country that cut more than half of the subventions for art two years ago. By the way, I don't believe in thinking about economic growth by consuming.

Vienna, April 2013

I sleep, I wake up. A tree grows out of my belly. My feet become roots. My arms and head become branches. My torso is an enormous trunk, that doesn't stop growing. My skin is all bark. Now my roots make holes in the mattress, in the floor. I break the plumbing system under my floor. Running water. I make holes in the ceiling of the apartment right under my apartment. An old woman lives here, alone with her cat. I was never there before. Now no one is home. Only the wooden furniture welcomes my new wooden existence. I have no time to chat. My roots make holes in the marble floor of the old lady. The earth feels wet and cozy, full of worms and insects. I bury myself further into the earth. I never felt so grounded. With my branches I break the ceiling, the roof of our apartment building. Tiles fall from the roof, as apples do in autumn. Fresh air. Birds start to make nests in my branches. My leaves make sounds in the wind. I see and hear my brothers and sisters on the other side of the streets. They are poplars, as huge as I am. Behind them I welcome the mother of all trees: Ayuasca, she is dancing, elegant moves with her long elongated branches and roots. She smiles.





The trap

Julien Zerbone

Over the course of several years, Christine Laquet has frequently questioned the imagery of animals, of savagery, and of the other through philosophical and poetic approaches, resulting in works where tenderness and violence mingle closely. Thus, her exhibition in the FRAC Pays de la Loire, *Une brève histoire de tout (A Brief History of Everything)*, was built around the idea of the trap, of stalking, and of catching. These motifs reoccur throughout her recent work, whether they are observation devices (weather vane, camera obscura), materials and devices related to restraint and confinement (bird cages, nets, barbed wire ...), or dead animals, mounted or not.

However, this idea of the trap is not merely an image, a theme or an illustration. It is rather the artist's own methodology and its display, a way to address the audience and to create the conditions to another way of seeing the world and beyond. We, in turn, desire to question these traps set by the artist through several pieces from her last exhibition in order to understand its motivations and its mode of operation.



Act I

Taken in its metaphorical sense, the trap can be seen to illustrate our modern scientific attitude towards the world and the procedures that we put in place in order to know and claim it. We trap particles in particle accelerators, we capture specimens for study, we build museums in order to store human remains and objects from an entire culture. Our scientific and cultural institutions are a huge trap that recreates « in captivity » natural phenomena and mounts cultural facts, bringing them to a discourse where they are both included and understood.

More specifically, the pattern of the trap illustrates a principle of asymmetry defined by the philosopher Bruno Latour as being a principle specific to Western modernity. On one side there is belief, nature, irrationality; on the other, culture, reason, science. On one side the Western man, on the other flora, fauna and the human and mineral worlds, all together taken in by his own knowledge and discourse. The world is pitted against the Western man, who is locked up in his own trap... It is on these distinctions that Christine Laquet sets her field of investigation and creates stories or rituals, at times in reference to previous or alternative constructions to modernity (shamanism, animism ...), at times questioning the histories of its development (the story of the wild child in *Nous nous sommes fortement influencés*, Darwin and

Einstein in Recife, etc.), and at times reinventing fairytales in order to build other ways of seeing the world: *Peau d'Âne*, *Les Fables de La Fontaine*, etc... If there is a trap in the artwork of Christine Laquet, it is primarily from a poetic, narrative and methodological point of view.

Une brève histoire de tout is the eponymous artwork of Christine Laquet's exhibition. It is also an introduction: the work itself is a double metal door that we are invited to push open to see further. Its structure consists of letters spelling these instructions. These are repeated, overlapped, and meant to be read in a variety of directions. The letters are progressively deformed until shaping a strange and poetic glossolalia. The artist offers to us to pass through language in order to engage with the exhibition, to see ourselves. However, for many anthropologists, this very language marks the fundamental difference between humans and animals. It embodies our rationality, our ability to abstract the world and put it into signs. Abandoning language and giving into glossolalia has us to erase any distance, and to accept being lured and taken in. A literal and figurative trap, the door establishes a false alternative: either we stay on the threshold and we look through the grid or we accept to get trapped and close the door behind us. Thus we are trapped ourselves, we are captivated.



