Animorphism in the anthropocene: nonhuman personhood in activist art practice

Bogna Konior

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Animorphism in the Anthropocene: Nonhuman Personhood in Activist Art Practice

KONIOR Bogna

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Principal Supervisor: Prof. LO Kwai-Cheung
Hong Kong Baptist University
January 2018
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work which has been done after registration for the degree of MPhil (or PhD as appropriate) at Hong Kong Baptist University, and has not been previously included in a thesis or dissertation submitted to this or any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualifications.

I have read the University’s current research ethics guidelines, and accept responsibility for the conduct of the procedures in accordance with the University’s Committee on the Use of Human & Animal Subjects in Teaching and Research (HASC). I have attempted to identify all the risks related to this research that may arise in conducting this research, obtained the relevant ethical and/or safety approval (where applicable), and acknowledged my obligations and the rights of the participants.

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Date: 01 2018
Abstract

Defined by the excess of abstracted production, the exploitation of natural resources and the continued impoverishment of the excluded, the Anthropocene is both a narcissistic prophecy of doom and a call to examine the roots of the environmental crisis. Against the death of “the human” in the contemporary theory unveils the violence of a global healthcare crisis, the persistence of illness, pain and pollution as the dominant sensory and political regimes, as well as the desire to become post-and trans-human, and to do justice to the plight of nonhumans under the reign of the anthropos. While the era interpellates the whole species as its subject, the continual presence of racism, colonialism and capitalism points to the specific roots of climate change, environmental pollution, and interspecies violence. As such, both realist and activist approaches should consider the inclusion of the nonhuman into the political as the a priori condition of resistance or change.

In this dissertation, I face up to this proposal, seeking to include nonhumans into the political and ethical sphere. In dialogue with animism, feminist materialism as well as decolonial and critical theory, I consider artistic and activist practices as communal, adaptive and programmatic. Rather than relying on a set of frameworks or the oeuvre of a thinker, I theorise the framework of “animorphism,” which accounts for activist art that does not present us with ideas and representations of nonhumans as damaged and vulnerable persons, but lets them manifest as such. Animorphic art practice lends a new visibility to small and slow violences that might otherwise seem imperceptible within the grand narrative of the Anthropocene. Rather than testifying to the changing nature of our global species-being, these practices are a form of tactical and geo-ontological activism, which unravels the world in a futurist gesture.
Against the dominant trends in post-humanist theory and environmental ethics, I criticise theorising nonhumans as “agency,” “matter” or “flow,” instead arguing for a personalisation of those often excluded by “green” art and activism. This is not a purely aesthetic coalescence but an assertion of animorphism’s suitability for developing adaptive practices in nonhuman communities in an era that necessitates and arises from damage, toxicity, predation and violence. The framework of animorphism pays attention to this condition and its resulting community. As such, its progressivism is no less than taking-into-account of the excluded. Through a theoretical inquiry as well as detailed case study analysis, I examine the practices of artists who intervene as designers, engineers and climate activists in order to resist the literal figurations of the anthropos but nevertheless remain attuned to the specificity of those, who struggle under the apocalyptic conditions of the world.
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# Table of Contents

Declaration.............................................................................................................. i  
Abstract................................................................................................................ ii  
Acknowledgments................................................................................................ iv  
Table of Contents.................................................................................................. v  
List of Figures........................................................................................................ vii  
Opening..................................................................................................................  1  
Introduction: Rotting Times....................................................................................... 2  
Chapter 1: Revolution is Foremost a Death................................................................. 11  
Chapter 2: What Does it Mean to be a Person? ......................................................... 31  
  2.1. Exhausting Life: What Persons are not............................................................ 34  
  2.2. Anthropomorphism: Representational or not? .................................................. 39  
  2.3. For Whom the Ontology Turns? ...................................................................... 45  
  2.4. Paralleling Decolonial Methods.................................................................... 51  
Chapter 3: Animorphic Practice: Art and Activism at the Edge of a Catastrophe....61  
  3.1. To Know is to Personify: Animorphic Pragmatism.......................................... 71  
  3.1.1. Nonhuman Health Services........................................................................ 74  
  3.1.2. Epistemic Accountability............................................................................ 88  
  3.1.3. Animorphic Pragmatism............................................................................ 99  
  3.2. Personhood of the Non-Living: Animorphic Museums of Decay...............105  
  3.2.1. The Human Face of the Ocean................................................................. 108
3.2.2. Lessons in Decay................................................................................124

3.2.3. Animorphic Museums of the Non-Living..............................................134

3.3. Animorphic Verminhood: Predation, Pests and Interspecies Cohabitation......140

3.3.1. Posthumously Wild....................................................................................145

3.3.2. Real strange.............................................................................................158

3.3.3. Persons in Animosity.............................................................................171

Conclusion: Slow Violence; Or, Adaptive Cultures................................................180

Works Cited........................................................................................................189

Curriculum Vitae..................................................................................................217
List of Figures

Fig. 1. Jeremijenko's DIY mice experiment kit. Web................................................................. 78
Fig. 2. Jeremijenko's tadpole strollers. Web........................................................................... 83
Fig. 3. Jeremijenko's human-bird communication device. Web. ......................................... 86
Fig. 4. Jeremijenko's Tree X Office. Web. ............................................................................... 88
Fig 5. Laar's business card. Web.............................................................................................. 90
Fig. 6. Installing the artwork by the Vernagt Glacier. Web...................................................... 93
Fig. 7. The Vitruvian Man by John Quigley. Web................................................................ 105
Fig. 8. The Rising Tide by Jason deCaires Taylor. Web......................................................... 109
Fig. 9. Follow the Leaders by Isaac Cordal........................................................................... 110
Fig. 10. A sculpture by Jason deCairnes Taylor. Web............................................................. 112
Fig. 11. A sculpture by Jason deCairnes Taylor. Web............................................................ 117
Fig. 12. Vicissitudes by Jason deCairnes Taylor. Web........................................................... 119
Fig. 13. The Raft of Lampedusa by Jason deCairnes Taylor. Web....................................... 121
Fig. 14. The Last Correspondent by Jason deCairnes Taylor. Web....................................... 124
Fig. 15. Iron Teaches Rock How To Rust by Olayami Dabls. Web....................................... 126
Fig. 16. Old theater in Detroit. Web........................................................................................ 129
Fig. 17. Iron Teaches Rock How To Rust by Olayami Dabls. Web....................................... 130
Fig. 18. Museum of Nonhumanity by Terike Haapoja and Laura Gustafsson. Web.......... 141
Fig. 19. An emanciated polar bear. Web................................................................................ 147
Fig. 20. Nanoq by Bryndis Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson. Web............................... 149
Fig. 21. Radio Animal by Bryndis Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson. Web.................................................157

Fig. 22. Super Rat by Chim↑Pom. Web. ........................................................................................................163

Fig. 23. Black of Death by Chim↑Pom. Web................................................................................................167

Fig. 24. Real Times by Chim↑Pom. Web......................................................................................................170

Fig. 25. A researcher in Washington with a dead crow. Web.......................................................................175.
Not Horses

What I adore is not horses, with their modern
domestic life span of 25 years. What I adore
is a bug that lives only one day, especially if
it’s a terrible day, a day of train derailment or
chemical lake or cop admits to cover-up, a day
when no one thinks of anything else, least of all
that bug. I know how it feels, born as I’ve been
into these rotting times, as into sin. Everybody’s
busy, so distraught they forget to kill me,
and even that won’t keep me alive. I share
my home not with horses, but with a little dog
who sees poorly at dusk and menaces stumps,
makes her muscle known to every statue.
I wish she could have a single day of language,
so that I might reassure her don’t be afraid –
our whole world is dead and so can do you no harm.

- From *Hard Child* by Natalie Shapero
Introduction: Rotting Times

In March 2017, Los Angeles Times announced that President Donald Trump’s budget blueprint reallocates funds from climate change policy to deep space colonization (Khan). The National Institute of Health as well as the Environmental Protection Agency were both to undergo severe cuts, but additional funds were to be devoted to sending American astronauts on deep-space missions as well as to increasing the involvement of the private sector in the industrialization of interstellar travel and possibly space habitation. Peter Thiel, a wealthy Silicon Valley investor and member of Trump’s transition team, prioritizes three areas of futurist development: the establishment of micro-islands for the wealthy in order to survive the first wave of the coming war for diminishing resources; space colonialism; and blood transfusions from the young and healthy straight into the veins of middle-aged billionaires (Gittlitz). Immortality is just around the corner, but only for those who can throw their money at it. As the cult cyberpunk author William Gibson noted, the future is already here, it is just that it is not distributed very evenly. Meanwhile, in Poland, where I was born, the ministers were adamant to explain that, while Polish cities are the most polluted in Europe, Polish coal is less poisonous than imported coal and that a multicultural society where everyone is a vegan and relies on renewable energy is profoundly incompatible with traditional Polish values (“Witold Waszczykowski”). In October 2016, the Polish Catholic Church offered the opinion that the biggest reproductive rights protest in the history of the country in response to the proposed total ban on abortion was a pagan spectacle, “the carnival of the devil,” as if it was an array of witches that paraded before their eyes, not a crowd of women demanding healthcare (“Kościół ostro odpowiada”). The ministers also dismissed it as a farce, while the Polish Ministry for the Environment proposed the logging of Puszcza Białowieska, the last and largest remaining part of the primeval forest that once stretched across the European Plain, for which they drew national and international criticism. The project went through, even though both the European Union and UNESCO warned that the Polish government violates multiple laws by infringing on the
commons. This was before the United States cancelled their participation in the greenhouse gas emission reduction program known as the Paris Agreement, signed by 157 countries. Two of them, the United States and China are together responsible for almost half of the global emissions. Following Trump’s withdrawal, China announced that it would become the global leader in progressive climate change policy, thus signalling a potentially significant shift in international politics in the coming decades.

Lawrence Buell, the pioneer of what is now known as eco-criticism, once wrote that the crisis in the human-environment relations is a crisis of the imagination. We fail to recognize, he argued, that we already possess the tools we need to create a sustainable world, and that we fail to utilize them because we neglect to exercise our creative power. Aesthetics must come first, he seemed to think, and the politics will follow. I take his belief in creativity and imagination to be too generous, when both are easily co-opted by the endlessly “innovative” neoliberal imperative to be creative rather than simply to be productive as the working class has been accustomed to do. In my final year of writing this dissertation in Hong Kong, around the time when Trump was elected, Poland went into a nationalistic frenzy and China announced plans to become the global environmental sustainability leader, I realized that my interest in the “slow cancellation of the future” (Fisher, “Ghosts of My Life”), the apocalypse, pollution, multi-species illness and extinction must be symptomatic of a generalized global anxiety that nevertheless is somehow euphoric in its reckless faithfulness to either fatalism or “business as usual” denial. The theories that I have been reading, a testimony to my long-standing interest in how culture and politics engage the category of the nonhuman in order to shape and respond to global paradigm shifts, and to imagine the future, were as symptomatic of our predicament as my own lifelong pessimism. The theories that I have been afraid to read because they ring too close to home – those on the global healthcare crisis, progressing precarity and poverty of the once middle classes, systemic violence against female and animal bodies, the persistence of illness, pain and pollution as dominant sensory experiences – wait for me in the future. Yet, these concerns have been animating me increasingly in the last year of
writing and this dissertation has been irrevocably influenced by the rapid entanglement of social and environmental violence on a global scale.

When our seemingly stable world is interrupted by uncanny powers, the definition of what is “real” shifts rapidly. What we have been accustomed to define as “social realism,” writes author Amitav Ghosh, is ill-equipped to describe our reality (“The Great Derangement”). The human/nonhuman divide comes crashing down, nature is certainly not inert and not so distant is the possibility of a world without the *Homo sapiens*. The “realist” impulse to represent and ponder the everyday lives of human beings does not seem very realistic anymore. Culture might be at a loss to represent such a world but not to respond to it. By *represent* I do not mean create physical images, objects or representations; I rather refer to “representationalism” in philosophy, where it is believed that the world “out there” does not exist and is only a filtered projection from the inside of our subjectivity, therefore our subjectivity should be the object of study, not the world itself. While this is a simplification, we have come to associate proposals like this with postmodernism, with the idea that the only way to study the world is to study the ideas about the world, an approach that has dominated the study of culture for many decades. What I saw instead studying culture nowadays is that our ideas about the world come tumbling down before the world’s distinctly nonhuman presence. I was therefore looking for cultural practices that are materialist and realist and that would not abdicate the power of practice itself to theorise and enact the world around it. Alongside my case studies and treating them as theoretical practices, I wanted to elaborate a conceptual apparatus that would account for a nonhuman politics that engages, through art practice and activism, both the generic and the local aspects of the global environmental changes that we are undergoing. It would provide a general framework for thinking about the nonhuman alongside particular ethical and political efforts. I wanted to think big and small at the same time.

Yet, it is precisely this tension between the enormous, cosmic pessimism of the apocalypse and the imperative to think in a subjective, located context that often ends in a standstill when it comes to our current predicament. Perhaps it is because of this incompatibility between the world that is
excess of our capacity to respond and the numbing cacophony of everyday disasters that we have managed to produce only feeble responses to the environmental crisis, especially when we stress what Fa-ti Fan calls “individual moral choices (e.g., picking the right kinds of light bulbs), organized demonstrations that amounted to spectacles rather than revolutions, and inter-governmental agreements compromised by calculations of national interests” (945). In other words, there is a complete incompatibility of the totalizing, cosmic precarity, where it seems that large swaths of the planet itself might become uninhabitable within the coming century, with the solutions that are being proposed. “Where,” asks Fan, “can we find the moral and political imagination that transcends the inadequacies of modern politics? (945)

It would be incorrect to state that I have found an answer to this question. My modest interest, which I set out with three years ago, was in extending the political and the ethical sphere to include the nonhuman members of our societies, affected as they are by modernity and capitalism, which are irrevocably tied to the environmental crisis. I am not alone in these efforts –Richard Grusin, director of the 21st Century Studies at the University of Wisconsin, which hosts annual conferences devoted to the state of the contemporary theory, proclaimed a “nonhuman turn” in 2012. In “Chapter 1: A Revolution is Foremost a Death,” I sketch the theoretical territory of “the Anthropocene” as a concept that is definitive of this turn, including discursive phenomena such as an apocalyptic imagination, narcissism and its accompanying longing to become post- or trans-human, an attentiveness to materialism and intersectionality, as well as the attempts to do justice to the suffering of nonhumans under the human reign. While the Anthropocene is not synonymous with climate change, it has been associated with it in the popular imagination. As a discursive and cross-disciplinary category, it makes for a much richer contextual framework than climate change itself, which is only part of what the new epoch stands for. The ways theory and culture have been confronting this term are already manifold – in this chapter, the figure of the “human” and its relation to the new “epoch” is the focal point. Contrary to the dominant strands of the Anthropocenic theory, I am interested in a nonhumanism that is also a radical humanism, a
consistent realist and materialist anthropomorphism, which I propose as a way to include the nonhuman into the political and ethical sphere. This “humanism,” however, or this “anthropomorphism” is nothing like the one that we associate with white, patriarchal techno-capitalist modernity, or with the impulses to “project something mentally” onto nonhumans. The human is not who we think s/he is. The non in the nonhuman is not a negation; it is rather a modifier that sketches an alternate vector for thought.

Furthering this theoretical inquiry, in “Chapter 2: What Does It Mean to be a Person?,” I survey the body of work around the term “animism” in order to show that with thinking about nonhumans as persons comes a different paradigm for practice. I first encountered animism, not yet knowing its complicated history, in the remarkable essays of the early cinema theorist and filmmaker, Jean Epstein, who wrote, “all of cinema is animistic (…) everything is suffused with an aura of personal identity” (289). Epstein thought that the greatest actor in the world was the river Seine and “in his mind, [in his 1924 film La Belle Nivernaise] the trees and the river played starring roles: in the credits for Six et demi onze Epstein includes “the sun” and “the lens” in addition to each of the human actors” (Keller 39). “There are infinite number of movements, of expressions, as much among my human actors as among the things that act in my films,” he wrote (qtd. in Guido 155). Mine is thus quite an unorthodox introduction to animism but it is from Epstein that I first learnt what would be later confirmed to me in anthropology and decolonial work at large - that animism dealt with the matters of personhood, rather than simply life. This was a key discovery in my search for a nonhuman theory that gives us nonhumans as subjects and therefore as participants in political and ethical communities, rather than as agencies or “matters.” Years after first reading Epstein, I came upon a collaborative article between Kate Lloyd, Sarah Wright and Sandie Suchet-Pearson with four generations of Yolngu women from northern Australia, which listed the Bawaka Country as a co-author alongside “non-humans – landscapes, seascapes, animals, winds, sun, moon, tides and spirits such as Bayini, a spirit woman of Bawaka [who] constantly shape and influence our research collaboration” (187). Having explored various incarnations of this idea of
nonhuman personhood, rather than relying on a set of frameworks (like phenomenology) or the *oeuvre* of a thinker, I decided to create my own framework in dialogue with anthropology, feminist materialism as well as contemporary critical and decolonial theory. My theoretical question in the first two chapters of this dissertation can be crystallized as such: in what way do we have to think “personhood” in order for the proposition of “nonhuman persons” to make sense, and simultaneously escape the determinism of standard anthropomorphism, where humans simply project some idea of themselves onto the otherwise inert nonhumans? What interests me in animism is both personalisation as well as the fact that it has to be sustained through everyday practice: we are persons, it says, because others treat us as such, and these practices of personhood have to be continually upheld. Irving Hallowell coined the term “other-than-human persons” to describe how in the Ojibwe animism personhood is a quality *given* in the universe as the basic ontological unit yet must be constantly activated through practice: rocks that we build our houses with are persons but rocks lying around the river are not. I call my reading of “nonhuman personhood” across various disciplines, but with a special attentiveness and a debt to animism, an “animorphism.” It is a strongly located, practical and political framework, even though it is also a generic ontology of the nonhuman. It argues that nonhuman persons do not need to be represented as much as provided with an opportunity to speak. Recognising this fact that constitutes a personalisation.

In “Chapter 3: Animorphic Practice: Activism at the Edge of a Catastrophe,” before putting this framework to work, I consider how animorphism could be a tactical activism in the Anthropocene, which has become both a prophecy of doom and a curatorial meme in the art world. Writing about how artworks can intervene within the paradigm of (non)human precarity, extinction and vulnerability, I do not approach them as an art theorist or historian. What provoked my interest were cultural practices that do not present us with ideas and representations of nonhumans as damaged and vulnerable persons, but with practices that let nonhumans *manifest* as such. The paradigm of civilizational autophagy did not fail to register on the seismographs of the arts, re-posing the questions pertaining to the politics and ethics of artistic practice. Formalism,
aestheticism, or engagement with the nonhuman can be perceived as a cop-out of politics. Yet in the Anthropocene, positioning the nonhuman as separate from the political is already political – activism has to adapt to this reality. Thus, the diverse projects introduced here are preoccupied with staging interventions that draw nonhuman persons into the realm of culture, build stages for the emergence of personhood against the background of the environmental crisis, and the crisis of “the human.” Notably, all of the artists discussed here are in some kind of a dialogue with political and scientific authority, and their work extends beyond the boundaries of the art world. As such, these practices are comunal, adaptive and programmatic, they carry out the future they want to see, while reflecting on their own geo-political specificity.

In subchapter “3.1.: To Know is to Personify: Animorphic Pragmatism and Corporeal Personhood,” I consider how in an era marked by techno-scientific and medical progress but also a global healthcare crisis, Natalie Jeremijenko’s practice redefines health to be a matter of multispecies well-being. Her understanding of nonhuman personhood is corporeal and material, where nonhuman animals emerge as persons because of their behaviours rather than any projection of a moral character or consciousness. Encouraging personal relationships with nonhumans, Jeremijenko opens up the possibility of a divergent knowledge, one that is experiential and rooted in the recognition as others as persons. Arranging possibilities for practical and personal interaction with a melting glacier, Kalle Laar foregrounds the vulnerability of non/human communities to climate change. While well-intentioned, his practice is also symptomatic of a convergence of capitalist and environmental impulses of personalisation, testifying to the entanglement of various personalisations within environmental, economic, legal, political and personal spheres. Both artists are aware that modern knowledge is based on the idea of objectification and ask whether we could personalise in order to know, thus sketching a different onto-epistemology for art activism.

In subchapter “3.2.: Personhood of the Non-Living: Animorphic Museums of Decay,” I examine how artists Jason deCairnes Taylor and Olayami Dabls engage the humanoid form in order to occlude it and lend it to the nonhuman, thus presenting a model of animorphic personhood that I
will call rusting, occluded, or submerged. Decoy, drowning and death are central to this mode of personhood, where nonhumans subvert the generic humanoid form by decomposing it. Tylor’s and Dabls’s practices, respectively rooted in the contexts of British colonialism and slavery, and fossil fuel economy and racism highlight the ways in which settler liberal governance can be resisted through an animorphic redefinition of the museum as a place of nonhuman cultures, where nonhuman persons emerge as artists rather than exhibits. Placing their activist exploration within the territory of the ocean and the industrial city, both marked by specific histories of decay, Taylor and Dabls show us how histories of “rusting” are reframed by nonhuman persons, thus foregrounding particular concerns of multi-species communities.

Subchapter “3.3.:Animorphic Verminhood: Predation, Pests and Interspecies Cohabitation,” unfolds alongside the debates about migrants and citizens, alien and indigenous species, health and illness, refuge and homelessness in the Anthropocene. Considering the categories of feral, wild, domestic and vermin species, Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir’s and Mark Wilson’s artistic research projects are set within a domestic wild, a local territory of the neighbourhood or home. In complex engagements with context and representation, they enter varied stories of interspecies precarity and violence, and consider how multispecies displacement reconfigures how and why we develop personal relationships with other species. While Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson are themselves skilled researchers and scholars, the scandalous Japanese collective Chim↑Pom are post-Fukushima activists, rewriting the Anthropocene as an era of atomic wastefulness. Their controversial work, which walks the tightrope between exploitation and exposé, complicates what counts as environmental art. By showing that nowadays vermin persons emerge within a predatory loop of damage and toxicity, both collectives deploy animorphic methods in order to frame predatory kinship among species as a tactic of living in a damaged world.