At the roots of this exhibition, there is an archive from a close relative of the artist, who has set up camera traps at the heart of a French mountain range. Driven by his passion for wolves, the amateur scientist set up the photographic devices and hid them in the stumps near sites in the Vercors where animals come to drink. He sought to capture their presence, to count them and get to know them. The results are snapshots of animals made from an automated mechanism triggered by their passage nearby. «These animals - says the artist – are trapped in the image. The poses refer to the act of photography itself. Its violence, poetry, beauty. The animals are captured in a shot, both actors and prisoners, bearing witness. This technique brings it close to surveillance cameras in natural spaces. «These «shots» are commonly used in order to establish a set of statistics on the main characteristics of the wildlife in the area, their habits, their reproduction. Shown in this exhibition, these images are no longer tools; they become objects of contemplation and wonderment, loopholed and incomplete but embodying a new poetry.

Act II

Christine Laquet made a video out of these archives, and called it *Tir de nuit* (*Night Shot*). The title refers to a triple reality: predation on one hand, doubt and silence on the other, and lastly, ghostly appearances from the night. On the screen, it is neither a movie, nor still images: at night, slopes of dirt, ponds, bushes and trees all stand out; white against the dark background. The shadow of an animal appears in several pictures; it disappears and appears again a meter away, sometimes joined by another fellow creature. The absence of color, the small number of shots per minute and the infrared lighting give a ghostly appearance to the deer, wild boars and the wolf that all bathe, play, fight, and drink in complete silence. The image is deeply deceptive and at the same time greatly fascinating. In a clever manner, the artist creates suspense by delaying the hero's appearance until the end of the film: the most expected character, but whose presence would prevent the others from showing themselves: the wolf. Perhaps is it to emphasize the deductive aspect of such an un understanding, in which being absent can mean as much as - or more than – being present, where what we see is only the expression of a negative network/patchwork, an intimate knowledge of a territory, its species and their habits ...

This network, precisely, is lacking. The lack of information in the «raw» aspect of this archive creates both the ambiguity and the singular interest of the artist's approach. In *Night shot*, it is indeed important to question what we cannot see it. There is no indication of place nor time, no



contextualization of these "scenes of daily life", the field of vision is limited to only a few meters. All these elements contribute to the feeling of an old silent movie ... In its materiality, both in its obvious and its deceptive appearance, in its intimate strangeness - Night shot introduces us to the "point of concern" evoked by Georges Didi-Huberman in *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde* and experienced by the viewer who feels caught between the tautological vision embodied by the famous "what you see is what you see" by Frank Stella, and the hoping vision according to which there is always something to see beyond. "To see is to feel that something inevitably escapes you", explains the art historian. It is to experience loss, and this is undoubtedly what we feel with these fugitive apparitions. They challenge and question us in their silence, without giving us the keys to any type of discourse. It is therefore a two-way visual trap that captures its prey whilst throwing us, the viewers, into a world of confusion and awareness of our lack of position. Us, those who watch without being invited to do so. And those who witness the spectacle of our own absence, that of Nature, as she is, as she denies us. A somewhat ironic vision of a viewer who feels watched more than anything...



These figures emerging from the night are embodied in three enigmatic paintings by Christine Laquet. Larger than life and painted in black and white on transparent veils, a deer, a wolf and a stag, stare at us with their bright eyes. Their gazes challenge us - as was the case in *Night shot* - through the powerful white of their eyes whereas the rest of their bodies are barely sketched in an evanescent transparency. This gaze is not aimed at us, but keeps us at a safe distance. In their fugitive way and their shadowing materiality, these figures remind us of the "photogenic drawings" that Talbot, a pioneer of photography, devised in 1839. He described it as « a process by which Natural Objects may be made to delineate themselves without the aid of the Artist's pencil ». Closer to the photogram than to photography, this device consisted in putting into direct contact the sensitized paper and the object. The idea was that "It is not the artist who makes the picture, but the image which makes itself ". Photography is for this reason the natural art par excellence, the receptacle of an autopoietic nature printed, as it is, thanks to the light, without any human intervention. As light footprints, these paintings escape the categories and our gaze and remind us of our constant need - along with our fear - of a naive, direct and total relationship with the world, in order to see all borders and all limitations in our perception of what surrounds us vanish.