When I presented excerpts of this dissertation in July 2017 at an “Animism in a Planetary Frame” seminar at the Annual Meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association, I was pleased to notice that I was not the only person working with animism and taking it into less
“green” or “joyful” terrains with regards to the contemporary thought about ethics, the nonhuman and the environment. While (as ever) no one could agree on what animism was, there was no shortage of research on animism and destruction, negative animism, or animism as a regenerative death drive. This is not a purely aesthetic coalescence but a trend that testifies to animism’s suitability for developing adaptive practices in nonhuman communities in an era that necessitates and arises from damage, toxicity and violence. The framework of animorphism theorizes this condition and its resulting community. A community, however, does not mean that humans and nonhumans are equal or exist on the same ontological footing, that there exists only flux and processes and every boundary is fluid. While this proposition has been gaining traction in critical theory, it approaches too closely capitalism’s dreams of a “frictionless exchange: a universe where commodities – beings and objects alike – circulate without encountering the slightest obstacle” (Bourriaud, “The Exform” 12). I rather want to think about animorphic art activism as a mode of progressive politics / ethics, where progressivism is no less than “taking-into-account of the excluded” (ibid 19-20). Seeking to diagnose the contemporary dynamic between art and politics, theorist Nicolas Bourriaud writes that it must operate on the axes of waste and exclusion, for the spectres animating socio-cultural structures are the unproductive, the wasteful, the never-decomposing, the people who have been abandoned (refugees, the homeless, those without health care or basic rights), the 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” (ibid 15). Animorphic art practice lends these phenomena a visibility, paying attention to hormone-fed mice, melting glaciers, decomposing cities, slaughtered animals and other precarious existences in the Anthropocene.
Chapter 1: A Revolution is Foremost a Death

In 1922 revolutionary Russia, historian Yevgveny Tarle wrote an article addressing the pitfalls of producing scholarship in the midst of a sweeping geo-political paradigm shift. He was overwhelmed by the wealth of archival documents, the growth of new disciplines, especially economic history and psychology, and the general broadening of intellectual horizons. It was a new dimension of space opened up, as if he walked off a cliff and felt himself in free-fall. Yet, he warned his colleagues of straying from past convictions and swaying to the rhythm of the tempting new unknown. This impossible task of understanding something beyond his capacity extended into existential considerations: “Revolution is always first and foremost a death, then life,” he writes, “[those who thought themselves safe would be] delirious to believe that we are in an unbreakable and majestic arch; we risk forgetting that not far under the elegant carpet of our cabin there is a dark and fathomless abyss” (qtd. in Dukes 70). The more daunting the task, he argued, the more synthetic scholarship must become – uncovering the abyss underpinning history is only the first step. Could his observations and instructions be any more relevant today? First, there comes the recognition: a fathomless abyss is drawing us in. It envelops history and time, extending from the planet’s core to the cosmos. In The Ends of the World, philosopher Deborah Danowski and anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro write that the most significant phenomenon of the century today is “the sensations of a definitive return of a form of transcendence that we believed transcended, and which reappears in a more formidable form than ever” (31). First coined by the Dutch chemist Paul J. Crutzen in 2000, the term “Anthropocene” gained currency in 2007, when paleobiologist and stratigrapher Jan Zalasiewicz requested that the Geological Society of London’s Stratigraphy Commission reviews the case for a new geological epoch to replace the currently prevailing Holocene. One of the signifying boundaries proposed by his Working Group on the Anthropocene research hub is the strata of plastics, concrete and nuclear, irradiated substances that humans have been producing since the 1950s and which might be still decomposing long after the
*Homo sapiens* are gone. Deciding on a fixed starting date for a geological epoch is a monumental task; proposed dates could range from the invention of agriculture eight thousand years ago, the arrival of industrial modernity on the engine of steam and the Great Acceleration after World War II that saw the human population skyrocket from four billion in the 1970s to almost eight billion now, to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, where measurements testify to an irreversible irradiation of soil in result of nuclear experiments (Davis and Turpin 5). Adding to these genealogies of responsibility, Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin suggest that the Anthropocene is an extension of colonial imperialism, global trade and reliance on coal, dating it back to 1610, when the golden spike can be observed in the geological record, indicating that humans had made an irreversible change to the planet's bio-chemistry in consequence of the global slave trade – the intercontinental transport of animals, plants and humans across the Atlantic Ocean. They argue that the death of fifty million Native Americans and the resulting loss of agriculture as well as subsequent forest re-growth altered the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

Whichever event is the unenviable winner of this historiographical contest, the Anthropocene functions as a signpost, signalizing that the actions of a singular species, which is responsible for the rising atmospheric pollution, progressing acidifications of the ocean and irreversible irradiation of soil have for the first time in history more impact on the life of the planet than any geological force. While climate change and the Anthropocene are often conflated, in 2009 *Nature* published an article in which a team of scientists led by Johan Rockström of the Stockholm Resilience Centre list several different processes that, if significantly crossed by humans, could lead to irreversible changes for us and other species. Climate change is only one of them, alongside ocean acidification, stratospheric ozone depletion, global freshwater use, biodiversity loss, changes in nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, changes in land use, chemical pollution, and atmospheric aerosol loading (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro 26). If the current alterations of these parameters continue, we will find ourselves on the brink of the 6th global extinction, which biologist Scott Gilbert compares to a K-T event such as the Cretaceous-Tertiary boundary and the extinction of non-avian dinosaurs.
66 million years ago or the Permian-Triassic extinction that wiped out more than 90% of all species 252 million years ago (Haraway et al. 7). Science, history and politics overlap, dissolving boundaries between the objective communicating of the observable data and ethical responsibility. Far from being just a scientific classificatory term that denotes a new era based in the acknowledgment of anthropogenic environmental degradation, the definition of the Anthropocene, as geologists Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin note, “makes scientists arbiters, to an extent, of the human – environment relationship, itself an act with consequences beyond geology” (171). As Deleuze and Guattari predicted (among many others), once the symbolic wall erected between Man and Nature crumbles, geology becomes a moral science (“A Thousand Plateaus” 39-75).

Unbeknownst to the scientists, however, the apocalyptic seeds of this ominous term flourished into a field of mutated flowers, a “science-fiction concept (…) that pulls us out of familiar space and time to view our predicaments as if they belonged to a distant land” (Swanson et al. 149). Like the mutated daisies growing near Fukushima or the rolling grassland that turned the filming crew of Mad Max: Fury Road away from the previously barren landscape of Broken Hill in Australia, scholarship feeds off the speculative radiation and unexpected eco-mutations that the current (intellectual) climate allows. All bets are off. Artists are calling for an overhaul of what was and the introduction of the radically new. Raqs Media Collective, for example, writes that “without a recalibration of the senses, at the level of our global species-being (…) we cannot conceive of another mode of production, another set of social relations, another ethic” (114). On an unprecedented scale, artists and scholars have the opportunity to weigh in on the issues usually relegated to the sciences. John Wiseman, the director of the Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute writes that “there is an increasing recognition that the biggest roadblocks preventing [successful environmental policies] are political, social and cultural, rather than scientific and technological” (29). Philosophy and theory, perhaps for the first time in a few decades, are enjoying the justifiable mandate to jump head first into speculation, utilizing the “poisonous gift [of the Anthropocene]” (Latour “Anthropology at the Time”) as a possible transformative event for thought. Benjamin
Bratton, for example, writes that we must mobilize all intellectual and speculative resources as if our lives depended on it, because they just might. We cannot know just yet what exactly we might need. We thus hook our brains into the prophecy of human disappearance, seeking in it “unthinkable new animal machines, and with them, New Earths.” This speculative drive is weaving an aesthetic and thematic alliance between academia and the arts, often clocking in at the denial of “humanity” as a productive term for social, aesthetic, scientific or political discourse. Artists who seek to move focus beyond the immediate human everyday, extending it into the animal, vegetal, mineral, machinic and cosmic are reaching towards the broad spectrum of post-humanist theory.

Ani Liu of the MIT Media Lab, whose multimedia work aims to further human-plant intimacy, quotes speculative realism as her framework, while Pei Ying Lin’s collaborative work is “influenced by the notion of vibrant matter, which [political theorist] Jane Bennett uses to counter the prevailing discourse in favour of hyper-consumption and capitalism.” Closer to the mainstream, Björk corresponded with philosopher Timothy Morton, asking him to help her define “what ‘ism’” she was. She wrote, “I would like to offer a collaborative hand and wave hi to theory (…) the human is not at the centre of the world, and the Anthropocene stuff is also spicy [sic].” She then discussed her work in relation to Morton’s object-oriented ontology, a philosophical system that preaches radical ontological equality between beings.

In their anthology on art in the Anthropocene, Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin suggest that the term is “not merely descriptive; it is a social imaginary that has exceeded its intended categorization and whose parameters delimit ways of thinking about the world well beyond the confines of geo-scientific debate” (7). There are many ways to travel into this newly estranged territory that we once called “the environment.” Some artworks, such as the Greenpeace-sponsored enormous sketch of the Vitruvian Man, assembled out of copper pipes melting into the waters of the Arctic, detect what historian Dipesh Chakrabarty calls the “contemporary mood of anxiety and concern about the finitude of the human” (“The Climate of History” 197). Other thinkers have gone the opposite way – philosophers Ray Brassier embraces the possibility of annihilation as an
empowering nihilism or a reinstating of scientific amoralism, where the finitude of the human is but one shimmer in the flow of entropy. Many thinkers deal in undoing humanity as an oppressive category, extending it into nonhuman multiplicity, dissolving dualisms in the name of ontological hybridity: we have never been individuals (Gilbert et al.), we have never been human, we are bacterial, we are compost (Gane and Haraway), we are an entanglement of networked agencies (Bennett), we are objects among objects (Morton).

Given this increasing desire to leave humanism behind and move “towards an open field of naturecultures, infrastructure assemblages, and other newly contested territory” (Davis and Turpin 15), one needs to asks where is the place of “environmental” artistic and activist practices within a discourse that wants to abolish the nature and culture distinction? Where is the environment in which the contemporary artist locates her practice? In their introduction to Material Feminisms (2008), Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman write that the environment can no longer be founded on the idea of wilderness and has to be thought through “the co-extensive materiality of humans and nonhumans,” thus extending the term into specific geo-political territories from the home to the ocean – there are “environments” rather than the “environment” (9). At stake, for example, could be the reformulation of environmental theory that would create space for matters usually considered technological or cultural. Can environmental activism care for the factory-farmed animals locked in a forced cyborg becoming or the dolphins trapped in amusement parks, as well as the disparities between human communities across the lines of gender, nationality and class that delineate different oppressions in the Anthropocene – and still call itself environmental? If the environment stretches from the rooftops of our institutions to the depth of the ocean floor, invalidating the outdated methods of spatial designation, and if it intersects with the cultural sphere to the point of inseparability, how do we chart this newly estranged category?

In setting the stage for this discussion of new frameworks for environmental art activism, we can say that the environment is now perceived to be everywhere, from the soil under our feet to the cosmic. The environment might be the cold universe of speculation, where humans and machines
extend into a cyborg self, or the vibrant physical assemblage of living organisms, among which humans are but one. A speculative, unknown environment beyond the human lingers in the background as “nature” divides itself, as if in a process of mitosis into countless contextually delineated environments. We oscillate between the specific and the unknown. In this paradoxical manner, although the Anthropocene insists on the inseparability of nature and culture, the possibility of extinction has given us nature back – here understood as an autonomous field beyond the human in which thought can be rooted and pushed beyond its limits. In the ruin of past discourses and practices, however, what this environment is and who lives there remains unclear, thus the growing desire for speculation and for willing the new into existence. How do we explore this environment, well aware that sending troops into uncharted territories might lead into the mouth of a yet unnamed beast, and risks turning into a Sisyphean spectacle, where the aesthetics of futility subsume under their thrill both the man and the rock struggling beneath them? According to anthropologist Tim Ingold, “environment is a relative term – relative, that is, to the being whose environment it is” (“The Perception” 20, emphasis added). Who are the beings – or persons, as I will call them - to whom our Anthropocenic environment belongs? Bound by death, those to whom our environment is common are now approaching the 6th global extinction of species. In The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History, environmental journalist Elizabeth Kolbert estimates that half of the extant species will die out by 2050 (167). The environment is no longer in opposition to culture or technology, it is better defined as a graveyard-to-come and the persons dwelling in it are all bodies threatened by death, vulnerable in their materiality to the physical conditions of extinction and harm. The persons whom the artworks discussed here care for or address are not ones who populate the stereotypical alleyways of environmentally-minded “green” art. They are pests, vermin, rodents, feral animals, violated humans, crows and corals, deteriorating cities, hormone-fed mice and melting glaciers. They are threatened. The coming death becomes definitive of the rapidly degenerating world. Philosopher Claire Colebrook writes that as the horizon of existence is (perceived as) receding, thought throws itself head first into speculation, displacing the question of
life onto the problem of approaching non-existence (186). Regrettably, she continues, philosophy treats the issue in terms of meaning, replacing the old philosophical question of theodicy and the meaning of life with, “by what right will humans continue to survive?” (188). Humanity as a discursive category comes under fire as criminal by the vice of its history and as a unified “species” to be persecuted for its failed stewardship. When a species or humanity itself is interpellated as the subject of this crisis, protecting nonhumans in this (intellectual) climate might thus take the form of creating a discursive shelter for their otherness, separating them from the figure of the human, which is perceived as corrupt (Braidotti, “The Posthuman”). Following Deleuze and Guattari, Braidotti hopes that if we discard (modern) humanism, we can ourselves enter these post-humanist shelters and call them home.

In agreement with Ingold's definition of the environment as relative to the being whose environment it is, I will argue that the current situation requires that we again examine the matter of personhood, an essentially ontological and social category. In the times when we seek (for good reasons) to move beyond the human, personhood is a category easily discarded for want of anthropomorphic associations and narcissistic inflation. And although some, like Jane Bennett, advocate a strategic anthropomorphism (18), for many scholars working in the nonhuman turn, to borrow Richard Grusin’s term, anthropomorphism misses the point. Alexander Galloway writes, “[to anthropomorphise] is to project onto the rubric of psychology, rather than to understand [a nonhuman] through its own logic” (“Language Wants” 326). Under these conditions, at least in the intellectual circle of Anglo-Saxon academia, anthropomorphism is taken to be the cornerstone of anthropocentrism and the plea to recognize nonhumans as persons seems counterproductive. More often than not, it is de-personalisation, in favour of agency, life, or intentionality that has emerged as an ethical trend. While anthropomorphism is advocated on occasion, it is never doubted that it remains a mere projection. Braidotti writes that “anthropomorphism is our specific embodied and embedded location […] the first step towards antianthropocentrism” (“Four Theses” 32) and Steven Shaviro writes that “the accusation [of anthropomorphism] rests in the prior assumption that
thought, value and experience are essentially, or exclusively, human to begin with” (“Consequences of Panpsychism” 24). For example, writing in the context of a photography project that referred to jellyfish as “suffering citizens of the sea,” Stacy Alaimo contends that “as weird and anthropocentric as it may be to imagine salps and other pelagic denizens as citizens, such figurations may, possibly, contest the sense that the sea should remain global capitalism’s treasure chest for plunder” (158). Thus, she suggests that these misrepresentations of the nonhuman’s nature are acceptable if they are to help us achieve the desired goal of de-capitalizing the oceans, yet not doubting that they are representations.

Considering the Anthropocene alongside anthropomorphism, one cannot forget the anthropomorphised figures of “the Mother Earth” that once were crucial to the environmental ethics. In the 1990s, ecofeminism proposed the political inseparability of feminist and environmental concern, arguing that no attempt to liberate any of the maltreated subjects under capitalist patriarchy can be successful without first addressing the oppression of the natural environment, the blueprint for all abuse (Gaard 1; also see Shiva & Mies). Anthropomorphism was both utilized and criticized in relation to gendered representation, for example through arguing that the domination of Man over the Earth mirrors patriarchal violence as a form of rape (Merchant) or by evoking the figure of the Mother Earth, either to ally with it or to denounce it as a sexist metaphor (Roach). Certain anthropomorphic images, such as the humanoid Goddess, entered into circulation as antidotes to modernist culture (Diamond and Orenstein). These raised questions about cultural appropriation and contextual limits of anthropomorphic politics; for example, Laura E. Donaldson critiques Clarrisa Estes’ infamous Jungian-tribal Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype for the misplacement of native traditions onto the terrain of individual growth and the neglect of the larger political and social struggles that the native people were implicated in not in the distant past but in the United States of the 1990s. Indeed, through an engagement with spiritualist trends, ecofeminist discourse seemed to have slipped into the aesthetics of pop cultural self-help books, where the essentialised Nature was to be utilized a
site of self-growth for “disconnected” women: “Extremely important is a willingness to deepen our experience of communion with nature. This can be done in the mountains, at the ocean, in a city park, or a backyard garden” (Spretnak 7). Decolonial theory points out that these problems persist today and that theory can often ignore the underlying colonial logic of environmental degradation (Mendez; Lugones; Miheesuh; Green; Suzack and Huhndorft). Zoe Todd, for example, discusses how Bruno Latour’s engagement with the figure of Gaia - certainly one of the most influential and visible commentaries on the Anthropocene today - ignores its parallel lineage in the Inuit onto-epistemologies and politics, appropriating it for the sake of neo-colonizing thought (“An Indigenous Feminist’s”). These are only several reasons why anthropomorphism has a bad reputation.

As we are collectively turning away from humanity as a discursive term for (counter-)Anthropocenic frameworks, I want to argue that hominisation or personification can be an activist, political and realist framework for the contemporary environmental arts. I will argue against the rejection of humanity as a political, ethical and ontological category not in spite of but because of the current environmental crisis and the need to think activism beyond the Homo sapiens. Writing in the context of environmental rights, in What We Bury at Night: Disposable Humanity, Micronesian activist Julian Aguon states that it is precisely the denial of humanity to some that is the most pressing question in the Anthropocene, as it has been throughout the modern history. Instead of dissolving the human into a multiple nonhumanity, Nicholas Mirzoeff argues that the “most radical possible gesture would be if all living people were considered fully human” but that “this renewed equality should be taken further to include nonhuman actors” (“Visualizing the Anthropocene” 227). Recent developments in the environmental law, many of them notably following from the efforts of decolonial and indigenous activists, brought back the category of personhood and the practice of homisization in order to protect nonhumans. Maori groups in New Zealand succeeded in convincing the government to grant legal status to the Te Urewera, a 821-square-mile national park, along with “all the rights, powers, duties, and liabilities of a legal
person” and the same is soon to happen in the case of the Whanganui river, the third largest in the country (Rousseau). In India, the Ministry of Environment and Forests declared dolphins as “nonhuman persons (…) who should have their own specific rights” and forbade their captivity (B. Hogan), while in 2011 the American Association for the Advancement of Science developed the “Declaration of Rights for Cetaceans.” The Nonhuman Rights Project in the Unites States aims to change the legal status of great apes, elephants, dolphins and whales to legal persons, who possess such fundamental rights as bodily liberty and integrity. The prospect of nonhuman rights for robots, especially of the “personal” kind, already lingers on the horizon. How can we then return to hominisation without falling back into projecting the anthropos onto the (non)human, without perpetuating this over-representation of man that subsumes under itself any possible mutation? I am interested in exploring what it would mean for environmental art activism and in a broader context for critical theory that deals with the nonhuman, to respond to these hominising developments at the time when many strands of the contemporary thought advocate the opposite move.

It seems a contradictory task: to save the human in order to produce a nonhuman activist practice, right at the time when the theory that is most aligned with my efforts seeks to fix man by prefixing him: out of Althusseran and Foucaldian anti-humanisms, which rejected the idea of a uniform human nature and focused instead of structural conditions that mould the social, grew various post-humanisms, the genealogies of which Roisi Braidotti skillfully outlines in The Posthuman. Transhumanism, for example, is seeking technological transcendence and cyborg immortality, while post-humanism rejects the humanist discourse of the Enlightenment. Prefixing is about putting man in his place, both provincialising him and setting trajectories for the future. To borrow from Dipesh Chakrabarty, various post-humanisms aim at a “programmatic provincialising” of the human, where trajectories for the future are set by a re-distribution of what was considered given or axiomatic in the past (and present). In “Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference,” Chakrabarty defines provincialising as negating the status of Europe as the
template for modernity, figuring it as only one trajectory among many. Provincialising is not forgetting or rejecting, it has to consist of the following moves: “the recognition that Europe’s acquisition of the adjective “modern” for itself is an integral part of the story of European imperialism within global history; and second, the understanding that this equating of a certain version of Europe with “modernity” is not the work of Europeans alone; third-world nationalisms, as modernizing ideologies par excellence, have been equal partners in the process” (43). We could paraphrase, arguing that the post-humanism of thinkers like Braidotti rests on the recognition of the mechanisms by which white, colonial patriarchy assigned to itself the status of the “human,” as well as the unveiling of how those who do not have the privilege of belonging to it, for example women or people of colour, uphold it despite their best intentions, or without their knowledge. Thus, it is not a chronological post, but a “qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species, our polity and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet,” as Braidotti writes in *The Posthuman* (2). Just like provincialising Europe, provincialising human “refers to a history that does not yet exist, [we can] speak of it only in a programmatic manner” (“Provincializing Europe” 42). And thus scholarship becomes the means of carrying this program out. That this task has become even more urgent in the Anthropocene, which can both promise the downfall of the human and simultaneously assert him at the centre of planetary history, seems a natural consequence of the already existing preoccupations of feminist and postcolonial critiques.

In feminist scholarship, there exists a possibly unanimous criticism of the *anthropos* as an avatar of colonial, patriarchal, white supremacy unleashed onto the planet in the name of humanism. The term “the Anthropocene” can be seen as an extension of this logic - it crowns the *anthropos* the commander of the planet’s destiny. A rascal king is still a king. Building on the legacy of ecofeminist work in revealing how apparently neutral designations are gendered, environmental geographer Jamie Lorimer writes that “scientific invocations of a planet-shaping Anthropos summon forth (…) an aggregation of its male representatives. A common ‘us’ (…)
masks differential human responsibilities’ (3), while economist Kate Raworth states that “leading scientists may have the intellect to recognize that our planetary era is dominated by human activity, but they still seem oblivious to the fact that their own intellectual deliberations [on it] are dominated by white northern male voices,” even though many of the Earth-scientists are women from the global South. The anthropomorphism of the term “Anthropocene,” then, is here perceived as a mapping of an androcentric (white, colonial) narrative onto the life of the planet under a universalising, scientific guise, a gesture that simultaneously occludes the located and specific discourses that gave rise to the problem.

In Anthropocene studies, if we can establish such a discipline, this provincialising of the *anthropos* is happening on various fronts. One of the most visible examples is the desire to re-brand the epoch. Peter Sloterdijk writes of the Eurocene and the Technocene, there is also the Capitalocene (Malm and Hornborg; Moore). “‘Man’,” observes Anna Tsing, “does not mean humans, but a particular kind of being invented by Enlightenment thought and brought into operation by modernization” (qtd. in Haraway et al. 7). Architect Paulo Tavares observes how the supposedly neutral designation of the Anthropocene brought a paradox to life: “different regimes of power will produce different natures, for nature is not natural; it is the product of cultivation, and more frequently, of conflict” (236). In other words, the more we attempt to think about “nature” as a totality out there for us to respond to, the more we discover that there is more than one nature, contingent on the geo-political currents that sustain or assault it. Thinking about un-natural environments, located conflicts and civilisational responsibility, Crutzen and Stoermer, both deeply concerned about the accelerating acidification of the oceans and the destruction of coral reefs, suggested that the Anthropocene started with the rise in carbon dioxide emissions following the invention of the steam engine in the late eighteenth century. The neighbouring year 1789 saw the publication of Immanuel Kant’s groundbreaking *What is Enlightenment?* The decisive entanglement of the “natural” and the “cultural” is thus paralleled by the most prescient academic establishment of a dualism between them. Alternative names for the “era” are not only seeking to
invalidate this dualism but also to explode the perceived neutrality of the Anthropocene as well as object to yet another mapping of man – here understood as a specific demographic – onto the history of the planet, thus subsuming under itself both human and nonhuman life.

Attuned to these very problems, in her tribute lecture to Edward Said, activist and author Naomi Klein warns against using the Anthropocene as a way of abstracting and refusing to deal with tangible problems like patriarchy, colonialism, or racism. While the Anthropocene stands in for the very knowledge that the geological *is* the political, as a scientific concept it can afford a certain universality that is far from the localized conflicts encoded in it. By its very name, the Anthropocene can make it seem as if it was the activity of the *Homo sapiens* as a biological species that is to blame, while the disastrous effects that it encompasses are in fact connected to “a particular nexus of epistemic, technological, social, and political economic coalescences” (Davies and Turpin 7). In fact, those who suffer the most under the Anthropocene – people of colour, animals, the ill and the poor – are those who are the least to blame for its emergence. And yet, this sweeping discourse threatens to subsume their oppression under a unified category of the *anthropos*. To quote from the indispensable Zoe Todd:

Rather than engage with the Anthropocene as a teleological fact implicating all humans as equally culpable for the current socio-economic, ecological, and political state of the world, I argue that we should turn to examining how other peoples are describing our ‘ecological imagination.’ To tackle the intertwined and complex environmental crises in which the world finds itself, a turn towards the reciprocity and relationships that [Cree Dwayne] Donald addresses in his writings and talks must be seriously considered, as locally informed responses to *in situ* challenges around the globe cannot be constructed using one philosophical, epistemological, or ontological lens. (“Indigenizing the Anthropocene” 252)

No wonder, then, that critical practice in the Anthropocene, especially one that localizes its
politics in the spectrum of environmentalism, seeks to erase the presence of the universalising human who “at the apex of his insanity has even proclaimed himself a ‘geological force,’ going so far as to give the name of his species to a phase of the life of the planet” (The Invisible Committee 32). Biologist Scott Gilbert notices that the Anthropocene is a masochistic, biblical narrative rather than a scientific fact. In his view, it is more reasonable to think of it as a “short geological [extinction] event,” an accelerated mass extinction of species that might wipe out life on the planet as we know it. It is not, however, an epoch - “we are elevating ourselves by thinking that humans are making a geological epoch” (qtd. in Haraway et al. 7). Human impact on the planet might be disastrous yet the extinction of species will be short-lived in the planetary narrative, which is still more decisively and tragically shaped by old but ever virulent enemies of racism, sexism and capitalism, which continues to fuel the exploitation of the workers, the precarious and the ill. Donna Haraway adds that the term only perpetuates the “old, tragic story” of Man thinking he can be God and skip punishment for his egotist actions, but this time it acquired an Lovecraftian aesthetic, spelling out the prophecy as such: “you will come down in a freaked-out ecosystem, where the jellyfish and the slime will sting you to oblivion” (ibid 11). I am not concerned here with whether the Anthropocene is truly a matter of a “geological” crisis or if such a thing can exist in the first place for a planet that survived a few mass extinctions already, but with the fact that it is possibly the first time in history when a “macro-physically determinant force” is aware of its geological role and able to act on this knowledge (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro 33). Therefore, as pleasing as these apocalyptic narratives of post-humanist transformations can be, there is a certain ambiguity to this erasure of the human, not to mention a failure to truly respond to the fact that humans, far from being ontologically peripheral, are a determinant force in the current extinction of species and degradation of biodiversity. In “Warm Pride,” Alexander Galloway writes that the Anthropocene narrative is the contemporary form of amor fati to which the supposedly rational moderns have surprisingly succumbed. The discourse of the Anthropocene as a determinant that just cannot be appealed provides a certain solace. Galloway expresses outrage and surprise at how we have moved,
very quickly, from “addressing” global warming to “living with” global warming. I would add that we have moved from the task of preventing multi-species death to learning how to mourn better and that capitalism thrives on appropriating every crisis to be the engine for its continued existence.

American presidential candidate Gary Johnson said not to worry about climate change because “in billions of years, the Sun is going to actually grow and encompass the Earth, right?” (qtd. in Bowerman). He added that the amount of money that we would need to spend on averting the disaster is simply too large and the results would be “inconsequential” because, well, the Sun is going to kill us anyway. And hence global warming provides another excuse for maintaining the status quo.

In admitting man to be a geological force of epic proportion, theory can simultaneously sketch him as ontologically peripheral and on-par with any organic and inorganic being, as object-oriented philosophers such as Timothy Morton, Graham Harman or Levi Bryant claim. Art theorist Nicolas Bourriaud (mis)labels them alternatively as representative of the speculative realism, which he (somewhat incorrectly) defines as “[a discourse] that assumes that human subjectivity is no more important than a gust of wind (…) that objects exist for themselves and only the destruction of any ideas of a self-standing subject can give voice to the truth of the world” (qtd in Charlesworth). While Bourriaud's description flattens the many strands of speculative realism, it captures well the way that non-academic public responds to these theorisations of humans as one object among many. In Reassembling the Social, one of the foundational texts of actor-network theory, which shares many characteristics with object-oriented thought, Bruno Latour describes the task of creating “an object-oriented sociology” as if it was a fairytale, with the scholar as the white knight charged with the task of saving things from the slumber that social constructivism has forced them into: “As if a damning curse had been cast unto things, they remain asleep like the servants of some enchanted castle. Yet, as soon as they are freed from the spell, they start shuddering, stretching, and muttering” (73). Latour's attentiveness to “things” indeed finds its parallel in philosophy, where this methodological preoccupation is extended into the matter of existence. In
Democracy of Objects, Levi Bryant writes about an “anthropodecentric” approach, a “flat ontology” of objects:

First, humans are not at the centre of being, but are among beings. Second, objects are not a pole opposing a subject, but exist in their own right, regardless of whether any other object or human relates to them. Humans, far from constituting a category called “subject” that is opposed to “object”, are themselves one type of object among many. (249)

Karl Marx already wrote of the strange “ghost dance” of capitalism, where material conditions are reduced to an abstraction, while the intangible is made into something concrete – subjects become objects and objects become subjects. In the context of climate change specifically, Alexander Galloway calls this deflatory inflation of the human “warm pride”: “Which is it? Are we special or aren't we? Are we special enough to go toe to toe with the planet? Or are we merely another desiring machine, no different from the lowly mouse, or the deoxyribonucleic acid?” (“Warm Pride”) He observes that the current treatment of the human splits along metaphysical lines into the ontic (actual existence in the world) and ontological (being): “We're impactful in matters of existence, but peripheral in matters of ontology (…) I may display hubris toward the natural world, provided I subscribe to annihilation at the level of being (…) a pride of place in geological history within a declension narrative that only ends one way” (ibid). It is as if certain strands of the contemporary theory were performing rituals of chastity on the ontological level in order to defer the punishment for the factual impact that humans have on the planet. This scaling down of the human to an object among many takes places against the background of an epic, unthinkable disaster that the same “ontologically peripheral” human apparently has caused. This thought spells out a paradox, an asymmetry. A possible end to our global hegemony because of our global hegemony – quite a different narrative of “progress” that the one we might be accustomed to when looking at the canon of Anglo-Saxon thought over the last few centuries.
Within these attempts, the terms human, man, *anthropos* operate ambiguously, taking on a different significance in each incarnation. The dismantling of the human happens on two axes. First is that of provincionalising him on the ontic level through *locating* him in specific histories that not only deny his universality but also place the blame for the current Anthropocenic condition on the capitalist, colonial, and patriarchal powers that uphold his status as universal. Second, however, is the ontological critique of the human as an all-encompassing being that forbids us to see not only the particularities of other humans, but also the specificity of nonhuman lives. The second critique is often presented as following and necessitated by the first and discards humanity as an organizing ontological principle. It posits that the only way to repay the sins of humanity on the ontic level is a stripping down the human to an agency, an assemblage, a life on the ontological level. What we can detect in the contemporary theory is then that critical ontological and political questions overlap, specifically the relation between the generic and the specific, the located and the universal. This dynamic is encapsulated most visibly in the dynamic between the *non* and the human itself. The *non* often sketches an eternal and atemporal pool of destinies that underpin our individual lives, and the human is figured as an irreducible particularity that fervently demands an understanding of local politics. The *non* is what is beyond imagination. The human is an individuality. The *non* is the beyond reach. The human is over-represented and torn apart in theory.

I argue that the wrongs that have been ontically committed cannot be re-payed on the level of ontological speculation, and certainly not by sacrificing “the human,” which can too easily slip into sacrificing singular persons. If I look at hominisation as a practice through this dissertation, it is to test whether we could halt in its inception the key question that Colebrook identifies in contemporary extinction philosophy - *by what right* will humans continue to survive? In the face of this discursive assault, how do we retract from the presumed sufficiency of speculation, how do we undermine its auto-positioning as the judge that decides *who* is human and whose very “right” it is to live? As philosopher of science Isabelle Stengers notes, “the Anthropocene thesis proposes a “future perfect continuous” tense, which puts theorists in a very agreeable position” (“Matters of
Cosmopolitics” 178) - that of hunting down the remnants of “anthropocentrism” in the current thought and practice. Theory and the arts thus become a race: who is less anthropocentric, who provides a better inhuman, who can hunt down the last shadows of the passé humanism in the writings of others? Within our planetary predicament, thinking the nonhuman might be equal to drawing blood and releasing the poison of anthropocentrism, or to an opening of the veins that should lead us to a transformative death. Is this dismissal of the human a pharmakon or simply an anaesthetic, a way to sleep through the apocalypse that is unraveling around us by a priori proclaiming transformation or futility? Colebrook again:

I would suggest that we ought to think, today in an era of climate change, about moralizing laments regarding human reason’s self-loss alongside various posthuman theorizations that human reason is constituted by a certain self-forgetting. The human animal or human eye is torn between spectacle (or captivation by the mere present) and speculation (ranging beyond the present at the cost of its own life). (14)

The double-sided desire to capture (non)human persons in a web of spectacle and speculation revels in a certain “speculative sufficiency,” an occlusion of the fact that they possess the capacities to represent themselves, create spectacle, or withdraw from it. They do not need to be represented as much as provided with an opportunity to speak. It is recognising this fact that constitutes a personalisation – the (non)human does not negate the human but rather expands the term. Today, the definition of the human is unsatisfying, unstable and open to inquiry. Donna Haraway tells us that when historical narratives are in crisis, dangerous and powerful re-settings of figuration can happen - “figuration is about resetting the stage for possible pasts and futures. Figuration is the mode of theory when the more ‘normal’ rhetoric of systemic critical analysis seem only to repeat and sustain our entrapment in the stories of the established disorders” (“Ecce Homo” 47).

Nowadays, this is no bloodless chore. Anthropocenic theory skins the human, hunts him down, puts
him under the microscope to conclude that he is bacterial; buries him in the wet ground to state that he is compost, stretches his muscles from the garbage can to the cosmos to entertain the idea that he is “vibrant matter,” or part of the ontologically flat “meshwork,” lets the whites of his eyes melt over his chin so that he can see that he is not a stable individual. There must be another way – a theory and practice that protects humans and nonhumans from this appetite for theoretical dissection. Haraway suggests that in order to counter the *anthropos*, when understood as androcentric and colonial capitalism, we need a feminist *humanity*:

We must have feminist figures of humanity. They cannot be man or woman; they cannot be the human as historical narrative has staged the generic universal. Feminist figures cannot, finally, have a name; they cannot be native. Feminist humanity must, somehow, both resists epresentation, resist literal figuration, and still erupt in powerful new tropes, new figures of speech, new turns of historical possibility. (ibid)

I refer to this passage from Haraway as I am motivated by the same goal – a discovery of humanity that resists representation yet does not fall into what she calls the “generic universal,” which ends up being synonymous with the figuring of the human as white European male and his corresponding categories (able, heterosexual, middle class, healthy). How do we resists literal figurations and yet still speak truth to power, still remain attuned to the specificity of those, who struggle under the apocalyptic conditions of the world? I consult this specific passage also because, although similar in orientation, Haraway's understanding of “the generic” (as the *anthropos*) will prove, as will become clear later, divergent from mine, for I argue precisely that a *generic humanity*, an animist generic *person or a soul* is the ethical figure that the Anthropocene demands. At this point, my attention to the figure of man might seem paradoxical – this dissertation in its title proclaims that it concerns *non*human personhood. That this seems paradoxical is the fallacy of the Anthropocene – an *a priori* assumption that we know who we mean when we talk about a person,
or a human, or a man. It is in this that animism proves us wrong. If we can agree that the *anthropos* is the avatar of white colonial capitalism and the material historical conditions related to the Anthropocene, my purpose here it to present a different understanding of the human, man, or a person, and therefore of the anthropomorphism that underpins the nonhuman, and that emerges in contemporary art-activist practices. Figuring the nonhuman does something to humans, too, and we too often leave humans behind in our liberating post-humanist thought. Without knowing who is it whom we are “negating,” the *non* becomes an empty gesture. A new figuration of humanity, to respond to Haraway, must be nonhuman in a non-standard manner, just like non-Euclidean geometry is a different idea of space, rather than the negation of Euclidean geometry itself. What would it mean to instead take the *non* as an act of proclaiming indivisibility between various persons dwelling in specific communities, a unity of humans and nonhumans? If this seems an occult proposition now, I hope to dispel it in the following chapters. The question at stake is that of a local politics that would be inclusive of the nonhuman, without fetishising it as transcendental otherness or colonizing it for our own human “becomings,” without reducing it to cultural constructivism and without discarding the concern for those struggling with the cosmic precarity of environmental collapse. For activists, the axis that we have found ourselves on in the Anthropocene is one that is both planetary and situated, *hereish* – as anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli says, “as we stretch the local across the seeping transits [of climate change, capital, toxicity, and discursivity], we need not scale up to (…) the global, but we cannot remain in the local. We can only remain *hereish*” (“Geoontologies” 29). The *ish* does not, however, invalidate the fact that as singular persons we are located *here*(*ish*) rather than somewhere else. Our bodies are subject to specific disasters carved out of the grand prophecy of the extinction of species. In this collapsing environment, the humanity that animism recognizes everywhere is different from the one that we know. If, as Viveiros de Castro explicates the assertion of Ameridian perspectivism, the human soul is the most common thing in the world, personhood is something else that we might have previously thought (“Cannibal Metaphysics”).
Chapter 2: What Does it Mean to be a Person?

Animism is dependent on three things: relationships, performances and the moment. It is a practice, a co-inspired form of active, mutual relating that emerges from the unique, personal, even intimate relationships that take place between persons (human and other-than-human) rather than a religious label, an ethic, or a worldview.

(Whitehead 260)

May 5th, 2017. Hampshire College welcomes its first nonhuman scholar in residence. *Physarum Polycephalum*, a species of plasmoidal slime molds moves into a dedicated office at the Center for Plasmoidal Research. “As they help solve important problems from a nonhuman perspective,” says Eva Rueschmann, Dean of Faculty, “these super-organisms promise to greatly enhance intellectual life on campus” (“Hampshire College”). In *The Creeping Garden*, a documentary about the gelatinous organisms that exist somewhere between fish, flower and fungus, directors Tim Graham and Jasper Sharper interviewed artists, scientists and amateurs who have found unlikely collaborators in slime molds. These mystifying organisms can navigate their way out of complex labyrinths, finding the most efficient escape route on their first try. Their results replicate the way road networks develop and there are already plans to use the insight of slime molds in fire escape design. Artist Eduardo Reck Miranda makes slime molds play the piano with him. Researchers at various universities have them take control of prototype robots. There is talk of implementing slime mold expertise in organic circuit design. Asked to comment on the university appointment of the species, artist and philosopher Jonathon Keats went as far as to suggest that “we will be communicating their findings to the UN and the World Bank [because they] are super-organisms, meaning that their self interest is inseparable from their collective interest” (ibid). He adds that this collaborative nature is what separates slime molds from humans.

Backtrack to the late 1880s in London. James Frazer, whose name will become synonymous
with some of the most influential works in anthropology, does not mince his words, describing the idea of plant souls as “preposterous and absurd (…) savage dogma” (qtd. in M. Hall 387). Somewhere at the beginning of the decade in London, another father of European anthropology, Edward Tylor attends a spiritualist séance, one that sparks his interests in those who communicate with spirits (Segal 61). In 1884, when he was appointed as a Reader in Anthropology in Oxford University, the first such position in the world that recognized the authority of the new discipline, he carried these ghosts along with him. With his *Primitive Culture*, he gave anthropology its first concept – animism. The nonhumans that the term first hosted were immaterial, bound up into the idea of the soul, one that the European reader cannot help but to understand through the Christian separation of the spiritual and the bodily. “Animism is a belief,” states a popular anthropology textbook, “that inside ordinary visible, tangible bodies there is a normally invisible being: the soul” (Harris 186). Tylor's ghost lingers on - in the early days of anthropology, which was at the time seeking the status of a legitimate discipline, the framing of new research within the studies of religion on the one hand and Charles Darwin's theory of evolution on the other was the zeitgeist or maybe a calculated attempt at securing legitimacy. All cultures, Tylor claimed, pass through an animistic stage before progressing to monotheistic religions, and finally to the age of reason, and to the scientific pride of the Enlightenment. “Savage philosophers,” as Tylor called them, simply miscalculated their efforts, attributing the cause of natural phenomena to imaginary nonhuman agencies (1028). By this definition, animism was an epistemological fallacy commonly found in children and “savage men,” a transitory phase in the development of the rational self. The nonhuman was nothing but an excuse, a projection, and the problem of animism was certainly not approached in a political or ethical manner. It is animism itself that was considered a problem and an excuse for the civilisational mission.

Back in our times, Latour writes: “One of the main puzzles of Western history is not that ‘there are people who still believe in animism,’ but the rather naïve belief that many still have in a de-animated world of mere stuff; just at the moment when they themselves multiply the agencies
with which they are more deeply entangled every day” (“Agency at the Time” 8). As an anthropologist of science, what he specifically means are ambiguous, technological agencies that criss-cross between nature and culture and disrupt our belief in their separation. In 2016, anthropologist Kathleen Richardson discussed the research she has undertaken in various international robotics labs, claiming that the most appropriate way to describe the relations that her subjects developed with robots is 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” (111). She writes:

Although it may be the size of an eight-year-old boy, a robot may still be used as a research platform to explore baby crawling; thus, age, size, skill, and functions are jumbled up. Interestingly, presenting the robots as children invites their inscription into honorary kinship categories. I know robotic scientists who openly welcome being labeled the ‘mother’ or ‘father’ of their robot platform (Breazeal 2002; Robertson 2007, 2010). The exchanges described above foster technological animism. The human participants in these interactions are aware that the other party is not human, much less a child. Yet they perceive, and respond to, the ‘animation’ of the robot as if it were a (partially human) person. This technological animism is not premised on the putative existence of a soul or on other intangible soul-like qualities. On the contrary, it produces an intangible sense of human-like qualities through purely mechanistic (technological) means. (116)

Clearly, animism has come a long way from being dismissed as a “savage dogma” to a term that denotes a variety of practices of recognizing nonhumans as persons. Curator Anselm Franke put on a successful and much revered exhibition on animism in 2010, calling it “an optical device, a mirror in which the particular way that modernity conceptualizes, implements, and transgresses boundaries can come into view" (“Much Trouble” 11), writing later that "animism is no longer
historical but it is rather the ground upon which history is placed" ("Animism: Notes"). Animism is now defined not as an epistemic fallacy but as a general, ontological structure, perhaps a more accurate one to describe the inter-relation of human and nonhuman persons throughout history, an interactivity that brought us to the Anthropocene. Thus, animism is becoming increasingly visible as a diverse and relevant body of work to engage with in order to address the nonhuman within social structures (Harvey “A Handbook”). In anthropology, the longstanding focus on cultural representations and epistemological questions of knowledge shifted to the matter of the very worlds themselves and the practical mechanisms by which forms of nonhuman life, subjectivity, personhood and agency within these worlds are actualised. Unlike within the dominant “writing culture” (Clifford and Marcus) in anthropology in the 1980s, where cultures used to be positioned as divergent ways of representing the same objective reality, the recent “ontological turn” swaps “one world, many worldviews,” for an approach that recognizes multiple worlds (Venkatesan et al.), thus infusing contemporary anthropology with the post-structuralist focus on radical difference. What does that mean for animism? This largely depends on how we define animism, personhood and ontology itself. To clarify these definitions, however, we must briefly plunge into the history of the term.

2.1 Exhausting Life: What Persons are not

Animism can mean many things and so I must distinguish the kinds that I engage here from the ones that I do not. There are multiple histories pulsating beneath Tylor's crude evolutionary classification of animism as an epistemic fallacy. He encountered the so-called “savage thought” only in text and relied on a parallel with the spiritualist practices in Europe, to the extent that he first desired to use the term “spiritualism” instead of “animism” (Stocking 90). Perhaps by chance, by a whim of history, he positions his animism alongside another body of thought, one that was also borne in his own cultural milieu – vitalism. It is much more probable, however, that the lively
intellectual climate of his milieu influenced his own conceptualisation of animism in lieu of ethnographic research and participant observation. It is important to briefly encounter this history, for the animisms I draw on are distinct from the joyful vitalism of ecological politics that extends liveliness to all matter. Vitalism's roots reach back to at least ancient Greek philosophy, when Empedocles argued that “a subtle fire exists from all eternity, [animating] the air and all matter” (Haller 81-88). Although evolutionism managed to wipe out vitalism almost completely from the realm of the natural sciences, at the turn of the nineteenth century it used the idea on everyone’s lips – from one of the fathers of modern chemistry Jöns Jacob Berzelius, who argued for an existence of a regulating force within all living matter, to the philosopher Henri Bergson, who enriched it with a philosophical allure of the élan vital, to Louis Pasteur, who by the end of his life argued that fermentation of living organisms cannot be reduced to their chemical functions.

Tylor himself knew that “life” and “soul” were not exactly the same, yet he was aware of their convergence through history. To prove it, he first cites a passage written by one of his contemporaries Laura Bridgman, a devout poet and the first deaf and blind person to receive education in English, who temporarily gained celebrity status when Charles Dickens featured her in one of his books. “I dreamed that God took away my breath to heaven,” she wrote, describing the vision of her own death (qtd. in Taylor1036). He then follows with several examples of the conflation of “life” and “soul”:

It is thus that West Australians used one word waug for “breath, spirit, soul;” that in the Netela language of California, pints means “life, breath, soul;” that certain Greenlanders reckoned two souls to man, namely his shadow and his breath; that the Malays say the soul of the dying man escapes through his nostrils, and in Java use the same word ťawa for “breath, life, soul.” (...) Hebrew shows nephesh, “breath,” passing into all the meanings of “life, soul, mind, animal,” while ruach and neshamah make the like transition from “breath” to “spirit;” and to these the Arabic nefs and ruh correspond. The
same is the history of Sanskrit ātman and prāna, of Greek psychē and pneuma, of Latin animus, anima, spiritus. So Slavonic duch has developed the meaning of “breath” into that of soul or spirit; and the dialects of the Gypsies have this word dūk with the meanings of “breath, spirit, ghost,” whether these pariahs brought the word from India as part of their inheritance of Aryan speech, or whether they adopted it in their migration across Slavonic lands. German geist and English ghost, too, may possibly have the same original sense of breath. (433)

This proximity of animism and vitalism, to the point that one cannot be distinguished from another, persists ambiguously in the contemporary theory. In Jane Bennett's Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things, we encounter vitalism in its contemporary incarnation. “How would political responses to public problems change were we to take seriously the vitality of (nonhuman) bodies? By vitality I mean the capacity of things – edible, commodities, storms, metals (…) to act as quasi agents of forces with trajectories (…) of their own” (viii). Her language is important – nonhumans are “things” or “actants” with “agencies.” Bennett's use of language by no accident cuts itself off from the vocabulary of animism: persons, souls, spirits. In the last chapter of her book, titled “The Naive Ambitions of Vital Materialism,” she writes explicitly that we must not become animists. She cites W.J.T Mitchell, warning against “the taint of superstition, animism, anthropomorphism, and other pre-modern attitudes” (18) and advocates working from a rich archive in Euro-American theory instead. The message could not be clearer – although the orientation of thought and practice might be similar, Euro-American archives are not “tainted” by the superstition of animism. Bennett wants to write about the agency of nonhumans but does not want to be perceived as “pre-modern,” a word that is like a stain, a stigma. She believes that we must stay away from this naïveté if we are to explicate a “reasonable” nonhuman politics for the contemporary times. Her affective vocabulary of “enchantment,” (xi) “thing power,” (20) “the scent of the nonhuman,” (xiii) “material agency” (38) and the titular “vibrant matter” has to protect us
from regressing, while at the same time acknowledging the evident participation of nonhumans in the fabric of life. And yet, this approach is not without its own traps. While Bennett's vitalism wants to include the nonhuman into politics, it slips too easily into the colonial logic of regress as well as the neoliberal logic of diffused responsibility. If Bennet subscribes to the vitalistic idea that what matters is only the vibrant flow of matter, if she champions events and affects rather than objects and subjects, politics becomes a vague matter. For example, describing a power blackout that affected 50 million people in North America in 2003, she writes that “[a] federation of actants is a creature that the concept of moral responsibility fits only loosely and to which blame does not stick,” therefore in this case a corporation running the plant is as to blame for the outage as electricity itself (28). (Bennett's approach, of course, does not map onto the totality of theory that configures nonhumans as agentiality or matter. Nancy Tuana wrote about the human/nonhuman “matterings” and the hurricane Katrina, stating that “epistemic responsibility requires that we attempt to understand the [human and nonhuman] interactions that result in the poverty that is woven into the lives of so many in New Orleans, or any major U.S. city, being well-known, but ignored or rationalized” (203) and focused rather on creating an intersection of the social and natural sciences.)

It is important that Bennett's vitalism seeks to cut itself off from animism in order to secure legitimacy. The erasure of the nonhuman person and the undermining of animism in favour of “neutral” terms like vitality refers back to Tylor's own strategy. Seeking validity by relating his own theories to those he perceived as scientific or otherwise respectable, Tylor borrowed the term “animism” from the German physicist and chemist Georg Stahl, for whom the principle function of anima was distinguishing living matter from inert. This is better described as a vitalist approach and indeed became the hallmark of vitalism when engaged in the natural sciences, before it was disproved as a theory of life. Could we then believe Tylor in his description of animism? It rather seems that the cultural entanglement between vitalism and spiritualism was transposed onto the first anthropological definition of animism. If Taylor remarks that “[the primitive] can give consistent
individual life to phenomena that our utmost stretch of fancy only avails to personify in conscious metaphor” (260), it reads like self-defence through comparison at the time when vitalism and spiritualism would be found at every salon in Paris or London. Nevertheless, in the European intellectual discourse, the specificity of animism melted into a general idea of a liveliness - biologist Thomas Huxley, for example, argued that modern science developed in opposition to “animistic” ideas of a life force.

We would not be entirely mistaken to read animism within this lineage – in fact, animism-vitalism is everywhere in the contemporary ecological ethics. Laying out the rules for post-humanist feminist thought, Braidotti writes: “in my view, the common denominator for the post-human condition is an assumption about the vital, self-organizing and yet non-naturalistic structure of living matter itself” (“The Posthuman” 2, emphasis added). Elizabeth Povinelli defines “the Animist,” as a figure of governance and resistance, which has it that “the difference between Life and Non-Life is not a problem because all forms of existence have within them a vital animating, affecting force” (“Geoontologies” 34). The lively nonhuman also animates ecofeminist efforts, rooted in such fields of inquiry and activism as “peace movements, labour movements, women’s health care, and the anti-nuclear, environmental, and animal liberation movement, [as well as] ecology and socialism” (Gaard 1). The first published collection of essays in 1983 was aptly titled, Reclaim the Earth: Women Speak Out for Life on Earth (Caldecott and Leland) following a conference held in Amherst in 1980, “Women and Life on Earth: Ecofeminism in the Eighties.” The figure of “Gaia” plays a prominent role in this discourse, whether engaged via pre-monotheistic, pagan religions or the hypothesis of chemist James Lovelock and microbiologist Lynn Margulis, who claimed that life forms co-evolved alongside their environment and that the Earth was a self-regulating, complex living organism. Alan S. Miller’s introduction to Gaia Connections: An Introduction to Ecology, Ecoethics, and Economics translates this into a quasi-spiritual proposition: “Many of us (…) have sensed that Earth is indeed like a vast, living organism. The worship of the Earth – its creatures and its creative force – is a theme common to us all” (1). This graceful image
of the living Earth is often romantically associated with the way indigenous peoples relate to the
natural environment, thus streamlining the conceptual potential of vitalism into the image of the
“noble savage” or – in the West – “the hippie.”