Therefore, the whole system set up by the artist, the seemingly scientific nature of the shoot, the apparent simplicity of her paintings are themselves traps: we are caught between different regimes of seeing and knowing,

between a form of intimacy with wild emerging shapes on the screen and veils, and the doubt which they instill in us, between the immanence of these apparitions and their necessary background. As the man who wishes to set traps, we are reduced to a set of conjectures about what might have happened, what we imagine taking place out of our sight. Caught in his own trap, this is the situation of the viewer, watched by what he was watching, which is no longer trapped in his net ... To better highlight this double trap, the artist maliciously exhibited two pictures of the camera traps, almost invisible in the lush undergrowth ... We, who guessed Nature through technical devices, now face a Nature which is too obvious and seek to uncover its hidden mechanisms. This is our knowledge of the world which, with its systematic and rational appearance, is fed by more intricate stories, beliefs and poetry and is what Christine Laquet used as her favorite materials.

act III

And get lost in the end....With *You should never forget the jungle*, Christine Laquet pursues a collaboration she started in 2011 with Robert Steijn, performer and dancer, on Gunung. Gunung takes its name from a Korean shamanic ritual which accompanies the souls of the dead through sacrifices. During a residence in Korea, the artist had indeed met a shaman, Sul-Wha Kim, who invited her to attend one of his rituals. The shaman had recognized Christine Laquet, she explains, even though they did not know each other. Strangeness and complexity of this meeting which abolish borders. During the resulting performance, Robert Steijn embodied a « screen-man ». He was holding the screen of this ritual, providing a physical distance and questioning our Western view on shamanistic rituals. The Performance materializes the meeting for Christine Laquet and according to her, it can not take place without a ritual. The use of body and gaze moves her practice from visual art to performance and enlarges her field of investigation. The meeting as a playground, is found in *You should never forget the jungle*, in the happy encountering - then erotic and ultimately tragic - between a young deer and a hunter, played by the bodies of two artists, around a boundary embodied by a knife.

Just like the exhibition, it all begins with words, and in this case with hypnosis: from 10 to 1, the countdown enables a change of realities, a transformation inside the narration. The deer shows its exuberant characteristic and, while addressing the audience, explains that he must confront the hunter and give him his life. Therefore, they live a relationship which is no longer a

unilateral stalking but a seduction game, a mutual and unconditional offering. The hunter is faced with an animal that looks human. Finally, the hunter, who is caught in a cornelian dilemma, shoots the deer, feeling exasperated by its dances. But this is not quite a death since it initiates a molt where limits are exceeded, prior to any ritual initiation. In cannibalistic tribes in Brazil, the conquering warriors change names when they ingest an opponent at the end of a long ritual process. Thus, after this lethal action, we see the man slip into the skin of the beast and be born again.

In his book *Homo Ludens*, Johan Huizinga develops an argument which states that the game is the essence of man. It gives shape to culture, rituals and social structures. Christine Laquet's role-playing game could be the essence of our relationship with the animal world. Any passage from human to animal is possible thanks to a deep mutual desire to play and be played, to give oneself to the other in order to improve. Therefore, to get out of the trap is first to accept this trap as a border, a porous playground where identities, bodies, roles are being shared, exchanged and modified. It is to build a fluid and evolving otherness by first considering the other in oneself in order to consider the self in the other better. It is about meeting the other, nature and animality and then agree to write and tell a story about this meeting, to finally transform each other.

From trap to game, from doubt to invention, from separation to crossing the boundaries. The artworks on display in A brief history of everything finally form a puzzle, a treasure hunt for the viewer who is willing to play the guessing game. Caught between fascination and doubt, taken aback by what seemed to be unveiled immediately, by a world we think we know, a world of *deja-vu*, we are invited to invent new rules, we move to cross the boundary, this separation which is after all the real trap.

The point is not to establish foreign beliefs and habits into European tradition here, but to understand how our relationship to the whole world is caught up in these issues, in seduction intertwined with infinite violence, in the necessity to embody another self in order to feel better that there is no radical separation from the world and oneself. So nature, animal, and human appear as artifacts developing constantly, as representations of the other that we try to personify in our turn.

Photogramme performance,
dans la peau de bête

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