Although the road is tempting and vibrant, this is not the type of animism I want to draw on. I
want to say early on: animorphism embraces death and decay, for we are all slowly perishing in a
prophecy of entropy, not of eternal life. I sever my reading of animism from its connection to “a
belief in spirits,” new age, vitalism and eco-ethics, where it is relegated to an empathetic practice
with the “natural environment,” because it risks the inscription of nonhuman personhood as
“natural,” only enforcing the division between nature and culture. Furthermore, I do not want to
pose that animism or animorphism are ethics in themselves, as eco-ethical frameworks would have
animism to be. As I will discuss later, there is nothing inherently ethical or moral in relationality or
in personalising the nonhuman – it simply depends on context, and can be used equally by the
dominant powers and by the resistance. Yet, knowing the history of vitalism is informative. I
believe that it could discredit Tylor’s interpretation, showing that his classification of animism as a
belief in an animating spirit testifies rather to his own cultural standing. Second, discarding this
lineage aids me in making out all the more distinct aspects of the animist practices of nonhuman
personhood, which inspire and inform animorphism.

2.2. Anthropomorphism: Representational or not?

Bennett warns against what she sees as superstitious, naïve animism, a stigma to be avoided
by a recourse to European vitalistic theory. What seems to be a point of discomfort is
anthropomorphism – the unsubstantiated belief that there is a human “spirit” dwelling within the
nonhumans of the world. Mohawk / Anishnaabe Vanessa Watts writes that in Anglo-Saxon theories
that focus on nonhuman “agency” or “interconnectivity,” nonhumans might be permitted to act, yet
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 (23, emphasis added). What was at stake for me when I was working my way through various animisms was to find theories and practices that understand nonhumans as social, creative and political persons rather than as vibrant materialities and agencies. We can find these ambiguous anthropomorphic tropes within the European lineage, too. While hermeticists such as Pico della Mirandola or Marsilio Ficino wrote about the neo-Platonic *anima mundi* (soul of the world), the best known of the magi, Giordano Bruno described planets as *persons* with *animal* souls – an exhilarating thought but also a heresy for which he was burnt at the stake (Harding 374). (It took force to uproot these concepts and the 16th century Catholic Church did not spare it, perhaps drawing a template for the coming colonial oppression of those perceived as “godless.”) Now that we re-pose these questions in the contemporary moment, I want to think alongside Zoe Todd: what would it mean to consider that “[nonhumans] are political citizens” and that “to speak of politics is to speak of not only our relationships to institutions like the state [but] of the responsibilities we hold to the plethora of [nonhuman] citizens” (“From a Fishy Place” 44).

We come back to the problem already sketched in the introduction – how can Anthropocene theory understand nonhumans as persons, when anthropomorphism is perceived as the cornerstone of anthropocentrism, and the two are to be hunted down as the last remnants of the old system that needs to collapse? Can we begin to parallel the proposition of animist personhood and intersect with the contemporary post-humanist thought? On the surface, it would not seem so. Looking for frameworks that could capture the agentiality of nature, its active character against the modernist projection of a passive material to be sculpted, captured and represented, Donna Haraway writes:

> We are in troubled waters, but not ones utterly unnavigated by European craft, not to mention other traditions. But animism has a bad name in the language games I need to enter as a critical intellectual in techno-science worlds, and besides, animism is patently a kind of human representational practice. Still, efforts to figure the world in lively terms pervade
hermeticism in early modern Europe, and some important radical and feminist work has tried to reclaim that tradition. There is not really much help for us in that history, I fear. (“Otherworldly Conversations” 174)

This is a similar criticism to that of Bennett's, yet this time focusing explicitly on the problem of projections and representations – the problem with anthropomorphism in a nutshell. The argument is that if we want to do justice to nonhumans we need to grasp them in their real presence rather than projecting ourselves onto them. This is a valid criticism – one that I share and call a criticism against anthropomorphic representationalism - that has been expressed most clearly in feminist new materialism, which seeks to make space for nonhumans by interrogating, on the one hand, the “human” as a category, and on the other turning away from the foundation of discursive constructions per se – language and representation. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman state that defining the nonhuman as predominately discursive has reduced it to representations and confined scholars to engaging with the discourse about the environment, rather than presenting us with “innovative, productive, or affirmative’ ways of engaging the world’s materiality” (4). This materiality and its agentiality are often approached as distinctly other, with its own temporality and texture (Coole and Frost). Against representations, there is agential matter. Additionally, it can also be an affirmative space where thought can rejuvenate itself by turning away from humanism and its perceived limitations.

Quantum physicist and philosopher Karen Barad writes that representations have been given too much power: “social constructivist approaches get caught up in the geometrical optics of reflection where, much like the infinite play of images between two facing mirrors, the epistemological gets bounced back and forth, but nothing more is seen” (“Posthumanist Performativity” 122). She quotes philosopher of science Joseph Rouse, to say that representations can be manifestations of dominance and mastery, where nonhumans are rendered into a mute material, ready-made for human investigation and interpretation. She seeks to remedy this problem
by showing that nonhumans are not “awaiting representation by culture/humans, [instead] both are entangled in the coming-to-matter of the world” (Neimanis 14). This blurring does not happen on the level of symbol, metaphor and figuration, but by looking to the real, material, and bodily condition of the world. Thus, “where the notion of a pre-representational reality as ontologically distinct from and hierarchically ordered in relation to its representation is rejected,” the problems of misrepresenting nonhumans no longer exist, because they can represent themselves (Neimanis 3).

Vicky Kirby presents a similar argument - citing examples such as neural plasticity in the brain, natural selection in biology, or “code-cracking encryption capacities of bacteria” she states that “[these] make us wonder [what do we mean by] agency, intentionality, or literacy” (234).

Confronted with the fact that not only humans make choices or meanings, representation cannot be thought of as a uniquely human property. I would call these solutions to representationalism *relational* – by showing the fluidity and exchange at the foundation of being, they prevent the establishment of representations that then can be “projected” onto nonhumans; or they assign these capacities to nonhumans themselves, making representationalism omnidirectional and thus not fixed.

My reading of animism will share much with these preoccupation with non-representationalism, something that will be especially visible in my discussion of art. Yet, as Sara Ahmed writes in her critique of the new materialism, what is at stake in the movement might be the establishment of matter as “a pure theoretical object,” rather than an engagement with the limitations of “discourse;” as a result, one representationalism (language) is replaced with another (matter) (“Imaginary Prohibitions” 35). More importantly, however, such a preoccupation with matter as an organizing principle can become an aesthetic and affective preference rather than an ethical or political praxis, as we have already seen in Bennett.

Can animism itself escape this problem of representational anthropomorphism? Surely, not when it is defined as a projection of the human self onto nonhumans. Haraway's definition of animism fits with the way it has been presented in the canon of Anglo-Saxon thought. In *A Natural
History of Religion, David Hume defines animism as a practice that makes a canvas out of nonhumans, one onto which humanity can be projected: “[whenever] trees, mountains, and streams are personified, and the inanimate parts of nature acquire sentiment and passion” humans are simply projecting their own ideas of personhood onto “inanimate matter.” Sigmud Freud repeats this logic, posing that although “[coming] to man naturally and as a matter of course” (149), animism is only a projection of inner impulses and emotions, one that has to be outgrown into rationality. Jean Piaget, one of the key thinkers in the area of childhood development, follows suit in claiming that all children are naturally animistic in ascribing personality and agency to objects but grow out of it later in life. Stuart Guthrie’s animistic game theory states that, in evolutionary terms, humans profit from anthropomorphising nonhumans, because it heightens the chances of survival to assume that everything is a potential predator. All of these influential scholars solidified the idea of animism as a representational practice, where humans project themselves onto nonhumans, thus forbidding the specificity of the nonhuman world.

Yet, Graham Harvey explains that it is not only that “old animism,” which understands it as a representational practice, “carries assumptions that preserve colonialist and dualist worldview and rhetoric that deserve to be contested,” but also because it simply “gets the facts wrong” (“Animism” xii). Intersecting with the relational feminist approach, anthropologist Nurit Bird-David, whose work initiated a reconsideration of animism as a “relational epistemology” rather than an epistemic fallacy, argues that social practices of personhood that shape the environment have been overlooked because from a modernist perspective personhood appears as an exclusively human property:

It is argued that positivistic ideas about the meaning of “nature,” “life,” and “personhood” misdirected previous attempts to understand the local concepts. Classical theoreticians (it is argued) attributed their own modernist ideas of self to “primitive peoples” while asserting that the “primitive peoples” read their idea of self into others! (68)
Instead, she writes, animism presents a different idea of personhood altogether. As numerous anthropologists commenced long-term ethnographic work, Tylor’s assertion that animists are somehow cognitively impaired or childish lost all credibility and was promptly exposed for its imperialist racism, to the extent that the concept of animism itself was discredited and soon fell out of circulation (Howell 104). A few decades after Tylor, Émile Durkheim’s influential work on religion, “The Dualism of Human Nature and Its Social Conditions” solidified the idea of animism as a projection, but an unconscious projection of social and cultural structures. It was Claude Lévi-Strauss’ pen, however, that signed off the destiny of animism for the decades to come, enclosing it within the structures of symbolic societal life: the totem as a symbolic representation of social relations, the spirit as an expression of cultural structures. Bird-David writes, “He did not explain animism but explained it away. Animists by his theory did not perceive the natural world differently from others” (70). She seeks to invalidate Tylor’s original assumption that animists first project personhood onto nonhumans and then socialize with them – instead, “animists personify as, when and because they socialize” (73) – an observation that makes animism well-suited to describing processes rather than outcomes. Borrowing from Marylin Strathern, she uses the term “dividual” to describe how a person, whether human or nonhuman, is the social microcosm made tangible, material and manifest. It is not only that persons are made through relationships but that they make relationships objectifiable and known. To “dividuate” someone is to be aware of how we relate to them. Thus, Bird-David describes how for the Nayaka, engaging a hill person is not about defining the essence of personhood, but rather recognizing that it makes known the personal human-hill relationship. She explains the difference between individual and dividual personhood:

When I individuate a human being I am conscious of her “in herself” (as a single separate entity); when I dividuate her I am conscious of how she relates to me (…) I am conscious of the relatedness with my interlocutor as I engage with her, attentive to what she does in relation to what I do, to how she talks and listens to me as I talk and listen to her, to what happens
simultaneously and mutually, to her, to us. (72)

Early on, Irving Hallowell, whom Graham Harvey labels “the father of new animism” (“Amimism” xxii) attempted to approach it as a system of thought that was no less valid than his own. During fieldwork with his Ojibwa hosts in the 1930s, Hallowell coined the term “other-than-human persons” in order to communicate the intrinsic relationality of animism, where the category of a person is the basic unit of being, with human-persons or wind-persons being the subtypes. In the Ojibwa language, rocks lying around the river might be spoken of as inanimate in a sentence, however, rocks that we carry to build our houses with would be spoken of as animate. In a famous passage, when Hallowell asked an Ojibwa elder whether “all the stones we see about us here [are] alive,” he received a response: “No! But some are” (24). By Hallowell's account, animism does not require an outside framework in order to be explained because it is itself already a framework. In animism, there is an underlying logic of sociability to the behaviour of both human and nonhuman persons.

2.3. For Whom the Ontology Turns?

Following her claim that the times of crisis are also the times the demand new figurations, Haraway has recently proposed three different frameworks for our planetary future: the Anthropocene identifies the human as a species among many and as an organism that is itself a multispecies assemblage; the Capitalocene describes the political, colonial and economic timespace of the era; and, finally, the Chthulucene refers to the necessity of thinking with the otherworldly and the chthonic because “it matters to destabilize worlds of thinking with other worlds of thinking, it matters to be less parochial. If ever there was a time to need to be worldly, it is surely now. And I think all of us lack many of the skills” (qtd. in Deloughrey 254). The matter of worldling and of worlds, of existences and of ontology came back with a vengeance in the contemporary theory, as
was already evident in the opening chapter. When catastrophe looms large on the horizon of thought, thinking likewise zooms out, reclaiming the terrains that we thought were philosophically forbidden for cultural criticism, such as the real, reality, ontology, being and existence. They carry with them a certain universalising stupor, one that has rightfully earned a bad reputation of subsuming particularity under an abstraction. Do these shifts of thinking, however, alter the way in which animism can be understood? In the beginning of this chapter, I referred to animism as “a general, ontological structure.” In philosophy, ontology is the branch that deals with being, existence, or reality, while epistemology covers knowledge as well as ways to understand reality. The way anthropology uses the term “ontology” is ambiguous yet it is clear that its function is to direct away from the study of other people's representations of what we take as a given world “out there,” acknowledging rather that different practices assemble different worlds altogether, ones that trouble our basic existential categories. The question is no longer, how do people manifest their relations to the world, but what is “a relation” and what is “the world.” These inquiries dig deeper into the fabric of reality, untangling the knots of what was presumed to be a certain “world” - or in the case of my own inquiry, of who is a “person.” The ontological turn in anthropology is intimately entangled with both ethnographic and philosophical work, intersecting largely with the insights of continental and post-structuralist philosophy. In fact, arguing for the necessity of the turn, Henare et al. suggest that the purpose of anthropology is first and foremost the creation of concepts, the exact same purpose that Deleuze and Guattari ascribed to philosophy in *What is Philosophy?* and secondly, that the turn must “take seriously” the material with which anthropologists are presented. What does it mean, to take the material of study “seriously”? Matei Candea writes that essentially what is at stake is reclaiming respect for radical difference within anthropology, which, as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro notices, was annihilated through the focus on “epistemological democracy,” where representations of the world are endless but held together by an unquestioned assumption of “an ontological monarchy,” where the unity of the world itself is never questioned. He continues: “Ontologies usually come in when anthropologists feel that culture has ceased to perform [its]
function, that culture does not take difference seriously enough” (qtd. in Venkatesan et al. 175). While this is just one scholar’s take on the essential traits of the movement, the growing interest in it outside of anthropology proves that concepts have a lifespan. It seems that “culture,” once useful, is falling out of circulation because it was rendered into “a mere representational game,” subservient to the need of established modes of thought and critique, to the point that this neutralised discursive machine became more authoritative than the world it was trying to describe (ibid). The same complaint against representation, discourse, and “culture” is then levelled by anthropology, feminist new materialism, and multiple strands of contemporary philosophy that seek a more realist, rather than constructivist stance. In The Social Construction of What? Ian Hacking observes that is everything is constructed, the term is both useless and overused: “The metaphor of social construction once had excellent shock value, but now it has become tired” (35). For Martin Holbraad, saying that there are different “cultural interpretations” already presupposes a split between reality and representation, which is an idea with a specific lineage (of ancient Greek thought, for example) (qtd. in Venkatesan et al. 181).

Those in the ontological turn feel that the term “culture” does not take the world seriously enough and remains locked within its own academic circularity, they therefore propose that it is time for a “turn.” The cultural approach in anthropology, Holbraad says, is confined to starting from the assumption that others “get stuff wrong” - we can recall here Frazen's dismissal of the “absurd” proposal that “plants have souls” - and therefore their ideas about the world have to be “explained” within the socio-cultural apparatus. From this follow the most insightful proposition of the ontological turn: the ontological approach would rather be to acknowledge that the statement “plants have souls” troubles the definition of both “plants,” “having” and “souls,” so that we need a different conceptual apparatus to understand it (ibid 183). It thus reverses the dynamic. It is not the theories that we have that explain the world, it is the world-making practices that transform and destabilise the theories, forcing us to think differently. (This alone could explain why this framework is so attractive to someone who is looking to activism and artistic practices in order to
construct one such apparatus.) Hollenbraad says that thinking alongside the ontological turn switches focus from interpretation to “conceptualisation,” a re-building of concepts resulting from the encounter with practices. The task now is to force ourselves to think: in which way does the world have to be organised for the statement “plants have souls” to not seem contradictory, wrong, or absurd? The way I have thus come to think of the ontological turn is as a different methodology of thought. With this way of thinking comes a politics. In “The Politics of Ontology,” Martin Holbraad, Morten Axel Pendersen and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro write about different intersections of the two terms:

(1) the traditional philosophical concept of ontology, in which “politics” takes the implicit form of an injunction to discover and disseminate a single absolute truth about how things are;
(2) the sociological critique of this and other “essentialisms,” which, in skeptically debunking all ontological projects to reveal their insidiously political nature, ends up affirming the critical politics of debunking as its own version of how things should be; and (3) the anthropological concept of ontology as the multiplicity of forms of existence enacted in concrete practices, where politics becomes the non-skeptical elicitation of this manifold of potentials for how things could be—what Elizabeth Povinelli (...) as we understand her, calls “the otherwise.”

The third one encapsulates the methodology of the ontological turn where politics become the articulation of possibilities for “the otherwise,” an alternate route for thought. For Viveiros de Castro, this possibility of the otherwise manifests in an “equivocation” or what Anna Tsing calls “productive misunderstanding,” where the goal is not to map or translate different terms through one another, but to stay precisely in the moment of passing; like “[an artist eliciting] a new form from the affordances her material allows her to set free” (ibid). Of course, the notion of “ontology” is not without its own risks – it in fact can easily fall into the same type of theoretical loop that “culture” did and run out its course. My purpose here is not to get to the bottom of what the
ontological turn means for philosophy or anthropology (a task that would demand another dissertation), seeing how the jury is still out in both disciplines and we may very well suspect that we shall never see them again (Venkatesan et al.). What interests me is, what did the ontological turn do for animism? I argue that because the focus on how worlds are interpreted waned, animism was no longer misinterpreted as an erroneous way of understanding the world. With an ontological focus on how worlds are made and lived, animism can become a framework within which we read practices of revealing nonhuman personhood. This will be key later on in my reading of activist arts practice. I could rephrase my guiding question following the methodology of the ontological turn: in which way do we have to think personhood for the proposal of “nonhuman persons” to make sense? And what kind of ethics or politics of revealing this personhood will follow?

Because animism does not map easily onto the nature/culture divide, it is perhaps the perfect framework for the Anthropocene. Fleshing out this trait and continuing the structuralist project of his mentor Lévi-Strauss, in Beyond Nature and Culture, Philippe Descola distinguishes four ontologies that map the general properties of social life – animism, naturalism, totemism, and analogism. Instead of using the categories of nature and culture, he settles for “interiority” and “physicality,” arguing that each ontology distributed them in a different manner between humans and nonhumans. Interiority can include, “intentionality, subjectivity, reflexivity, the aptitude to dream,” and physicality can include, for example, “form, substance, physiological, perceptual, sensory-motor, and proprioceptive processes, or even temperament as an expression of the influence of bodily humors” (“Human Natures” 18). Naturalism, an ontology that Descola defines as authoritative in modernity, assumes 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 (Sahlins), 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. (94-95)

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” 19). The so-called cultural and natural domains are in fact one domain of culture that includes human and nonhuman persons acting towards each other according to norms that are common to all,” just like in naturalism “a single, unifying nature [exists along] a multiplicity of cultures” (ibid 21). In naturalism, “what distinguishes humans from nonhumans is the mind, the soul, subjectivity, a moral conscience, language, and so forth, in the same way as human groups are distinguished from one another by a collective internal disposition [that naturalists call culture],” yet in animism it is these same things that unify rather than diverge (ibid). It has been argued that in the “Western” world, because of the 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,” “Western” people apparently experience the “pathological consequences” of their separation from the nonhuman world (qtd. in Degnen 153). Yet, when animism is approached as a practice that reveals nonhumans as persons, it invalidates these assumptions. Descola’s ontologies do not map easily onto specific geographical and temporal spheres - they are “spatially discontinuous archipelagos rather than rigorously delineated countries” (qtd. in Kohn 144) yet each ontology enjoys more authority in certain places, although, as we will see in the next chapters, it is entirely possible to switch from animism to naturalism in social practice even within a day. Tim Ingold writes that it is not that animist ways of practicing nonhuman personhood have died out but rather that “they have lost much of their authority but they continue to operate nonetheless and remain deeply embedded in the experience of everyday life” in
various geopolitical contexts (“Rethinking the Animate” 81). He also 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” (ibid 9). 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 football ceremonies and towering mega-churches. Wolfgang Kapfhammer adds that it is no wonder that we are fully entranced in animist practices, as there exists in “Western animism [an] alternative occidental tradition contesting the much maligned Baconian and Cartesian dominance” (Halbmayer 18). 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” (866).” Graham Harvey, professor of religious studies, whose edited collection of essays on animism remains the most versatile source on the incredible diversity of how the concept is used, 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 the meeting-points of shared interest and difference” (1). The very unstable history of the term thus aids in making it a platform for varied inquiry.

2.4. Paralleling Decolonial Methods

Emerging from these various histories, animism is a centrifugal, fleshy spirit-in-motion, an empirical practice that does not re-cast itself into history, but itself is the vehicle that carries the weight of history's progression. If there is a principle I hold about this revival it is this – beware of rejuvenation. The revival of “animism,” however differently it is understood across disciplines, testifies to a growing interest in the nonhuman, and yet it also points to an exhaustion and the subsequent appetite to utilise the nonhuman for transformative means. The “lively” nonhuman weaves itself back into the frontline of exhausted human history, inadvertently or purposefully used
to “enliven” the tired machine of intellectual engagement. Anselm Franke and Etienne Turpin explore this relation between exhaustion, animism, rejuvenation and recoil. The Marxist writings of Hal Foster in the 1990s, Franke argues, arrive at animism repeatedly, only for him to capitulate before the “ontological instability” that it unavoidably invites (145). Yet, parallel to this failure is a success: as Turpin responds, the rejuvenating investment into “animist subjectivity” that radical psychiatrist and thinker Félix Guattari brought into his project with the then-depressed Gilles Deleuze allowed them to produce collaborative work that turned out to be of a decisive importance for the post-humanities (“Anti-Oedipus”; “A Thousand Plateaus”). As the winds of the apocalypse flutter outside our windows, perhaps we have arrived at another point of exhaustion and so animism creeps over from the periphery to the centre of the debate? To fully account for the re-emergence of animism today, including my own interest in it, we should note that anima materialises at the moment when the threat of authoritative anthropos looms large on the horizon of thought. Linda Hogan writes: “It is because of [climate change] that we need the new animists. We need change.” (21). Deborah Bird-Rose follows, writing about her friend's Val Plumwood's “philosophical animism,” stating that attentive action leads to the recognition of nonhuman persons as “fellow agents and narrative subjects” (97). Yet, I do not want to claim that this engagement with animism is a process of rejuvenating anamnesis, a reminiscence of what has been lost or forgotten, an injection of “the old ways” into contemporary thought. An activist engagement with nonhumans that recognizes them as persons does not belong to a specific time or place. I rather align with the “reclaiming” as defined by Isabelle Stengers. The reclaiming of animism that she calls for refers back to how pagans and witches she encountered used the term “reclaim” – she gives us an example of her own reclaiming of Marx:

So, I “reclaim,” as the neo-pagan witches say, a pragmatist Marx (…) “Reclaim” Marx, recuperate him but also (and this is a move that I learned from the witches) rehabilitate him, reproduce him. And not for any concern for justice on his part, but from the perspective of
asking his question once again. (qtd. in Bordeleau 14-15)

Such a reclaiming is faithful rather to the task of continually reactivating the operative questions inherent in the term rather than a return to an idealized past once lost. In the Anthropocene, we lament the disappearance of nature from our conceptual cabinet, finding ourselves either blending into the void of its departure or seeking solace in the slowly decomposing artefacts of cultural representations. The waves of nostalgia can too quickly carry us into tumultuous terrains, where watered down discourses of what once was can be promptly refashioned into stable concepts, able to hold us hostage before the concentrated powers of the past. Reclaiming is not only correcting misrepresentations, but asserting the right to continually re-pose the questions central to the object of our reclaiming. When we think about personhood through animism, we seek not a new representation, but a new way of acting. Stengers again:

Reclaiming animism does not mean, then, that we have ever been animist. Nobody has ever been animist because one is never animist “in general,” only in terms of assemblages that generate metamorphic transformation in our capacity to affect and be affected—and also to feel, think, and imagine. Animism may, however, be a name for reclaiming these assemblages, since it lures us into feeling that their efficacy is not ours to claim. Against the insistent poisoned passion of dismembering and demystifying, it affirms that which they all require in order not to enslave us: that we are not alone in the world. (“Reclaiming Animism”)

How can we think alongside animism and its proposition of nonhuman personhood about art activism? How to engage with it when it manifests in seemingly countless incarnations, against the background of an often troubling history? How to think anthropological concepts as on par with those proposed by critical theory concerned with the nonhuman and the Anthropocene? First, there is homework to be done. Gayatri Spivak uses the term “homework” to describe the activity of
locating ourselves as scholars, writers, and artists. A location is no simple professing of alliance to a political or social category, a nation or a country (62). *Homework* is the space of domesticity because it is the space where we recognize ourselves, where the scents are familiar and the sounds melt into a comfortable background noise. But it is also the labour of making a home, of working at making a home and in labour there is difficulty and traction. For Spivak, it is not simply a matter of describing where we stand but of digging deep into our epistemological and ontological assumptions. Exposing our alliances to the ways we think about knowledge – how do we come to know the world – and being – what kind of a world exists is how we plunge into ourselves to look where the lantern was left unlit. Finding these locations is important because they are usually unprofessed. Both epistemology and ontology are important if we consider the existential webs into which practices are entangled, including the practices that raise nonhuman persons into the light of social recognition. In reading about practices that seem divergent – that practicing nonhuman personhood comes naturally to me does not mean it is “naturalised” in the doings of others - we must keep in mind that we have put work, conscious or unconscious, into our “homes” – axiomatic constructs that govern our thinking and practice. Perhaps it is still the philosophy of the Enlightenment and of modernity that shelters us, for recognising onto-epistemologies under our rooftops amounts to facing the way in which they have been determined by geopolitical and institutional power relations: in the conquests of colonialism, in the unstoppable force of industrial modernity, in the unveiling of various wars, national and personal. The efforts involved are not only those of recognition. Doing one's homework is a practice of unlearning what has been presented as obvious, of facing unrecognised privileges, of de-centering oneself within the history and the multitude of onto-epistemologies that sustain various practices. For Spivak, it is essentially the method of undoing colonial exceptionalism and the ongoing colonial violence perpetuated in presenting Anglo-Saxon thought as the axis of History.

I have been searching, as was already mentioned, for a way of theorising nonhuman personhood that would allow for a re-humanisation of the nonhuman “other” without projecting the
anthropos onto it. A political way of accounting for how we think those persons with whom we share the labour of sustaining communities large and small. It seems impossible – and yet, it happens – to think about nonhumans in the Anthropocene without encountering decolonial scholarship. Within this encounter, knots must untangle and homes must shake at their foundations. Even those of us not explicitly and obviously related by origins to colonial history, such as myself as a Pole who perhaps should be more attuned to post-Soviet theoretical sensibilities, by the very virtue of working in the academe and of living in an imperial world can still uphold colonial structures, specifically the foregrounding of Anglo-Saxon thought as the body of work most readily engaged in Anthropocene research. The contributions of continental philosophy, post-humanism, deep ecology or new materialism have indeed been central to the currently forming discipline of the Anthropocene studies in the humanities. Media artist and theorist Joanna Zylinska’s theoretical framework in *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene* exemplifies the kind of sources that would be often used in discussing post-anthropocentric ethics:

[I will refer to the work of] Henri Bergson, Karen Barad, Roisi Braidotti, Wendy Brown, Jane Bennet (...) Tom Cohen, Claire Colebrook, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Donna Haraway, Tim Ingold, Stanislaw Lem and Timothy Morton (...) in a departure from a modernist form of critique, [my method is] ‘critical vitalism.’” (17)

Yet, this self-proclaimed departure from a modernist critique *via* a “critical vitalism” draws on sources within the culture that produced modernism – apart from the Polish intellectual and science-fiction author Stanislaw Lem, the sources are firmly located within Anglo-Saxon, “first world” culture. Without taking anything from these remarkable scholars – I often draw on their work myself - or indeed from Zylinska's work, I want to pause before its intent to de-modernise without doing the homework of decolonising. As geographer Juanita Sundberg notes in an excellent article, “Decolonizing posthumanist geographies,” post-humanist methods are still tightly bound
within Eurocentric thought. By Eurocentric I here mean, after Sundberg, “a contingent conceptual apparatus that frames Europe as the primary architect of world history” and by Anglo-Saxon I mean, “English-speaking white supremacist settler societies as bearers of these Eurocentric imaginaries [even though it is a non-unified body of thought]” (34). In the forthcoming chapters on art and activism, I will talk about a method of revealing nonhuman personhood via activist and artistic practice that I call “animorphic.” This is an explicit nod to the ontological geometry of animism, my indebtedness to the body of work created around the term, and my desire to work through the insights of anthropology in the context of nonhuman theory at large. I have subsequently encountered propositions similar to animism in various bodies of thought. I decided to stay with animism and to foreground anthropological theory as one of my main interlocutors in this research, instead of referring back to the more commonly used critical theory sources. Moving through the body of work that constitutes animism is a difficult task. I want to pause again before the question of engaging located concepts in a way that would make them central to general politics, without performing an intellectual hijacking under the umbrella of universality, incorporating them without acknowledgment, or ignoring them altogether. Because animism is irrevocably tied to indigenous cosmologies and knowledges – but not only to them – this is a problem that can be mapped onto Anthropocene studies at large. Métis anthropologist Zoe Todd wrote a viral blog post, which then turned into an article, about attending a lecture by one of her personal heroes Bruno Latour in 2013. “Buzzing with anticipation” of seeing Latour, whose work convinced her to move from the field of biology to anthropology, she was excited to hear him describe climate change as a “matter of common cosmopolitical concern” (“An Indigenous Feminist’s” 5), expecting that he would credit indigenous thought such as that of Inuit activists, scholars, and elders, for example for the concept of Sila, which encompasses meanings as diverse as “climate,” “the breathe [sic] that circulates in every living thing” and the relation between the environment and knowledge (ibid). She also thought about the activist efforts of Inuit women like Sheila Watt-Cloutier, who almost won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007, losing to Al Gore. The
mention never came, instead Latour “spent a great deal of time interlocutting with a Scottish thinker, long dead, and with Gaia” (ibid 7).

Of course, we could remark that this was one lecture, one time. We could also remark that Latour necessarily must have settled on something, unable to mention every existing account of eco-social interconnectivity, and that his choice of John Hunter was understandable given how the lecture was held in Scotland. We could also argue that Inuit – or indigenous – concepts are not the only ones that intersect with the current nonhuman turn in thinking about climate change; so do, to look close to my own home, pre-Christian pagan (and neo-pagan) cosmologies of Medieval and Renaissance Europe as well as many strands of thought suppressed in Europe under the dominant ways of thinking (J. Cohn). As Aaron Gurevich argues, for example, in the Middle Ages the concept of “the individual,” rather than denoting a severance, referred to an indivisible whole: “man thought of himself as an integral part of the world (...) His interrelation with nature was so intensive and thorough that he could not look at it from without” (297). We would, however, be missing Todd's point, for it is the very systemic repetition of this neglect that upholds the Anglo-Saxon dominance: “[mine] is a critique of systems and practices that culminate in the events such as the one I attended,” she writes (“An Indigenous Feminist’s” 9). Todd demands that indigenous scholars and practitioners be engaged as “thinkers in their own right, not just disembodied representatives of an amorphous Indigeneity (...) not just as research subjects or vaguely defined 'collaborators' [but] as dynamic Philosophers and Intellectuals, full stop” (ibid 7). I take her instructions to also mean that we are aiming at something more than affirmative action but for a decolonisation at large. It is not that, she writes, “the current trends in the discipline of anthropology or the Euro-academy are wrong. It is that they do not currently live up to the [decolonial] promises that they make” (17).

What a decolonial approach would mean in scholarship is a contested issue. On the one hand, Laura Hall writes that any work that does not seek to decolonise the theoretical frameworks currently deployed to confront the Anthropocene risks “exacerbating ecologically damaging
colonial relationships,” thus calling on all scholars to draw on frameworks other than Anglo-Saxon or modernist (302). In Another Knowledge is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies, Boaventura de Sousa Santos writes in his introduction 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” (14). Sundberg presents a broad understanding of a decolonial framework within post-humanities, which she describes as “exposing the ontological violence authorised by Eurocentric epistemologies both in scholarship and in everyday life” (34). Her extension of decolonialisation to addressing ontology provides a generous and permissive entry point for any scholar seeking to uproot foundational assumptions of colonialist and modernist thought. As she also points out, the “geo-historical and bio-graphic,” to use Walter Mignolo's phrase, location of authors and bodies of thought is never there in most of the Anthropocene scholarship. The “we” of these theories is rarely collectively and explicitly identified as Anglo-Saxon or European. The coordinates of these thoughts can only be found in the sources cited and the examples given, which would often all be Anglo-European, thus betraying their authors’ milieu. This happens in tandem with “an overwhelming silence” about indigenous scholarship and a simultaneous occluded reference to indigeneity that never acknowledges its own sources (37). Sundberg's observations are perfectly summarising the problem and provide a template of conscious citational practices for those working with the nonhuman in order to not repeat colonial exclusions. She calls on scholars to diversify their sources and methodologies in order to contribute to a decolonial – in a broad understanding – and cross-disciplinary efforts of scholarship.

On the other hand, it is equally important to not equalise, for example, my efforts to think nonhuman personhood alongside anthropology rather than the most often consulted Anglo-Saxon critical theory, under the umbrella of decolonialisation, because “decolonisation is not a metaphor,” as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang point out. In fact, contrary to Sundberg and Hall, they instruct that thinking of decolonialisation as a term that is broad enough to describe basic and
frankly obligatory efforts to broaden our conceptual frameworks might obscure the ongoing settler colonial structures and only “re-centres whiteness, resettles theory, extends innocence to the settler, entertains a settler future” (3). In other words, they move from theory to political praxis. While broadening theoretical horizons beyond Eurocentrism is an obligation, decolonisation is a political struggle against ongoing oppression that is “accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity” (35) and cannot be used to describe everything that seeks to do away with “modernity” or the Enlightenment or the ontologies related to them. There is, as Franz Fanon already wrote, an incommensurability between decolonial and other struggles because an actual decolonialisation would require a seismic shift and a brutal change in the current order of the world, not a simple phraseological proclamation of alliance, or the inclusion of varied scholars in our writing about the environment.

I could follow Bennett’s aforementioned suggestion to refer to the “rich archive” of Western thought rather than risk engaging with animism, or I could only refer to the multitude of theories that intersect with it. Egomorphism (Milton), for example, describes the perception that other species possess a self. It operates not through metaphor, but rather presupposes selfhood in others as an organizing principle of empathy. Primatologists Jane Goodall and Frans de Waal have long studied social behaviour in animals. Recent anthologies on animism (Harvey “A Handbook”) testify to the fact that many scholars seek to “prove” animism by relating it to the current state of scientific knowledge. This “truth-value” of animism is of no interest to me. Nevertheless, with or without animism taken as an ontology or a conceptual framework, thinking about nonhumans or nature or ecology in the Anthropocene simply cannot exclude indigenous thought, often stuck in a problematic relationship with anthropology. Thus we face the fact that there is no innocence in thinking, when thought itself is theft by the very virtue of the entanglement between the institution of academia and colonialism. Within this context, Todd's remarks resonate strongly because she foregrounds the way that theory can – and does – figure the climate (or as I would add, the nonhuman in general) as a terra nullius or aer nullius, which then can be filled like a blank slate, as
if it was not already populated with ongoing death and struggle. This speculative “emptying out” of the environment as a cause of concern in order to open up a territory for the colonization of the nonhuman is what I perceive as a large problem of many strands of post-humanist theory. Decolonial scholarship makes a powerful case here, arguing that the speculative configuring of the environment occludes the already-always-ongoing communal struggle and resistance.

Perhaps the most productive way to intersect with decolonial efforts is through the logic of parallel rather than of “inclusion.” That is, paralleling these insights is more effective than claiming them as an umbrella term that belongs to everyone equally. As such, the work of undermining the discourses that brought us the Anthropocene is multilateral. Looking to animism, which I take as a practice of activating nonhuman personhood in various geo-political territories, among the other frameworks that I touch on here, is not in itself a decolonial act, even though it also crosses paths with traditional indigenous knowledge (TIK) or kinship theory. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro writes: “do not try to actualize the possibilities immanent to others’ thought but endeavour to sustain them as possible indefinitely (…) neither dismissing them as fantasies of others, nor by fantasizing that they may gain the same reality for oneself” (Holbraad et. al). Thus the question considered here is not whether the arts are animist in the same way that other animisms are – they are not. Everything operates in its own context. The question is rather: how can art activism respond from its own standing to the proposition of “nonhuman personhood” instead of agentiality and matter? How can this response be in dialogue with decolonial scholarship, anthropology, feminist materialism and critical theory? How does this proposition change local art practice and politics? Drawing on various animisms but also on a variety of other theories, I developed animorphism as a way of describing the varied art-activist tactics that reveal nonhumans as persons. Animorphism can thus can be seen as running parallel to animism, at least to those types of animism that are preoccupied with personhood.
Chapter 3. Animorphic Practice: Art and Activism at the Edge of a Catastrophe

There will be no other end of the world.

(Milosz 57)

Une autre fin de monde est possible.

(Another end of the world is possible.)

Graffiti spotted in France in 2017

In 1944, Polish Nobel Prize-winning poet Czesław Milosz wrote a frivolous poem about the end of the world. It smells of honey and flowers, unravels with images of dolphins bathing in the shimmering sea waves, glitters with the pointed heels of women resting with their umbrellas in a park. Those who expect the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, the dragon and the Beast, are disappointed. Even as the fire takes them, they cannot believe it is happening just yet. And only one among them, an old man who “would be a prophet yet is not a prophet, for he’s much too busy,” contends while tending to his tomatoes – “there will be no other end of the world” (ibid). Before the advent of the Second World War, Milosz’s poetry was much different: messianistic, spectacular, catastrophic, biblical. This is, perhaps, typical of artworks that imagine the Apocalypse as an event to come, an invitation to speculate on what might happen. There is an aesthetic thrill encoded in thinking about our own demise. Yet, once the apocalypse of the war happened in Poland, its very tangibility uncovered the real, lived experience of familiarity and commonality underpinning every death, no matter how monumental. Milosz thus reminds us that we live through the ends of the world constantly and that ruptures run alongside ordinary events. The apocalypse happens quietly.

An apocalypse that awaits now is somehow different – the global extinction of species forces reflection on a larger than human scale, although the death of the *Homo sapiens* undoubtedly is the limit of the horizon of thought. Danowski and Viveiros de Castro write that the Anthropocene is an
epoch that points towards the end of epochality as such, at least as it concerns our species (20-21). Yet, it is not free from the same kind of fallacy – thinking extinction as an event to come, as something in the future, rather than a steady spilling out of the Styx into our oceans, a slowly suffocating catastrophe, a sudden sinking recognition that half of the planet's wildlife has gone extinct since the 1970s. Deborah Bird Rose writes:

In the words of Paul Gordon, an elder from the inland country of New South Wales, the creatures who are dying in these massive waves of extinction are not just flora and fauna, they’re family (…) The loss of family is a “sorry” that goes far beyond the deaths of individuals through hunting, and it calls up anger as well as grief. It is a loss that goes beyond balanced relationships between life and death. With extinctions there is no return, and death starts to overtake life. Extinction is unethical killing that is tipping into a black hole of death. The more life disappears, the more life disappears. (144)

The animist prerogative of treating nonhumans as persons, family members, ancestors or enemies is not commonly shared. In fact, as we will see in the following chapters, naturalist ontology can reify nonhumans as a mass that cannot be individuated or as an exploitable resource that can bounce back from depletion. What is specific to the discourse of the Anthropocene is the preoccupation with the irreversibility of loss, whether of our own species or other. It can scale anything down to pure insignificance; inject futility into any and all labour. The online outlet BBC Earth informed in May, 2017 that “there are diseases hidden in ice, and they are waking up” (Fox-Skelly). If it is not the lack of healthcare that will kill us, then it will be the long-dormant viruses and bacteria that will be released from their permafrost prison alongside the melted ice. According to the article, NASA had previously successfully revived 8-million years old bacteria and there are a few registered cases of a disease outbreak following drastic changes in the climate. Claire Colebrook writes that three different extinctions envelop us today: the planetary 6th
extinction of species, the extinction of other species caused by humans, and the capacity of humans to self-annihilate (9). Within this triad of demise, we could rethink Karl Marx’s original definition of our species-being as a part of an overwhelming, capitalist estrangement not only from the product of one’s labour but from existence itself. Perhaps today, the species-being of the *Homo sapiens* is no longer our collective ability to transform our environment, but the capacity to annihilate the conditions of our very existence. Perhaps, to respond to Viveiros de Castro, we should think of an *autophagic* rather than “cannibal metaphysics,” where autophagy denotes a body that eats itself instead of merely eating its own kin? We are a species that devours itself and we desire to devour the present, too, by conflating it with the posited futurity of extinction. The more threatening and overwhelming the present becomes, the more persistently do we fix our eyes on the distant future, with its promises of a complete freedom, which is unstoppable annihilation that erases agency and responsibility. While embracing our condition of illness, pollution and estrangement, animorphism is a practice that affirms extinction not as an event to come in the future, but as our ontology and our *a priori* present, thus foregoing the need to speculate about the future as chronologically distinct from now and forcing us to look at the apocalypse(s) unravelling now.

Global paradigm shifts never fail to register on the seismograph of the arts, often causing controversy as to the role of art in the face of new political, or even existential, circumstance. Is art an aesthetic self-exploration that can be traced back to individual will, or a giving of oneself to the world in order to become a seismograph, to register the earthquake? In the 1930s, photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson wrote, "The world is going to pieces and people like [Ansel] Adams and [Edward] Weston are photographing rocks!" (qtd. in Lippard 9). Is his comment a lament or a dismissal of those who photograph rocks when the world as we know it is receding from the horizon of being? What is the relation between “the world going to pieces” and artistic practice? The criticism that some wish to photograph rocks while reality is disintegrating reveals a split between the disappearance of the world and the purpose of the artist as someone who should *care*
about the end of the world enough to adjust their practice to it. Cartier-Bresson demands that artists respond to the end of the world, yet his assertion is that one must choose between an ethical response of care and a foregrounding of the nonhuman in artistic practice. Either the human or the non, where the non is perceived as a decisive disengagement from politics, as not paying attention to the world going to pieces.

Yet, the most important question that the Anthropocene poses is not how to negotiate between the political and the nonhuman but how setting the political as separate from the nonhuman is already political. Social conditions translate into sensory phenomena and sensory phenomena translate into interpersonal politics. In animorphic nonhumanism, the non in the nonhuman does not negate the human but only the sufficiency and the certainty assumed in the term “human” in order to present another configuration. Within this paradigm, there is nothing specific about art as an institutionalised discipline that makes it more suitable to considering the question of the nonhuman than other types of practice. Detroit's Olayami Dabls, whose work I discuss in subchapter 3.2., despises the term “artist,” claiming that the divorcing of art from social practice is the result of capitalism and commodification, which got us into trouble in the first place. Practitioners discussed here intervene as designers, engineers, climate activists and community members, although they understand their communities to consist of more than just the members of their own species.

Anthropologist of technology Joseph Dumit writes about a tactical biopolitics for the 21st century, whereas

the multiplicities [in which we live] also include the increasing entanglement of all practices—science, art, activism, writing—with corporate capital and mass media, and the belated admission that these problems cannot be handled alone, but require cross-species tactical coordination (…) activists reconfigure lines of authority, knowledge, and regulation to change how concern about life operates.” (xi-xii)
In *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, Heather Davies and Etienne Turpin focus on theoretically laying out the new sensorium suited to living in a world that is perpetually in the state of exception. Their core argument is that art in the Anthropocene is primarily a sensorial phenomenon; secondly, a new regime of visuality encompassing data visualization, satellite imagery and climate models; thirdly, a non-moral site of experimentation where we can devise tactics of living together in a catastrophic world, attuning to new realities (4). Specifically, anthropologist Anna Tsing points out that in this overwhelming environment, art could be a “non-moral form of address that offers a range of discursive, visual, and sensual strategies that are not confined by the regimes of scientific objectivity, political moralism, or psychological depression” (qtd in. ibid), which otherwise seem to dictate the rhythms of discursive engagement with the new geological epoch. In the absence of the cognitive capacity that would allow humans to comprehend the scale of the global extinction of species or climate change, what we are left with at a tangible level are sensory experiences of living in a world that is increasingly diminished. While the end of the world surely draws out endless aesthetic reconfigurations and “non-moral” speculations – what does it mean to live within a prophecy not only of an individual death but an irreversible loss of species-life? - I want to focus not on what artistic practices tell us about our inter-species condition, but how they can take the form of Anthropocenic tactical activism. Aesthetics code realities, an encryption that we can decode with sufficient contextualization. But practices unravel and program worlds in a futurist gesture. If animorphic art is an activist practice of unravelling a world in which the “otherwise” of nonhuman personhood is a given, it parallels what Harry Garuba sees as definitive of animism - “[it] opens up a whole new world of poaching possibilities, prepossessing the future, as it were, by laying claim to what in the present is *yet to be invented*” (271, emphasis added). Dwayne Trevor Donald also writes that ethics we need right now demand the foregoing of the separation between the future as an event to come and the present in which we live:
This ethic holds that the past occurs simultaneously in the present and influences how we conceptualize the future. It requires that we see ourselves related to, and implicated in, the lives of those who have gone before us and those yet to come. It is an ethical imperative to recognize the significance of the relationships we have with others, how our histories and experiences are layered and position us in relation to each other, and how our futures as people similarly are tied together. (qtd. in Todd, “Indigenizing the Anthropocene” 248)

In the case of animorphic practices, art must reveal nonhuman personhood or provide a platform for its emergence. It says, *someone* has been overlooked and draws out the consequences of allowing those who have been overlooked to assume cultural membership in specific communities. It is about making these persons visible, not necessarily in a purely ocular manner, but in an assertion that they indeed exist as persons. As Nicolas Mirzoeff writes in “Visualizing the Anthropocene,” claiming the places to look at and the places to look from is a crucial question—“the right to look confronts the [powers] who say to us ‘Move on, there’s nothing to see here’” (Ranciere, 2001). Only there is, and we know it and so do they” (214). Considering the matter of animorphic art as a tactical activism, we might rephrase the matter: the other side of “the right to look” is the question of what / who resides in the space that we are looking at, whose bodies occupy the space that is bracketed out, who lives across the border of what is allowed to be seen. Visuality is not a simple matter of representation or creating images but of the ways in which the social is articulated, the mechanisms that allow for the emergence of the condition of being seen or being able to look (Mirzoeff “An Introduction”). Visuality is malleable because the world is changing in ways that are imperceptible. The only palpable sounds are the drum rolls announcing our coming demise. As cultural theorist Sylvére Lotringer notes, the Anthropocene projects itself as the “last political scene” (371), where psychological, environmental and affective crises are woven together in a fatalistic over-determination of our attention. Seemingly, there is only one thing to look at and it is ourselves wrecking havoc on the world. The end-all discourse demands our undivided attention
to its own apocalyptic prophecy - Erik Swyngendouw fears the coming of a “post-political future,” with the Anthropocene as the new opiate of the masses. In this sensory and emotional overriding of smaller scopes of concern, this mythos can cast a shadow over specific artistic interventions that constitute essentially activist responses to a slowly totalizing discourse.

Grand themes like the Anthropocene are seductive for both academia and the arts. The “epoch” has been already presented in major curatorial contexts, such as the cycle of remarkable exhibitions at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, including *Animism*, *The Whole Earth, After Year Zero*, *Forensis*, and *The Anthropocene Project*. Our species-death has already become something of a curatorial meme, validating numerous artworks by simply being their subject. Suspicious of this blanket-term that can conveniently apply to every practice, in the syllabus for her recent class in Berlin, media artist and theorist Hito Steyerl warns her students: “If you try to hide the failures of your work by invoking the anthropocene, chances are you understand neither. Please stay away, you are wasting your time and our patience” (“About”). As the Anthropocene is becoming the dominant cultural meme, McKenzie Wark asks, why should we accept the term “Anthropocene” at all, why should we surrender to yet another master discourse? Rather than “investigating” the concept he proposes to “hack it (...) find analogous but different ways to hack specialized domains of knowledge, to orient them to the situation and the tasks at hand” (599). As an ontology of nonhuman personhood, animorphism underdetermines the human (into a generic personhood) and *anima* reduces *anthropos* to an organizing cultural principle rather than an epoch. It allows a different vantage point.

Before the Anthropocene became an end-all discourse, animism was a popular theme of events held in various exhibition and performance spaces, such as “Le fabrique des images” at the Musee du quai Branly or Anselm Franke’s *Animism* in Antwerp, Berne, Vienna, Berlin, and New York. While the dominant approach of these exhibitions is ethnography, animism is taken as something different than a local manifestation of a culture – it is rather a double-edged sword that cuts through the dualisms of the modernist ontology (naturalism). It addresses both epistemological
problems of representation as well as the problems of being. Franke’s commentary on animism is worth quoting at length here:

In animism, you have a different relationship to things, to nature; you don’t treat them as just 'dead matter' that is indifferent to humans. Therefore, it is also about borders: it’s about drawing certain distinctions differently, and this concerns literally everything: everyday experience just as much as the definition of what is a ‘subject’, a ‘self’, or a ‘legal person’. Then, when other people make those distinctions differently, you call them ‘pre-modern’. So modernity is always about borders, and what we were trying to do is develop a curatorial ‘frame’ that de-colonizes the imagination, and shows how these borders are implemented and policed, but also how they can be conceived differently. (qtd. in Lin)

While animism has become an important phrase for the art world recently, interested as it is in modernity, art has always been important for animism. Because animism distributes humans and nonhumans very differently over the domains of nature and culture than naturalism does, thinking about “art” through animism must start with questioning where – in which domain – does art happen at all. In animism, art is a way of preserving and enacting communities and as such it is not separable from the production of the social (Harvey, “Animism”). Félix Guattari made this one of his key points in Chaosmosis, where animist subjectivity is directly opposed to a capitalist one and can be achieved precisely through religious rituals, neurotic or aesthetic phenomena (Melitopoulos and Lazzaratto). He acknowledges the vital role of the arts in permitting a definition of the social that is inclusive of the nonhuman, thus allowing us to better grasp what he perceives as the dominant political challenge of our times: a re-invention of social solidarity and the modes of psychical life (“Chaosmosis” 20). Animism was so important to these strands of his thinking that were a-signifying or non-representational that Angela Melitopoulos and Maurizio Lazzarato describe them as a “machinic animism.” Guattari’s insistence on the power of art to re-imagine and
reshape the social is especially urgent in the Anthropocene, where communities should be produced in a way that reflects the vulnerable entanglement of non/human persons. As if responding to Guattari, anthropologists Eduardo Kohn and Philippe Descola suggest that the arts can become a vehicle for activating ontologies like animism where they can otherwise seem muted (143). If within these considerations, animism is usually presented as a way of thinking through the foundational conditions of modernity, animorphism performs a similar function for the Anthropocene, an era defined by interspecies precarity, extinction, pain and vulnerability.

The idea that the arts are able to re-arrange social relationships has been also put forward by art theorist Nicholas Bourriaud in *Relational Aesthetics*, where he argues that the primary function of contemporary art is to re-arrange social relations between humans in order to alter the social and escape the primacy of Debordian spectacle. These types of art, he argues, are not aimed at producing objects for display, but rather creating events that could reconstruct the social fabric. Exemplary of this form is Rikit Tiravanija's solo show in 1992, where a kitchen was set up in the gallery, with the artist preparing Thai food for the visitors. Nowadays, given the post-humanist climate, Bourriaud has been accused of anthropocentrism, as well as criticised for his early preference to host seemingly society-altering events in the gallery space, which is accessible only to select groups. Interviewed recently about his Anthropocene-themed exhibition *The Great Acceleration*, Bourriaud stated, quite contrary to the trends that seek to post-humanise, that “the main political agenda for art consists in re-humanising these spheres from which the human has withdrawn – from the economy to ecology” (qtd. in Charlesworth). He considers art a human activity: “I am not curating exhibitions for frogs or stones” (ibid). Within non-naturalistic ontologies, however, art extends well beyond the gallery space, and communities, even if we would like to make them so, are not strictly confined to the *Homo sapiens*, especially in the times marked by the extreme interspecies convergence of trouble, harm and extinction.

Coincidentally, in the same interview Bourriaud discards animism as a fetishistic discourse of inputting life into inert things. His interpretation already starts from a naturalist severance of
nonhumans from personhood so that something has to be “put” in them by humans. Animorphic arts are not for the purpose of creating such projections, they rather concern themselves with devising tactics for the emergence of nonhuman personhood. Nature-cultures might be constructed, but it is not only the *Homo sapiens* doing the construction. In “Natural Convers(at)ions: What If Culture Was Really Nature All Along?,” Kirby argues that the only way of escaping the nature / culture split is by acknowledging the fact that there is no mute Nature “out there” to negotiate. If I were to set out three characteristics of animorphic arts, they would be as follows: first, I want to argue that in taking humanity / personhood as the generic and under-determined reality, animorphism re-humanises the nonhuman without projecting the modernist *anthropos* onto it. Secondly, because what is under-determined cannot be projected, animorphic art focuses on staging platforms for the emergence of specific non/human persons in local contexts, rather than on creating representations. Finally, because of its realist orientation, animorphic art leans towards activism in staging interactions between the persons who make up the environment. Developing this animorphic framework is then about creating a vocabulary of practices and frameworks for the personalisation of nonhumans in artistic practice as a form of located activism.
3.1. To Know is to Personify: Animorphic Pragmatism and Corporeal Personhood

When primatologists tell you that for decades now we have been realizing, step by step, that there are cultural properties in ape populations, they will say, in the same breath, ‘but it’s too late.’

(Franke, “The Fates of Negativity” 148)

Back in 1992, the Chicago-based collective Haha launched an art project that, although originally funded for the duration of one year, would survive for as many as three due to unexpected community involvement. Flood: A Volunteer Network for Active Participation in Healthcare was foremost an open storefront that organized biweekly meals, public events and educational activities, but also a garden, where medicinal herbs and hydroponic greens were grown to be distributed to AIDS hospices and to community members suffering from the HIV epidemic. It extended into a comprehensive medical facility in Rogers Park and a large volunteer network. Soon enough, as locals grew interested in the specifics of care that the plants required, the garden became the focal point of interaction between not only the humans and the plants but also within the human community itself. The log recorded visits from guests as varied as “a man interested in hydroponics, a neighbor to talk about HIV, three men admiring the garden, a Spanish-speaking couple and their small daughter to look at the AIDS literature (…) a family from Milwaukee directed here by their Chicago-resident son” (Davis, “Growing Collectives” 40). To address the inequalities between humans, the artists argued, one also must take into account the nonhuman communities that can sustain or challenge the injustice. Ultimately, this hybrid community became the foundation for another possible reality, allowing imaginative practices of care to translate into an everyday activism. As the artists remark, “the experience of interacting with the garden is like reading a book:
one is not necessarily changed by it, but the condition for change then exists” (Brenson et al. 96).

In places, the practices of Natalie Jeremijeko and Kalle Laar, which will be the focus of this chapter, do not depart from relational art-activism of collectives like Haha. All concern themselves with community-building across the human/nonhuman boundary and blending artistic expression with local community politics. Scholar Heather Davis, who has recently co-edited an anthology of art in the Anthropocene, identifies multiple traits in “Flood” that could also be considered animorphic. The artwork’s “capacity to reveal the network of relations between people and the other-than-human [where] the subject is reframed as a term in a relation” (“Growing Collectives” 38; 40) parallels animism’s relational focus. “The rootedness of the garden [as a] source of undetermined potential [for change]” (ibid 40) highlights how particular activism and the generic framework of “the otherwise” made possible by reconfiguring human/nonhuman interactions are locked in a positive feedback loop. “A reconceptualization of collectives along non-anthropocentric lines [and an expansion] of our ideas about ‘nature’ and ‘culture’” (ibid) intersects with the propositions of the ontological turn. Laurie Palmer, one of Haha’s four founding members, aligns herself with the kind of pragmatic, sustained and material care, which is crucial in forming non/human communities: “A hydroponic system requires not so much physical labor as constant attention (…) Flood is, if nothing else, about that commitment, and the body of people gathered to tend the garden” (55). Yet, although Davis notices that “because of this demand from the plants, new connections needed to be made between human participants” (“Growing Collectives” 40), these readings of the artwork, and perhaps the artwork itself can be distinguished from animorphic arts. This project from two decades ago can thus serve as a useful entry point into the contemporary animorphic arts, providing it both with an immediate predecessor but also a useful contrast point.

Palmer described the rules of the human/plant interaction as such: “The connection to the earth is gone, the earth as a source: unlimited, magical, deep. The plants are fed rationally” (58, emphasis added). The tide is turning – this plant-based activist art has little sympathy for the image of the Earth as primal or magical that once informed environmental ethics and ecofeminism. There
is also a renewed call for an engagement with rationalism and Palmer sees a clear separation between rationality and the mythologisation of the Earth. Artistic practice is divorced from its potentially pejorative place outside of the everyday political reality, where rationalism and thinking down-to-earth is the guiding force. The Mother Earth is long gone and with her the nostalgic visions of sorcery sprouting from the wet grounds of yesteryear. Anthropomorphism, too, seems a thing of the past, rejected as a metaphor that has no place in the times that call for direct action. In fact, Haha describes “Flood” in terms of a depersonalisation, defining it as a “disentanglement from our individual selves” in favour of collectivity (21). Yet, seeking a term that would best describe this idea of self as a collective, Davis points to Félix Guattari’s animist Chaosmosis as a useful reference for understanding the practices of Haha (“Growing Collectives” 42). Evidently, there is an ongoing ambiguity around how personhood as a concept is used in academic and artistic discourse, a confusion that those who stand by the term “animism” or “anthropomorphism” need to continually account for.

In an era marked by techno-scientific and medical progress, but also a global healthcare crisis, Jeremijenko’s practice redefines health to be a matter of multispecies well-being. Her understanding of nonhuman personhood is corporeal and material, where nonhuman animals emerge as persons because of their behaviours rather than any projection of a moral character or consciousness. Encouraging personal relationships with nonhumans, Jeremijenko opens up the possibility of a divergent knowledge, one that is experiential and rooted in the recognition as others as persons. Arranging possibilities for practical and personal interaction with a melting glacier, German sound artist Kalle Laar foregrounds the vulnerability of non/human communities to climate change. While well-intentioned, his practice is also symptomatic of a convergence of capitalist and environmental impulses of personalisation, testifying to the entanglement of various personalisations within environmental, economic, legal, political and personal spheres. Both artists are aware that modern knowledge is based on the idea of objectification and ask whether we could personalise in order to know, thus sketching a different onto-epistemology for art activism.
3.1.1. Nonhuman Health Services

Quoting from the Hippocratic Oath, Natalie Jeremijenko contends that “the greater part of the soul lies outside the body (…) treatment of the inner requires treatment of the outer” (“The Art of Eco-mindshift”). What better example of a material and embedded understanding of the soul as a function of the acting body, rather than an immaterial essence of the self? With this external definition of the anima comes a different responsibility: tending to the soul is no longer a matter of abstraction or spiritual advancement, neither is it the collective construction of a religious imagination. It rather becomes a matter of health in a communal sphere, for the “external” lives of our bodies are upheld by the ecology of practices that sustain or violate them. While Michel Foucault has already observed that “the emergence of the health and physical well-being of the population in general [is in capitalism] one of the essential objectives of political power,” (“The Politics of Health” 277) nowadays it has to be considered how the “medico-administrative” structure of governance accommodates nonhumans, whose well-being is key to environmental health. For Jeremijenko, who works as an artist, engineer, computer- and neuro-scientist as well as an environmental activist, the rapidly degenerating environment provides the contextual materiality that frames the non/human soul. Currently heading the Environmental Health Clinic at the New York University, her extensive work has been preoccupied with harvesting new technologies for the purpose of social transformation. When she started working at the Environmental Health Clinic, Jeremijenko first interviewed the physicians in New York to find out that most of their patients dealt with problems irrevocably tied to environmental change, such as asthma or the 400-fold increase in developmental issues in children over the last ten years (“Environmental Health Clinic”). How can we reformulate, she asks, environmental health concerns so that the patients could walk out with prescriptions for things that can be done? How can we rewrite our relations with the environment through an ontological shift in defining the environment and the patient? How
can we make sure, finally, that these solutions remain firmly rooted in the needs of local communities, so that they serve specific non/human persons? Just like Hippocrates, Jeremijenko wants to treat the soul by tending to the body, or rather to the multiple bodies that make up the environment. In doing so, she mobilizes an understanding of nonhuman personhood as strongly material and corporeal, and engages the processes of personalisation in order to reveal it.

Although extremely varied, Jeremijenko’s work is often described as “bio-art,” intimately connected to the rise of interest in biology in the arts following the democratisation of laboratory equipment and software, with both becoming accessible and relatively cheap. In the 1990s, when this shift was happening alongside the media frenzy surrounding the Human Genome project, biology was “the hottest physical science (…) accompanied by, on the one hand, the inflationary use of biological metaphors in the scholarly disciplines that study cultures; on the other, a wide range of biotech procedure [providing artists with new technical means for creating art]” (Hauser 182). (We can with confidence say that the Anthropocene is signalling a similar shift with regards to geology.) Bio-art is hard to define, apart from that it engages live organisms; it can include “cell and tissue cultures, neuro-physiology, bio-robotics and bio-informatics, transgenesis (…), cross-breeding of animals and plants (…) biotechnological self-experimentation,” among others (ibid). While Jeremijneko’s work has since moved into different territories, she was already thinking about biological agents as persons within a political context in her early bio-art experiments. In her bio-art handbook, co-edited with Eugene Thacker and published in 2004, Creative-Biology: A User’s Manual, Jeremijneko opposes the idea that governmental organizations, private institutions and corporate powers should own the rights to bio-technological research. In her introductory discussion of the work of another bio-artist, Steve Kurtz, Jeremijenko discusses how bacteria can be considered as cultural persons, contingent on social and political practices that surround them. The US Biological Weapons Anti-Terrorism Act as expanded by the USA Patriot Act, specifically “SEC 817: “Expansion of the biological weapons statue” considers “biological agents” such as bacteria to be potential terrorists (“Creative Biology” 3). Jeremijenko recalls an
incident in which Kurtz was arrested for the possession of biological agents in his own home, rather than storing them in his studio or at his university. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, upon discovering potentially hazardous organisms in Kurtz’s possession, locked down the whole block, finding in the end no danger. Nevertheless, Kurtz was charged with mail and wire fraud, an offence punishable by up to twenty years in prison. As a scholar and a historian of bio-art, as well as a mentor to DIY bio-art hobbyists, Jeremijenko draws attention to how removing the organisms from the network of research and corporate profit changes their ontological standing, transforming them from research resource or artistic material to potential terrorists with unpredictable capacities. Patenting genetically modified organisms in a corporate setting reconfigures different platforms for the emergence of bacteria as objects or persons than the private and social sphere of one’s home would. Yet, in the fifth chapter of the manual, Jeremijenko encourages bio-amateurs to stage encounters precisely in the personal space of the home. The DIY activist is here concerned with creating situations where personhood can manifest itself in a localized manner rather than with classifying nonhumans as properties, objects or subjects. Where the latter is more about deciding \textit{a priori} or \textit{a posteriori} about the interiority of the nonhuman, the former is more concerned with providing platforms for response, expression, observation and interaction.

Jeremijenko outlines a series of DIY experiments involving rodents that cohabitate with humans. The state of your mice, says Jeremijenko, is the best way to judge the health of your household. To propose that rodents can serve as models for humans is not an animorphic approach in itself. Rodent brains are frequently used in laboratories and corporate spaces for human brain research because of their neurological similarity. The Allen Brain Atlas project, for example, started by Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen, is a public database of all 20,000 genes of the rodent brain, a resource which has been deemed useful by scientists in learning about brain disorders and mental illness in humans, such as dementia, PTSD or Alzheimer disease. While these practices could also contribute to an ethic rooted in theorising nonhuman personhood \textit{via} positing its proximity to those of humans by the collection of objective and measured data, they would rather locate this
personhood within, as the internal quality of the self or a property of the brain. Without invalidating this approach, Jeremijenko’s proposition is different and points towards externalised personhood. Mice do not only amass objective data, but share personalised practices with their human housemates. It is not only that mice and rats share their biological and neurological traits with humans but that as specific individuals with whom we cohabitate, they share our diets and addictions, play with our things and pick up our microorganisms.

In Amerindian perspectivism, transcribed elaborately by Viveiros de Castro, all species are considered to pursue cultural activities, such as having a family life, performing rituals or seeking entertainment. Yet, while we share the same culture with other animals, our bodies are very different, therefore it is not that we perceive the world in a different way but that all beings see the world in the same way, what changes is the world that they see (“Cosmological deixis” 477-78). It is these uniform, practical, empirical behaviours that we perform within our species-cultures that constitute the foundation of our corporeal personhood, rather than any internally possessed soul, consciousness, awareness or moral character. Jeremijenko’s “Milgram’s Mice: Bioinformatics in the Wild” is a play on the infamous social psychology experiment by Stanly Milgram, which tests the subject’s willingness to obey a figure of authority who instructs her to perform tasks contrary to her conscience; in this specific experiment, subjects were asked to administer electro-shocks to unwilling victims. Jeremijeko’s kit enables similar tests for addictive, adaptive, communal and political behaviours in rodent communities. It tests whether mice prefer to administer food, self-medicate or drink alcohol, and whether they would help other trapped mice by organising food delivery. It also includes human-mice communication channels, such as an instrument that mice can play to denote their preferences, a webcam and an audio interface.
These enable learning of specific preferences of specific mice in our households, extending personalisation into methods of gathering knowledge. Some of the cultural and political experiments that Jeremijenko proposes are: will mice deliver food to a trapped mouse or will mice in Paris make different social choices than those in New York? “What forms of governance do they use? Do mouse socialists exist without punishment (…) How do they deal with aberrant behavior?” (“Creative Biology” 40). As she states, “these devices are particularly useful for those interested in how ‘your’ mice (i.e. those that share the same local environmental stressors) respond to ‘your’ medication or other substances you like to ingest” (36) and whether the substances that they consume could influence their social structures. If your household carries with it the possibility of mice ingesting anti-depressants, for example, how would that influence their behaviour towards one another and the humans that they share the house with?
Jeremijenko’s project accentuates the individuality of each mouse, noting that some prefer to self-administer vodka and anti-depressants while others chose healthier options. These choices are dependent not only on their social group and individual preference, but also on the neighbourhoods, cities and environments where mice and humans coexist. Health is here framed in an external way, not only by deferring the soul to the outside layer of the body, but through embedding it into a larger network of the house and the animals whom it is shared with. In this way, just like the soul becomes an external, relational trait in animism, Jeremijenko’s understanding of health refers not to internal biology or genetics of an individual, but extends into an ecology of persons whose well-being is at stake in activism oriented towards environmental well-being.

Human and rodent bodies are not only devices for gathering data, but social persons located in specific households and facing personalised challenges. Without the continual affirmation of personhood through daily practices, one could easily slip away from the status of a person - we are persons, says animism, because others treat us as such. Irving Hallowell coined the term “other-than-human persons” to describe how in the Ojibwe animism personhood is a quality given in the universe as the basic ontological unit yet must be constantly activated through practice: rocks that we build our houses with are persons but rocks lying around the river are not. In this way, an animistic ethic relies on the reciprocity between members of a community, where the basic demand is to first recognize each other as persons.

The ethical imperative to recognize each other as persons is why an additional part of the Milgram’s Mice project is a “shoebox cage” containing a patented nesting material for laboratory mice, who detest bright lights that they are continually exposed to in the research setting. Although rodents are frequently used in medical research in order to develop medicine beneficial to humans, cases of mistreatment of those, to whom we owe a great share of our medical progress abound. With the “Shoebox Cage,” Jeremjenko weights in the on solitary confinement of rodents, who are exceptionally social, and its impact on their mental health. An infamous experiment in the 1930s by psychologist B. F. Skinner supposedly demonstrated that rodents would rather have “the pleasure
“centres” in their brains stimulated than survive. In the experiment, a caged rat had a choice between administrating drugs or choosing food and water. Shockingly, the rat opted for a pleasure-induced suicide. Skinner’s interpretation of the result was that the possibility of an immediate reward overpowered not only the rational mind, but also the animal’s basic survival instinct – the theory has been subsequently used to explain addiction in humans. In the 1970s, however, the “Rat Park” experiment by Bruce K. Alexander and his colleagues at the Simon Fraser University in Canada proved that the rat would have chosen something quite different if it was not placed in a solitary confinement with an electrode sticking out of its brain. As Jeremijenko notices, “suicide rates are higher in both incarcerated humans and animals; [it is] the leading cause of death in prisons” (“Creative Biology” 37). In the “Rat Park,” several rats were placed together in a comfortable environment with a lot of possibilities for play, interaction, and relaxation. Not one rat committed suicide or developed particularly addictive behaviours.

The two studies alone are not enough to form any definitive conclusion on the nature of addiction, especially since the models are quite limited. Jeremijenko points out that although laboratory experiments present themselves as being able to produce universal results regarding the behaviour of animals (mostly rodents) – which is then treated as a model for the behaviour of humans – laboratory rodents are actually a quite specific demographic. As she writes:

You cannot just catch any old mice and keep it in your lab (…) You have to buy rodents at some expense from accredited suppliers who know the pedigree of the mice (…) and keep track of what characteristic and modifications they have been bred for (…) So, where do companies get their mice? This is where it gets interesting because almost all of the mouse products originate from a handful of mice donated to Harvard by a Boston based fancy mouse breeder at the turn of the last century (…) This already strange isolated poodle mouse population [has been further selectively bred] in the rather peculiar environment of the laboratory (…) And it is this organism that all of modern human medications, genetic therapies, behavioural studies etc. are developed
Jeremijenko is thus aware that there are cultural differences between rodent populations; she recommends to her readers that they compare the behaviours of the rodents in their households with those bred in the labs. Although she herself does not cite the “Rat Park” experiment, she nevertheless writes that “testing ‘biological’ mechanisms without understanding how they are constrained, changed, and modulated by social and external structures (…) based on the assumption that [mice] make adequate biological models but not adequate social, political or ethical models; this division is a little forced, right?” (ibid 40).

Of course, this division is not forced in the ontology of naturalism, where humans are the only one with any kind of “internal” qualities, such as the capacity to produce a society, while their bodies are merely inert and passive materials connecting them to the physical environment (Kohn 7). Because Jeremijenko’s practice is animorphic, however, she reveals that the “natural” world is the field of nonhuman cultures, equally structured by internal qualities such as play and community, while divergent on the level of bodily dynamics. It is not internal properties, such as the desire and capacity for self-care, that are the field of difference between humans and mice. It is rather that mice are different people than humans are, because their personhood is expressed through different bodies. For rodents, for example, nesting functions as a form of mental and physical self-care and thus it is the very physicality of the shoebox cage that can provide emotional comfort.

In “On Vegetable Love: Gardening, Plants and People in the North of England” anthropologist Cathrine Degnen describes the practices of anthropomorphic personhood among British gardeners and the plants that they care for. Degnen’s interest in the human-plant interaction relates to her interest in the arts, specifically her fascination with Andrew Marvell’s love poem “To His Coy Mistress,” where he evokes the (dubious) promise of “a vegetable love” (qtd. in Degnen 151). She carried out her research in the north of England in the early 2000s, thus providing a different than
usual setting for the ethnographic studies of animism. She points out that while it “might be tempting to declare [that human-plant] relations [are] metaphorical and claim that the gardeners are only speaking ‘as if’ plants were people, as everyone ‘really knows’ human beings and plants occupy radically different domains” (152), she believes that “dismissing [these practices] as simply metaphorical is to gloss too easily over how gardeners in north England conceptualize the world within which they live” (164). She summarizes her findings as such:

Over time, I realized that the gardeners I worked with assume a reciprocity of identification between people and plants. Plants, like people, are perceived as exhibiting intentionality and sentience. Plants have likes and dislike; plants find their way and climb through obstructions such as rocks, fences, and plastic sheeting used to try to contain them. They are able to do this because they are clever and they can undo the hard work of the gardener. Plants have culinary needs, they eat food, and they express food preferences. Plants are like human babies in their dietary needs. Plant’s lives, conditions, and quality are paralleled to human life and human health. Plants need to breath and can be smothered. Some plants have manners, others are hooligans. Planets and gardens look best when care is lavished onto them. Some plants have a developed subjectivity attributed to them and can go berserk and run amok, be confused or tricked, and even panic and think ‘oh shit’ whilst others are lazy and need motivating. Plants need vitamins like humans, and, like humans, some plants will bleed if cut.” (160)

The key observation is that these processes of personalisation are facilitated by the attention to the very *physicality* of the plants – the fact that they bleed, breath and sleep are the key features of their personhood. In other words, it is their *physical behaviour* that makes them *cultural* beings - in this way, humans and plants function as interpreters of one another, expressing analogue behaviour on both individual and social level. Degnan notes that “animism is not simply metaphorical (…) but rather [it is] about humanizing the world, and indeed this work calls into question common sense
Reciprocity would suggest that because mice are used as animal models for everything human, from human cancers, diabetes, motivational, aggressive and addictive behavior, sexuality, maternal behavior and for testing anti-anxiety and antidepressant medication, that is, higher cognitive and emotional modeling, then the approximation must work both ways. If they can model us, we can model mice, or put another way, *mice stand in for humans as well as humans stand in for mice.* So go right ahead and empathize, from your highly communicative urban animal point of view. (“Creative Biology” 36, emphasis added)

In another project, “The Tadpole Bureaucratic Protocol,” Jeremijenko takes further the task of animorphing by the most colloquial standards – those of naming, reserved in modern societies mainly for pets, ships and tornados. Jeremijenko is interested in amphibians. “We are witnessing
an extinction of amphibians and frogs right now,” she says in a radio interview about the project, “[that is] more serious than the extinction of dinosaurs. And frogs survived the dinosaurs’ extinction, right? But they are not surviving whatever it is that we are doing” (qtd. in Dissette). Just like mice embody the microbial, social and environmental relations in a given household, tadpoles are receptive to the man-made toxicity in water, especially to endocrine disruptors and t3-mediated hormones. The ingredients in our personal care and cleaning products, BPAs found in plastics and in canned food, pesticides or antibiotics and hormones fed to farmed animals can easily make it into the local water supply and further into the oceans. These disruptors are not only damaging to the health of aquatic animals, but can also alter their sexual and social behaviours by changing the hormonal composure of their bodies (Söffker). This ongoing pollution is difficult to notice, as is common with environmental damage. In “Life and Death in the Anthropocene,” Davis writes that the Anthropocene relies on the “narrative teleology” of white, patriarchal techno-destruction, postponing political and ethical engagement with the promise that “there will be a clear, clean and defined end, rather than the much more probable scenario of ongoing devastation, species extinction, and mutation towards a future that will become increasingly toxic” (354). Aiming to highlight the shared non/human vulnerability to toxicity and deploying her usual campy aesthetics, Jeremijenko constructed strollers for tadpoles. Installed inside the stroller in water samples taken from various neighbourhoods, the tadpoles were named after the politicians responsible for the local water quality, including Pete Grannis and Denise Sheenan of the New York Department of Environmental Conservation. With her usual humour, Jeremijenko stated that she would like for people to take their tadpole strollers out in public: “You can let your neighbors social network with your tadpole” thus leading them into further inquiry into the local water quality, including the organisms living in it (“The Art of Eco-mindshift”). Ideally, the artwork would lead to the meeting of the tadpole and the politician it was named after, eventually making for an interspecies policy gathering. These practices of reinstating nonhumans as persons are particularly timely because of Jeremijenko’s concern with climate change, an issue that she believes artists must respond to by
“taking a global issue and addressing it locally” (qtd. in Dissette). In this local manifestation of the problem, water quality affects multiple species. Jeremijenko’s work thus encourages the spontaneous construction of localised networks of inquiry via relating humans and nonhumans on the axis of personhood.

These concerns culminate in her highly publicized “OOZ” project, the inversion of the word “zoo,” an attempt at “creating a greenspace [as] an invitation for nonhumans to co-habituate with us” (“OOZ”). As the project’s website describes, OOZ is a place without cages, where nonhuman animals remain by choice, providing a site of interaction rather than of passive (and often abusive) voyeurism characteristic of zoos. This “human/animal interface” has two components: “an architecture of reciprocity” i.e. relations are reversible, any action that you initiate towards the animal, the animal can initiate back at you, and “an information architecture of collective observation and interpretation” (ibid). Providing species-specific conveniences and “technologies that animals can master,” OOZ deploys modes of interspecies communications by animorphic means. For example, animals can control human visitors by pressing the appropriately designed buttons in order to ask for food. The message is then translated as, for instance, “Yo! If you are going to stare how ‘bout inserting 25 cents and delivering a dose of that biscuit?” The stylised language of the translation shows that it is never de facto assumed that this is what the geese would say. At the risk of producing the most jargonic sentence of the year, I would say that it is rather than the geese gessepomorphise humans as much as humans anthropomorphise geese in a process of mimesis that underdetermines the distribution of natural and cultural properties. To encourage this process further, Jeremijenko worked with a chef on a project called “Recipes for Geese and People,” in which “food is bait for interspecies social contact” (Solomon). Where the animals reside, the light switches can be turned on and off by both humans and badgers. Jeremijenko sees in this a reversal of Pavlov’s dog experiments. The animals are expected to train humans to behave in a certain way, both learning each other’s reaction to stimuli. Jeremijenko sees OOZ as a “an experiment in collective knowledge” and the project also functions as “SIMOOZ,” a simulated
online database, where information can be annotated and human reactions to different animal calls and behaviour can be compared (“OOZ”).

While Jeremijenko’s goal is to improve the quality of life for nonhuman animals, she also aims to “develop urban animal populations in Zeewolde and particularly within the Verbleeding trajectory,” aware as she is of the necessity of what anthropologist Anna Tsing calls “collaborative survival,” which always requires “cross-species coordination” (“Mushroom At the End” 155). In her *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, Tsing writes that the capitalist narrative of development has “segregated humans and political identities, obscuring collaborative survival” (48). Yet, she continues, “we are surrounded by many world-making projects, human and not human. World-making projects emerge from practical activities of making lives; in the process [they] alter our planet” (ibid 52). Like Tsing, who devoted her book to human/fungal cultures, Jeremijenko is aware that nonhumans have their own cultural projects and much of her work is providing a blueprint for interspecies communication patterns.

3 Jeremijenko’s human-bird communication device. Web.

Jeremijenko’s animorphism might be incorrectly mistaken for an anthropomorphic
projection, rather than an attempt at creating a platform of *morphing* relations between the very qualities that different ontologies associate with nature or culture. Her practice favours localised and personalised engagements, activating the generic framework of personhood for the purposes of addressing social issues in specific non/human communities. Rather than an anthropomorphic projection, it is a strategy of relating through personalising where the personhood of each participant cannot be taken for granted unless it is continually embedded in a web of interaction. As she asks us to reconsider who counts as a person, it is worth mentioning that the same question is now posed in the legal sphere, not only in relation to “biological agents.” Jeremijenko explains that her work often stems from an interest in the correlation of property rights and personhood: “If non-human organisms own property,” she asks, “will that change their explicit value in a market-based participatory democracy?” At the times when the 14th amendment grants personhood rights to corporations, she continues, “[trees can] by virtue of their shareholder and board status in the OOZ corporation, themselves become corporate/person, or active agents – new citizens” (“Tree X”). Jeremijenko’s “Tree X Office” is an open space office in New York owned by a tree, who acts as the landlord, as well as can self-monitor, tweet and capitalise on its resource with the technology provided for it. Interestingly, this project takes inspiration from an incident of 19th century animism in the US, one more proof that the ontology is mobilised regularly on either side of the Great Divides of colonial modernity. “The Tree That Owns Itself,” a white oak which fell in 1942, used to be located in Athens, Georgia and was once conferred all legal land rights within eight feet of it by William Henry Jackson, reportedly a professor at the University of Georgia. An unconventional office space for rent, Jeremijenko’s “Tree X Office” produces power and provides wi-fi. By paying the rent one can supply the tree with resources that it decides how to use: “augmenting the soil with biochar, companion plantings, and other actions at the tree’s discretion” (ibid). As such, Jeremijneko’s work intersects with a larger discourse of personalisations in law, although these can be as promising as they can be ominous.
3.1.2. Epistemic Accountability

In the early 1970s, US Justice William Douglas, arguing for the development of a ski resort despite the protests of an environmental protection agency, offered this dissenting opinion:

The ordinary corporation is a ‘person’ for purposes of the adjudicatory processes (...) So it should be as respects valleys, alpine meadows, rivers, lakes, estuaries, beaches, ridges, groves of trees, swampland, or even air that feels the destructive pressures of modern technology and modern life (...) The voice of the inanimate object, therefore, should not be stilled. (Percival et. al. 113-114)

Jeremijneko is not the only artist who questions the way personhood can be ascribed to semi-abstract entities like corporations but not to non/human communities threatened by exacerbating environmental damage. “Overtures,” launched by the art platform articolo in 2000 is a collective, interdisciplinary project concerned with the future of natural resources, focused among
others on developing novel methods of communicating scientific research to the public and on creating sensory intimacy between human and nonhuman persons. A collaboration between artists, educators, designers, media representatives, scientists and corporations, it locates in art the responsibility of forcing a paradigm shift within the aesthetics and experiences of climate change. From the outset, “Call me!,” a little-known, three-part art project by German sound artist Kalle Laar looks unremarkable. A gallery visitor would be presented with a rather dodgy business card, its design reminiscent of the 1990s, with a bold red and yellow font superposed over a picture of a snowy mountain. “Call me!,” the card demands. The phone number listed, however, connects to a real glacier in the southern part of the Austrian Alps. Near the small gauging station built by the Commission for Glaciology almost four decades ago, Laar had installed a microphone that transmits unedited sounds from the area: water flows of various intensities, or the sporadic cracking of the glacier. As one of only five such glaciers worldwide, the Vernagt Glacier discharges into a singular water flow - a powerful, noisy stream in the summer and a quiet creek in the winter. This makes the glacier of specific interest to scientists, as most glaciers discharge into multiple streams, thus making it harder to collect data. The microphone is connected to a mobile phone system that, once called, transmits the signal to the nearest antenna. Another microphone was installed on the Pasterze Glacier in Austria, at the request of the “Ars Electronica” festival in Linz and the Central Institute for Meteorology and Geodynamics in Vienna. Like with the Vernagt Glacier, the power for the project was supplied by the sun and additional solar panels were installed to facilitate it. Contingent on the sun’s participation and general weather conditions, the second project ended abruptly when a strong heat wave from the Sahara region in late May caused the ice to melt at a pace never observed before – the water rose by as much as a metre compared to the previous years’ few centimetres. All the electronics were flooded and their destruction served as the evidence of this new phenomenon.
In relation to Jeremijenko’s acknowledgment of the fact that corporations are enjoying the legal status of persons, it is notable that the second part of Laar’s project, “Hotline” provides business cards with phone numbers that connect to institutions that are in different ways contributing to climate change or are in the position to intervene. Among them are atomic, coal and tidal power plants, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, environmental ministries of various countries, or FRONTEC, the European Union border security unit. The aforementioned cheesy design of the business card ensures that they cannot be mistaken for the actual ones – it is doubtful that FRONTEX would use a pink-hue card with three different lurid fonts on it urging to call them. Laar writes:

While some of the numbers published on these fake business cards are hard to find, none of them are really secret (…) This project asks the question, ‘Are you afraid of the post-fossil fuel age?’ and encourages the participant to share her or his concerns with a person that will be affected in the future in the same way as the caller, but is working in an institution or a plant that has a direct link to the impact of future changes. [The project] is not about the call
“Defroster,” the third and final part of the project combines the live connection of the previous two parts with an added recorded material. The name refers to the melting of the permafrost regions in Siberia. Yet, as it is close to impossible for the microphone to pick up the sound of methane releasing from the Siberian soil, Laar foregrounds the change in wildlife by measuring the change in temperature. Thus, the microphone was directed at insect swarms, whose presence in the region is unprecedented in such large quantities, carrying disease from one region of the world to another. “Defroster” provides a connection to the Tiger Mosquitos, carriers of the West Nile virus, who have recently moved to Siberia, as well as the information about the rising temperatures.

Even though that it was relatively small, the project attracted quite intensive audience participation. Laar did not expect anyone to call the glaciers during the exhibition, hoping rather that the decision to dial the number would be made in the privacy of one’s own home. Within the first year, he reports, more than 20,000 people have called; some developed an emotional connection to the mountains and started calling regularly (ibid 5). Interestingly, Laar adds, the participants did not doubt that the number provided connected to the actual glacier, investing trust into this experience rather than taking it to be an artistic provocation (ibid). The animorphic artist is not preoccupied with producing better representations of climate change that would then provoke to activist action, but stages relational platforms for the emergence of nonhuman personhood that can be engaged locally, prompting the weaving of personhood through developing personalised relations with the glaciers. As Laar describes it, “[The artwork] is a series of interactive projects in acoustical emotional field research (…) on the global impacts of climate change” (ibid 1). He is interested in scaling down the overbearing issue of climate change to a personalised relation. “For any participator,” Laar writes on the project website, “active calling provides the possibility of individually experiencing locations normally unreachable and mostly neglected by headline news” (ibid). Active calling demands at a minimal level a gesturing towards the nonhuman rather than a
contemplation of its representation. Decisions have to be made about the frequency and length of each call. To further quote Swanstrom, these spaces where personalised and open-ended relations between the humans and the glacier can play out is nevertheless focused on the singularity of each mountain:

It also calls attention to this glacier, not as a remote, vast abstraction, severed from human contact, but as a real-world site of fragility, worthy of protection and conservation. Instead of cutting humans out of the picture, a frequent tendency in conservation practice and aesthetics, the glacier invites connection. (4)

To describe glaciers as “fragile” might seem surprising. While Anselm Franke compares the desire to archive our own demise with the impulse of “the old anthropologist figure, who feverishly records as much as he can before it all goes away, as it is going away” (“The Fates of Negativity” 148), Laar’s artwork departs from a straightforward “conservation.” He rather prefers for the glaciers to emerge out of this interaction as materially vulnerable, sharing with humans the possibility of death or demise: “[The glaciers] resemble giant living creatures, which are slowly and in many cases frighteningly quickly shrinking, literally leaking off and disappearing” (3). While the artist does not engage with local history, it is worth noting that the glacier in question has a reputation for posing a threat to human communities. The locals consider The Vernagtferner one of the cursed peaks in Austria (Bressan). In Alpine lore, glaciers were considered aggregates of frozen souls, where those damned to be greedy and selfish were to dwell for infinity. The melting of the glacier, then, carries with it the additional weight of releasing the captured souls. In the case of the Vernagtferner, these concerns grew over time as the meltdowns did indeed cause several dangerous floods. In the 1600s, the glacier obstructed the valley of Rofen by forming an unstable ice dam that then caused one of the most well-documented catastrophes in the year 1600. Catastrophes followed in 1678, 1771 and 1845. Current human activity “in the form of anthropogenic climate change has
Andra Fisher, a glaciologist with the Austrian Academy of Sciences predicts that much as 50% of glacier volume loss by the 2050s, which would make the melting glaciers one of the most immediately visible signs of climate change and pose serious threats to the non/human communities living around the Alpine mountains (Berwyn).

Yet, even though there exists a shared human/glacier vulnerability, to what extent could glaciers be described as “persons”? Anthropologist Julie Cruikshank recalls the time in the 1970s and the 1980s, when she was living in the Yukon mountains, undertaking field research in the history of the Gold Rush, the construction of the Alaskan highway and the progressing colonial governance of Canada. Instead, however, her respondents, which included senior indigenous women, persistently redirected the conversation to their personal encounters with glaciers, which
they described – echoing Degnans recollection of her interviews with English gardeners and Jeremijenko’s commentary on mice – as prone to “mak[ing] moral judgments and punish[ing] infractions […] they see and have ‘eyes like the moon.’ They resent humans looking directly at them (…) Glaciers have a sense of smell: their olfactory abilities are especially astute and particularly offended by odours arising from ‘cooking with grease’” (242). Physical sensation and the bodily form of the glacier as well as its sensory capacities are what creates the ground for their personalisation. To again think in parallel with Amerindian perspectivism, while Viveiros de Castro argues that it applies only to animals, Cruikshank makes an argument for glaciers. Describing perspectivism, which Descola argues to be a subset of animism (see Latour, “Perspectivism: ‘Type’ or ‘Bomb’?”), she writes:

In this ontology, everyone understands that [nonhumans] perceive the world from distinct points of view. This should not be confused with relativism [i.e.] that culturally distinct groups interpret the world differently. Perspectivism is more fundamental: it supposes that all beings see the world in the same way: what changes is the world they see, and indeed they see different things. (244)

Instead of being divided by culture, persons are divided by nature: “the radically diverse bodily forms and behaviours they exhibit, what they eat, how they move, how they communicate, what they see (or fail to see)” (245). Paying attention to this corporeal personhood, Cruikshank points to the melting of the glacier and its transitory nature as well as its aural presence. While Laar describes the glacier as fragile and vulnerable, Cruikshank writes that “surging glaciers (…) are sometimes solid, sometimes liquid, and always floating. They are shape-shifters of magnificent proportions (…) Aurally, they are disturbingly noisy. Everyone who has experienced proximity to a glacier surge refers to the cracking, sometimes thunderously explosive noise that they make” (248). Commenting on “Call me!,” Elizabeth Swanstrom writes that “it is the voice of the glacier that
matters, rather than its visual features” (2). As Laar states, the scientific devices and the tools of the artist were used not to create a representation or an object, but a platform of communication. An ontology in which glaciers are persons has been activated by providing an opportunity for hearing and listening. An inquiry into who exists precedes any kind of epistemological questions. The mobile phones used for the project, he notices, have been in use for years, yet their presence “didn’t seem to have affected the general idea of communication or who to communicate with” (6, emphasis added). His artistic practice is not only concerned with communicating the research related to climate change, but also with drawing the glaciers into the circle of personhood as communication partners. As he writes, “this little mobile instrument has been invented to communicate, so why not think about quality rather than quantity? Not on the technical side, but in terms of new partners to communicate with” (ibid, emphasis added). In the Anthropocene, communicating with these partners includes the awareness of a collective vulnerability; as Cruikshank writes, seeing a glacier as a person requires “a recognition of our collective imperilment” (qtd. in Ghosh, “Author’s Response” 954).

It is this human-glacier communication that is the prerequisite for making another call, this time to the corporations and institutions that are in the position to intervene. While the data has not been revealed and we cannot be sure how many calls were made to any of the coal mines or governmental institutions, Laar’s effortless inclusion of the corporate partner into the project testifies to the entanglement of various personalisations within environmental, economic, legal, political and personal spheres. Cruikshank, concerned specifically with the relevance of different types of knowledge to environmental protection notes that “scientific studies (…) attempt to disentangle natural cycles from anthropogenic causes, whereas oral traditions from the region merge natural histories of landscape with local stories [and new knowledge is created] by focusing on relationships and transactions among human and nonhuman persons” (243). Increasingly, it would seem that the latter is a more realist approach – as Amitav Ghosh notices, the parameters of mimetic realism are “based on the epistemic regime of the modern era” (Fan 945) rather than on a
loyalty to the real. As Kenneth Pomeranz adds, “our bourgeois worldviews have compelled ‘respectable’ [realist culture] to ‘stick to the possibilities,’ while probabilistic and human-centred sciences have excluded from these possibilities nonlinear, catastrophic change in our ‘natural environment’” (947). While his assessment of the sciences seems rather misinformed, his comment does reveal a desire to redefine epistemological questions in light of climate change, a dominant trend in cultural production at large. Seeing in personalisation a point of entry into epistemological issues, Laar writes that developing a personal relation to the glaciers should pose questions that “deal with embracing our growing knowledge. Which values need to be redefined, conserved or rediscovered? What needs to be changed regarding the limitation of resources, the changing climate (…) And what level of personal responsibility do we take for our local and international actions?” (5). Through the glacier’s hominisation, through “bringing [it] to human scale” (Swanstrom 4) Laar creates the possibilities for knowing not through the gathering of data but in an experiential manner.

Yet, these animorphic platforms of interaction were established with financial and substantive support from scientific institutions, such as the Commission for Glaciology of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Munich, and corporations, such as Vodafone Group Research & Development in Germany, thus posing questions as to the relation between personalisation, objective knowledge and capitalist commodification. As Laar explains, the project was specifically designed to bring climate change closer to the public: “For more than thirty years, these scientists were measuring the Vernagt Perner, and for at least twenty years they have been trying to explain to the general public that a radical change is happening, but they were unable to reach a broader audience” (5). During periods of technological and social change, as Michel Callon writes, forms of knowledge change by attaching themselves to particular networks of dissemination –facts that “network” well and insert themselves into the correct channels of power are often solidified as common sense. For example, Cruikshank notes that upon the advent of modernity, “new landscape stories took root and gained authority as official common sense” while local knowledge was dismissed as superstition, even though the colonisers could hardly move
around the new territories without their local guides (247). Could it be that Laar’s intervention marks a worrying convergence between different types of personalisation and animation? If the previously mentioned strands of the contemporary theory, such as object-oriented ontologies, want to figure humans as objects, perhaps it is precisely because under capitalism and in the midst of an environmental crisis, it seems a much safer and desirable option to be objects, rather than humans, whose existence is often not as highly valued as the technological commodities that they produce. In an interview, philosopher Achille Mbembe says:

The argument I was making was that in an age when capitalism has become somewhat of a religion — a religion of objects, a religion that believes in objects having become animated, having a soul of which we partake through the operations of consumption which means that capitalism has become a form of animism. In such an age the old division between subject and object is no longer as clear as it used to be and that in fact, if we look carefully at the operations of consumption world-wide today, we might observe that, many people want to become objects, or be treated as such, if only because becoming an object one might end up being treated better than as a human. [sic] (Blaser)

In this light, Laar’s efforts to connect his audiences with individuals working at plants and institutions seem rather futile, only perpetuating the logic that has it that systemic changes in policy can be achieved by individual participation in art projects. His engagement with corporate partners is rather troubling and indeed makes “institutions” one of the persons with whom participants could interact. In this case, it would be “the relation itself” (of making the call) that is anthropomorphised, as Ernst Halbmayer notices of certain types of animism (16), rather than the institution itself. As Elizabeth Povinelli argues in Geoontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism, the “animation” of nonhumans is not only an element of biopolitical governance, but also “a set of discourses, affects, and tactics used in late liberalism to maintain or shape the coming relationship of the distinction
between Life and Nonlife” (17). Within Western modernity, those who have approached nonhumans as alive have been subjugated to “civilizing missions,” be they the witch hunts or colonialism. Yet, in light of the fact that corporate institutions are now considered persons, the interplay between Life and NonLife becomes a more ambiguous strategy of governance – where this distinction is ascribed and how it is upheld is crucial to the way in which late settler liberalism both maintains itself and becomes vulnerable. Laar’s project ambiguously taps into this dynamic. In a recently published article, “Creativity versus branding: totemism, animism and the pursuit of uniqueness in fashion,” Kasper Tang Vangkilde argues that the economy of branding is inherently animist in that it produces brand identities, with which humans interact “as if they were people” (186). Rane Willerslev writes that animism is not a dogmatic system but “‘something that emerges in particular contexts of close practical involvement” (“Soul Hunters” 8). It can be engaged to further various aims, including questionable ones. As an ontology in which nonhumans are recognised as persons, it is not inherently ethical or unethical, but depends strongly on the context. Laar’s work is symptomatic of a certain entanglement. On the one hand, the practices of personalising the glacier are presented as innovative and ethical as they aid in communicating scientific research and raising the concerns regarding climate change. On the other, the almost unacknowledged personalisation of the institutions raises question as to whether the project is not a public relations stunt for the sponsors involved, similar to the function of creating a “brand persona.” Vodafone presents itself as a highly “eco-conscious” company, devoting multiple pages of its websites to highlighting its environmentally friendly profile; their involvement in Laar’s project is certainly a part of the plan to boost this very brand personality. This does not mean that the project itself does not deploy animorphic means to redefine knowledge or that the projects is inherently corporate in nature. It rather means that the techniques of personalisation can be deployed both by artists and by institutions. While the numbers that Laar provides on the cards are not the same as the institutions that sponsor his project, the dynamic revealed through the project remains symptomatic. It could be said that by providing a “human” connection to governmental
organisation – a number of someone who works them – Laar exposes these institutions to some unwanted attention and a few uncomfortable questions. Yet, the object of our attention should not be Laar’s work but the paradigms in liberal capitalism that hijack processes of personalisation for corporate entities, while rendering others into objects and commodities.

3.1.3. Animorphic Pragmatism

After all, the insurrection of knowledge depends on a certain sort of person who is either ethically otherwise and seeks to persevere in being so or who seeks to be ethically otherwise and acts on and perseveres in this desire. Both of these sorts of persons manifest a kind of wilfulness in the face of dominant formations of knowledge – the will to know what exceeds, lies alongside, or refuses the functional coherences and formal systematizations that subjugate knowledge.

(Povinelli, ‘The Will to be Otherwise” 11)

In contrast to the naturalist discourse that has it that projecting inertness onto nonhumans is “reasonable,” where rationalism is defined alongside modernist humanism, Jeremijenko’s and Laar’s practices are pragmatic, that is concerned with practical solutions to problems. Animorphism invites a consideration of art not as the “other” of reason, a metaphor, or a different mythological narrative but as a strategy. As Giraud and Soulard write, art in the Anthropocene requires:

an embrace of a fully pragmatist perspective, where rationality is not considered as a monolithic institution of overarching judgments and divisions, but instead as an intrinsic and collective practice open to revision and continuous self-correction. Far from any ruthless simplification that considers rationality as unilateral coercion, reasoning should be understood as a truly dynamic and plastic relation between what we do with concepts and
With this in mind, the animorphism in “OOZ” contributes a plasticity necessary in redefining pragmatism in an activist context for the Anthropocene. As Jeremijenko writes, “the open-ended world model (...) sustains multiple post-facto interpretations (...) the project is open to the empirical richness of the actual interactions generated [by the nonhumans], to [their] characters and moods” (“OOZ”). As such, it is the very under-determination of these practices that allows for knowledge to emerge as enriched with contextual information specific to individual non/human communities. Furthermore, although data is gathered and produced, it is not enclosed as a representation but rather operates as a processual interface that continually develops through foregrounding personalisation: “The interface is not passive and it does not produce data that claims to passively represent” (ibid). Laar is also interested in open-ended and accessible knowledge platforms that can be “[accessed] in real time, any time, from anywhere [activating] this perspective in connection with [the] social, political, and scientific [reality]” in an experiential manner (3). Art is tied with the methods of producing and communicating knowledge through providing the public with specific “tangible patterns they can identify with. As such, it is better suited than any genre to making complex, multifaceted topics, such as the economics of water, accessible to the general public while at the same time providing a fresh, existentially relevant perspective” (ibid). The work of relating that the artists initiate is on-going: the phone line remains open for months or even years after Laar’s exhibition of the phone cards in a conventional gallery, and builds a platform for the further creation of non/human relations. Jeremijenko’s OOZ project is similarly an open platform in a constant development, with a growing number of persons participating, and her open-source materials for aspiring bio-artists are available online and in libraries. Reason is here not conceived as instrumental use, but as a utilitarian tool for developing a divergent relation to the environment, one that is founded on a mutual vulnerability to toxicity, decay, climate and time.

If Giraud and Soulard argue that the reconsideration of epistemology that art in the
Anthropocene should produce must be based on a bi-directional revision of unchallenged concepts of “nature” and “reason,” I argue that this reconsideration must extend into ontology if we are to truly escape the modernist way of splitting nature from culture. In her 1999 article, Bird-David first argued that animism was a relational episistemology, a divergent understanding of what knowledge is and how it operates; where knowledge stands for knowing how to relate well: “Against ‘I think, therefore I am’ stands ‘I relate, therefore I am’ and ‘I know as I relate’” (78). Viveiros de Castro observers similarly that: “[F]or Amerindian shamans to know is to personify, moderns need to objectify – or desubjectify – in order to know” (“Exchanging Perspectives” 468). As he already noticed in his commentary to Bird-David’s 1999 article, it would be a mistake to classify animism as an epistemology, thus reducing it to a different way of accessing the world rather than a different world all-together that determines the very relation between knowledge and being already differently: “While this posits animism as a different way of defining what knowledge is, and how to know well, it can leave unchallenged the definition itself of the world there is to know (…) Anthropologists persist in thinking that in order to explain a non-Western ontology we must (…) reduce it to an epistemology” (“Comments” 79).

As is the case in anthropology, in thinking about integrating the nonhuman into politics through art-activism that aligns itself with epistemological matters, such as the communication of scientific knowledge or the awareness of environmental damage, one must ask whether collapsing the questions of being into the questions of access and knowledge would not ultimately fuel the naturalist split that animism disregards. In other words, reducing Jeremijenko’s and Laar’s efforts purely to their surface goal of communicating or producing knowledge misses the ontological operations of redefining personhood that they perform in order to achieve their aim. Both Jeremijenko’s and Laar’s projects question not only how we know persons, but what kind of persons exist in the first place and how can their presence be accentuated. Thus, I argue that the reconsideration of ontology that animorphic art in the Anthropocene could produce should be based on the revision of unchallenged concepts of personhood and culture as properties that unite the
human and nonhuman world, contingent on sustained and localised practices. Subsequently, although both projects are envisioned as experiments in communicating and creating knowledge, they provoke ontological and ethical questions with the gesture of drawing nonhumans into the circuit of personhood. For Laar, what matters is not only the content of what we communicate, but who do we consider worthy of listening to, while for Jeremijenko efforts should be taken to enable a two-way communication between various persons – for this reason, she wants trees to use social media.

Although parts of Laar’s and Jeremijenko’s projects can be exhibited as artefacts, it is rather the very action of relating to nonhuman persons that is the gist of the artworks. These miniscule behaviours are hard to capture in their totality inside representational forms. It is rather that these projects initiate actions independently of an object in a gallery or even the presence of the artist. In this way, they penetrate into everyday life. Both for Jeremijenko and for Laar, these small actions contribute to a re-imagining of relations between humans and nonhumans. Jeremijenko herself identified her long-term goal as redefining the ways in which we measure how “successful” a country is not by its production output but by the health of its inhabitants. Health is not internal, individual, or pharmaceutical. Rather than that, following her definition, “it is external and shared” (“The Art of Eco-mindshift”). Because she understands that the environment is the field of nonhuman cultures, she promotes an pragmatic ethic of care that could contribute to opening up to an ontology in which nonhuman persons are capable of contributing politically, culturally and socially. There is little idealism or romanticism in “care” here, only a simple pragmatism in preserving mutualism that can help species survive. Puig de la Bellacasa writes that we should “[understand] caring as something we do that extends a vision of care as an ethically charged practice, one that has been at the forefront of feminist concern with devalued labours” (90). Feminist ethics of care find their roots in concerns about devaluing women’s emotional and domestic work that, although considered worthless in market terms is in fact foundational to sustaining the labour force and social structures that facilitate economy and culture. Drawing
parallels between the situation of women and nonhumans, ethics of care point out the fact that activist practices might also be considered worthless in market terms, yet it is imperative that they are sustained and foregrounded: “from a feminist standpoint, care is a signifier of devalued ordinary labors that are crucial for getting us through the day (…) productive labors that support livable relationalities” (ibid 93); a care for the sustainability of life (Cuomo).

Care for the nonhuman is not a romantic gesture but a material labour, a matter of survival, pragmatics in the present, not only in the imaginary utopian world or an idealised past but in the here and now (Rose). When Laar admits that “Call me!” is foremost about activating the potential for a different future by taking action in the present, he aligns with Stenger’s definition of pragmatism as “the care of the possible” (qtd. in Bordeleau 11), and with Povinelli’s insistence that if we are to bring ontology into politics it is always to motivate ourselves to “think otherwise.” For both Jeremijenko and Laar, this means the inclusion of nonhumans into the social and personal sphere. Writing about materialist and feminist ethics, Karen Barad proposes that “[we should] not merely use nonhumans as tools to think with, but in thinking with them to face our ethical obligations to them, for they are not merely tools for us but real living beings” (“Nature’s Queer Performativity” 127). Working responsibly with the nonhuman in the Anthropocene means providing opportunities for persons to respond, not simply framing them within existing representational apparatus. To come back to Bird-David’s article, artistic events are one type of social activity in which humans and nonhumans are actively made and unmade as persons. Pace Bird-David, performing and engaging with nonhuman persons happens simultaneously, thus such activities are not a representations of social practices but are the practices in question. For the Nayaka, the performer’s job is to bring the devaru to life and at the same time to allow others present at the event to engage with them – so nonhuman persons also facilitate the reproduction of interpersonal relationships between humans. Jeremijenko hopes to orchestrate interspecies community meetings and Laar wants to foster communication between those who are “afraid of the fossil fuel age,” whether they be gallery visitors or public officials. Whether any of these projects
achieves more than a cathartic function remains to be seen; so far, they can be described as symptoms of both adjusting to climate change and the trends of engaging with nonhumans in design and art. If knowing and being are in-the-making, Jeremijenko’s and Laar’s practices resonate with the appeal of The Invisible Committee: “[In the Anthropocene] a revolutionary perspective no longer focuses on an institutional reorganization of society, but on the technical configuration of worlds” (95).

Both artists attempt to formulate pragmatic answers to the overbearing issues of climate change and environmental degradation. Both are a type of an animorphic pragmatism: they show that epistemological questions about the nonhuman should be posed within an altered ontological framework; they align with practice, materialism, realism and experiential modes of art rather than with the more imaginative or fabulist ones; they foreground the care of the possible, locating in present action a potential for a different future; and they allow nonhuman personhood to emerge on a local, communal platform rather than produce representations.
3.2. Personhood of the non-living: animorphic museums of decay

Animism may be an ontology, or an academic construct—but is it not also a tactic, a method, an instrument of insurrection, a war machine? “Subjectify the universe,” says Ursula Le Guin. “Subjectify the universe—because look where objectifying has gotten us.”
(Reinert 114)

In 2011, artist John Quigley drowned the Vitruvian Man in the ice-cold waters of the North Pole. Funded by Greenpeace, the enormous artwork the size of four Olympic swimming pools “[bears] the unequivocal message that the humanist image of man as the measure, and measurer, of all things is being eroded by global climate change” (Williams 22). Working in one of the world’s harshest environments atop a Greenpeace icebreaker, Quigley was assisted by volunteers from the Arctic Sunrise crew. They helped him assemble the Vitruvian Man out of copper usually used in solar panels. Images of their replica of the famous da Vinci sketch against the stark whiteness of slowly melting ice soon circulated in major media outlets. Expedition leader Frida Bengetsson

7 The Vitruvian Man by John Quigley. Web.
commented in an official statement that “the image illustrates how our dependency on fossil fuels is tipping the balance of the relationship between nature and humans” (“Press release”), drawing a parallel between the over-use of our natural resources and the changing landscape of the Arctic.

Quigley further elaborated:

> We came here to create the ‘Melting Vitruvian Man,’ after da Vinci's famous sketch of the human body, because climate change is literally eating into the body of our civilization. When he did this sketch it was the Enlightenment, the Renaissance [sic], the dawn of this innovative age that continues to this day, but our use of fossil fuels is threatening that. (ibid)

The Melting Vitruvian Man captures the incoherence of anthropocentrism and of the “warm pride” at its heart – a criticism of trespassing by trespassing, a criticism of pollution by mimicking pollution, and –what is left unsaid - an absence of a criticism of the colonial, capitalist and patriarchal foundations of the Anthropocene, doubled here by the act of transposing the likeness of a European, male, able body onto yet another unexplored land. It is not only that the *Homo sapiens* by their very specificity escape this humanist over-determination, their varied bodies spilling out of the confines of this universal sketch, their civilisations far exceeding those of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. It is also that the environment serves here only as a background to the epic drama of human extinction, overdetermined as mute, depersonalised, inert, waiting for humans to animate it with meaning. The *Time* writes about the artwork: “Let’s face it. All Arctic ice looks about the same. Cold, and white, and deserted. But now, there’s one piece to watch” (Ko). Is it only when canonical images of certain bodies take the center stage, when this “[unreflective] heroism of geo-engineering” (Kainulainen 120) is made visible that the environmental disaster is worth looking at? Commenting on the artwork, Maggie Kainulainen states that “it is the representations of climate change that ‘peddle’ common sense that dissuade [the] rearticulation of the social [as more than
human]” (121). She suggests that straightforward and apparent representations of climate change need to be complicated, made messy with multiple contexts and doubts as to their seeming givenness. Undeniably, the icecaps are melting at a rate imperceptible to humans and our eyes are eager to detect familiarity. Is the human form necessary in order to talk about decay on a more-than-human scale? If so, how can it be used within the framework of non-representational anthromorphism?

Thus returns the problem of representation. What is the place of representations within animorphism, an ontology that takes the practical construction of personhood in the last instance as its determinant? Is there a way to introduce the humanoid, or a certain generic humanity, without re-introducing the anthropos, to humanise the nonhuman without projecting the Vitruvian Man on it and onto ourselves? Can humanoid forms ever be re-arranged by nonhumans, could they be rented out to them in a process that opens the human up, democratises it further, makes everyone fully human, rather than confining us and them in the image of the anthropos, which most of us can never quite exactly fit? Animorphism does not abandon humans; neither does it fall into the drive to transcend into a trans-humanist future, or to persecute humans for their failings as a seemingly unified species. What is at stake is the baring of the generic personhood in its specificity and particularity under the essentialist and deterministic images like the “Vitruvian Man,” and a further lending of it to the nonhuman, rather than a denial or a transcendence of humanity in itself.

In this chapter, I want to look at the way in which artists and activists Jason deCairnes Taylor and Olayami Dabls engage the humanoid form in order to occlude it and lend it to the nonhuman, thus presenting a model of animorphic personhood that I will call rusting, occluded, or submerged. If in Jeremijenko’s and Laar’s work we have seen a model of nonhuman personhood that operates through an immanent mimesis, where in the flux of behaviour humans and nonhumans are models for one another, in Taylor and Dabls personhood enters a more complex relation with representational forms. The humanoid image is used as a decoy, allowing for the emergence of non-representational anthromorphism through the subversion of the very images that it lends for
the interpretation of nonhuman persons. Furthermore, if Jeremijenko and Laar showed us how animorphism has a pragmatic relation to epistemology, Taylor’s and Dabls’s practice demonstrates how settler liberal governance can be resisted through an animorphic redefinition of the museum as the place of nonhuman cultures. Decay, rusting and drowning will be central to these cultures, thus embodying the above-mentioned mode of political resistance that Elizabeth Povinelli labels “the animist” – that is, a figure of both governance and resistance that confuses the maintenance of the distinction between Life and NonLife. The framework of governance that she calls “geo-ontological” emerged as the new biopolitics in the Anthropocene, no longer focused solely on the governance of individual bodies, but on upholding the distinction between what is alive and what is inert (“Geoontologies”). What, then, if we personalise without life, if we start personalisation from the very ambiguity between the living and the dead, thus drawing a different horizon of activism in the times of extinction? Placing their activist exploration within the territory of the ocean and the industrial city, both marked by specific histories of decay, Taylor and Dabls show us how histories of “rusting” are re-framed by nonhuman persons, thus foregrounding particular concerns of multi-species communities.

3.2.1. The Human Face of the Ocean

It's really hard to think of [the ocean] - something that's just so plain and so enormous, as fragile. It's simply too massive, too vast, too endless.

-Jason deCairnes Taylor (“An Underwater Art Museum”)
“At high tide, you might barely know they’re there. But as the water level of the Thames comes and goes twice a day with the tide, the four ghostly heads – and the horses they sit atop – slowly emerge fully into view” (Ellis-Petersen). In her review of Jason deCaires Taylor’s “The Rising Tide,” an installation comprised of four sculptures just outside the Parliament in London, Hannah Ellis-Petersen writes that by letting the work emerge and disappear alongside the movement of the tides, Taylor comments on the capital’s obsession with speed and construction. There is a grim, alert undertone to this cycle, a nod towards the history of environmental disappearances that humanity had caused and endured throughout its history, a theme recurrent in Taylor’s work. Atop four life-sized horses there sit four humanoid figures, each head replaced with an oil well pump. This apocalypse is specific and the ocean is its setting, tainted with our fossil fuel dependence. For a month, the artwork reminded those with offices near the bankside of the Vauxhall bridge in London, politicians and businessmen with real influence on climate change, just what awaits in consequence of their work, or their disengagement.

At a first glance, Taylor’s artwork parallels another sculpture that addresses the topic of
climate change through the aesthetic of submergence. “Follow the leaders,” renamed on the Internet as “Politicians discuss climate change,” by Isaac Cordal shows a world in which it is already too late – the sculpture portrays a group of men possibly debating whether climate catastrophe is real while salty sea water is seconds away from pouring into their throats.

Both sculptures signify our helplessness, a mute rebellion, a silent shout – a genre of ironic, aesthetic helplessness specific to neoliberal capitalism that offers at best “an exacerbated awareness of how we are trapped” (Shaviro, “Accelerationist Aesthetics”). It is only what happens to Taylor’s work after its initial exhibition that makes his practice animorphic. Next to Betty Beaumont, he is one of the first artists to push land art into a new territory – the ocean. Most known for the creation of “The Underwater Museum,” a vast underwater installation, which commenced in 2006 and spans over 800 sculptures, his first experimentation with submergence was the “Marine Correspondent,” a simple sculpture depicting a man sitting at a desk. It was submerged at the coast of Grenada in an area decimated by the hurricane Ivan in 2004. Taylor developed the marine, pollutant-free cement with a neutral PH with the supervision of the local scientists. He had previously expressed his
dissatisfaction with the environmental cost of his artworks: “I used to make art installations at exhibitions and afterwards, I would always have to store all the sculptures. It was really demotivating, just creating more mass for the planet – it already has so much” (qtd. in Gocova 36). Working with this type of cement and submerging the sculptures was first a way to lower Taylor’s own carbon footprint, while hoping that the cement could be appropriated by the marine species. What happened exceeded expectations – the ocean took over. The highly durable, pollutant-free cement, twenty times stronger than its terrestrial counterpart, was designed to withhold immense water pressure. The nooks in the folds of the material provide shelter for crustaceans and fish. These artificial reefs attract various marine animals such as sponges, algae and corals, thus increasing reef biomass by initiating a support network for an entire ecosystem. The sculptures are strategically placed downstream just before larval coral spawning occurs, yet not early enough for other animals to take hold of it before the corals mature. Even a sculpture of a Volkswagen Beetle “has an internal living habitat to encourage crustaceans such as lobsters and sea urchins” (“An Underwater Art Musem”). Starting with the “Marine Correspondent,” Tylor’s work has been predominately concerned with extending his underwater park, making it specific to both the marine species and to the concerns of the local human communities nearby the sites where the sculptures are installed.

“The words of the hour in ecological and economic circles are meltdown and underwater,” write Monique Allewaert and Michael Ziser, “these two forms of drowning are connected by more than just metaphor” (234). Tylor’s oceanic work comes at a critical time. In the times of global pollution, the way we imagine the oceans is changing. The Great Barrier Reef embodies images of death. An image of a ghost in the flesh: in the phenomenon of coral bleaching, which affects up to 95% of the Great Barrier Reef, corals turn stark white under environmental stress, not unlike when humans turn pale upon seeing a ghost.
This does not mean that the corals themselves are dead, rather that the algae living in it has been expelled so that it can survive somewhere else. Its anxiety is anthropogenic – rising water temperatures caused by human activity parallel the destruction of entire marine habitats by bottom trawling and dynamite fishing, which are comparable to razing a forest to bare soil. Water pollution with oil spills, over 300 million tons of plastic dumped into the waters every year alongside agricultural pesticides, artificial hormones and cosmetic preservatives add to the problem. The strangely obsessive slaughter of sharks, whom humans kill ten million of a year, disrupts the ecosystem by removing a key predator. Only 4% of the oceans remain untouched by humans. “[I make my work] because, as we all know,” states Taylor matter-of-factly, “our reefs are dying, and our oceans are in trouble” (“An Underwater Art Musem”).

Yet, his work relies precisely on that very touching of the ocean, rather than on the conservationist impulse of un-touching and preserving, of returning to a primary state. Drowning and submergence are not the signifiers of a hopeless catastrophe, but the tactics of staging animorphic platforms for the emergence of nonhuman personhood. To think of nonhuman persons as embedded in the environment once again refers us back to Bird-David's pioneering work with
animism. Drawing parallels with William Gibson's ecological theory of perception, she describes how in the Nayaka's understanding persons *are* the changes in the environment and cannot be thought of in separation from it: the environment neither produces persons nor is the effect of their labour, it is rather that the two emerge together, interrelated. On the most apparent level of personalisation, nonhumans are the direct beneficiaries of Taylor’s work: “I've realized that the greatest thing about what we do, the really humbling thing about the work, is that as soon as we submerge the sculptures, they're not ours anymore, because as soon as we sink them, the sculptures belong to the sea” (ibid). His efforts have seen marine biomass increase by over 200% in once deserted sections of the sea bed. Visitors to his "Ocean Atlas" in the Bahamas, the world’s largest sculpture, which re-imagines the mythical figure as a local Bahamian girl carrying the ocean on her shoulders, alerted the authorities to a leak from a nearby oil refinery. The subsequent media coverage and the pressure of the art and local communities forced the government to pledge no less than 10 million dollars in coastal cleanups. The original sculpture in Grenada, the first in this long series, was a key factor in declaring the site a protected marine area. The benefits for the marine life and for those humans who live in the proximity to it are direct and apparent. (It does not always work out as planned – the “Musa” installation attracted a host of lobster, who were then spotted by fishermen and disappeared overnight, presumably to be boiled alive in nearby restaurants. Still, as many as fifty species have been attracted to the work.) Yet, there is another layer of (non)human personhood in Taylor’s work, one that exceeds the redefinition of nonhumans as art consumers or the beneficiaries of environmental activism. It is a submerged type of personhood, in which the anthropomorphic humanoid form itself is used as a decoy or an initiator of emergence; a partial occlusion that allows for the particular. This mode of personhood is tied closely to the emergence of nonhumans not only as “just like us” but specifically as artists and *interpreters* of the human form, which they morph so that it accommodates their particular mode of dwelling. On a material level, this is an activity of aesthetic ritual, performed according to the specificity of each nonhuman. As Taylor says in his Ted Talk, “each of the marine species is a group of “inquisitive visitors, each
lending their own special touch to the site,” further describing the process as such:

Sponges look like veins across the faces. Staghorn coral morphs the form. Fireworms scrawl white lines as they feed. Tunicates explode from the faces. Sea urchins crawl across the bodies feeding at night. Coralline algae applies a kind of purple paint. The deepest red I’ve ever seen in my life lives underwater. Gorgonian fans oscillate with the waves. Purple sponges breathe water like air. And grey angelfish glide silently overhead. (ibid)

Speaking of animist arts, Graham Harvey notices that “[their goal] is not principally the production of inanimate objects for prestigious display, but the transformation of living persons in and by new relationships” (“Animism” 64). As was already mentioned, this concept was most influentially iterated for the Western art world by Nicholas Bourriard in his *Relational Aesthetics*, where he argues that art can intervene into the commodification and reification of relationships between humans by relationally reconfiguring them. Thus, in art as a “space of encounter,” rather than in the art object, Bourriad sees the antidote to Guy Debord's “spectacle,” which turns relations between people into a commodity (15-18). Of course, where animism differs, is that it considers human more than just those who belong to the *Homo sapiens*. Tylor’s representational, humanoid sculptures are provided for nonhuman use and interpretation, thus allowing the marine species to emerge as interpreters in the process of non-representational animorphism. Harvey writes that animist art is “not as much representative as expressive,” a process that he compares to the Christian transubstantiation (“this is my body”) or the Aboriginal Australian ceremonies in the time of the Dreaming, which overlap the past and the present in a realist rather than representative manner (“Animism” 75). The corals are not *represented* as artists by Taylor himself - they are rather allowed to manifest as such by taking over the human form and slowly morphing it, while themselves emerging not as much as creators of *objects* but as initiators of the artistic process that cannot easily be commodified into an object, because their goal is the dissolution of what was
placed in their custody. Thus, even though Taylor’s sculptures are that of a human form, their submersion allows for the emergence of nonhuman personhood.

Taylor’s submerged personhood relies on representation in a manner of taking it to be a decoy. Media artist and theorist Hito Steyerl arrives at a similar tactic when it comes to engaging with a different nonhuman. For Steyler, in today’s image economy, we are “‘represented to pieces,’ rather than amused to death” (Pettman 191). Instead of trying to make the images authentic, she argues, we could use them as a cover for actual persons, who cannot be easily captured in the representational apparatus. Living humans can use this over-production by way of an exodus under the veil of over-representations, with the machines who countlessly produce stock images and commodified representations of identities, humans, and nonhumans doing “the thankless work of the Spectacle for us” and thus letting us absolve ourselves from our own participation in the spectacular (ibid). We can see a similar tactic in Taylor’s work: “humanity” is underdetermined and extended into a generic form in order to make space for the emergence of another humanity, that of marine species-as-artists. This tactic of submersion, decoy, or occlusion is not only evident on the aesthetic level – as described above - but translates into a specific activism. Taylor informs that, “visitors to the marine park in Cancun now divide half their time between the museum and the natural reefs, providing significant rest for natural, overstressed areas” (“An Underwater Art Musem”). The humanoid figures that he creates thus draw actual humans away from unexplored, protected, and isolated marine areas, allowing them the time and space to develop on their own without human presence: “sculptures are placed away from existing reefs often in areas of barren sandbanks to boost diversity, but also to draw tourists away from the delicate ecosystems and fragile corals of existing reefs, where divers may do more harm than good with their well-intentioned curiosity” (Taylor, “Overview”).

It is a decoy that by occlusion allows a different mode of nonhuman personhood to emerge; it intervenes through a seemingly representational anthropomorphism in order to create the
possibility of emergence of nonhumans-as-interpreters. Taylor’s work is subtle in its play between representational, humanoid forms and the animorphic relational mode of emergent nonhuman personhood that it encourages. As he admits, he chooses a humanoid form for the sculpture somehow deceitfully:

I start out with a simple image or quite often a human figure, because I know however much you disfigure the human body you can still recognize some part of it as some identifying feature you can relate to [yet] the longer they are underwater the more the layers of calcium deposit will start to form, so they’ll start to grow more unrecognizable over time […] it’s completely amalgamated with the sea floor in a year’s time. (Pangburn)

This does not mean that Taylor’s work is in the abstract, aiming at dissolving the human into a multiple nonhumanity. The sculptures are modelled after locals in the area where they were installed. “Humans have empathy when they see something of themselves,” he describes his strategy of aiming for a partial recognition in the sculpture submitted to nonhuman morphing (Smillie). In 2009, he cast five hundred local fishermen into sculptures and placed them on a coastline of the small village they inhabited in Mexico, before, submerged, the sculptures invited nonhuman participation, thus becoming an artificial reef and a catalyst for the creation of a protected area between Cancun and Isla Mujeres. Susan Smillie describes that as she was diving out with a local fisherman, he led her to the sculpture modelled after him: “The fisherman Joachin draws himself up in front of me, his chest expanding as he strikes a pose. “Don’t you recognise me?” […] He clearly feels a sense of ownership, and of pride. Locals […] have something to protect not only because they can earn a small income from tours to the museum: the conservation message is [equally important].”

The key interplay in animorphism is that between the generic and the particular. When the *anthropos* can be done with by challenging that idea that only humans can be persons or artists,
grand narrative can retract into the shadows in order to allow for the emergence of a particular community, a particular need, a particular history. Because the overbearing definitions of what defines a human or a person are cast aside, leaving only the generic basis of material behaviours that construct personhood as they happen, all persons have to emerge with specificity once each time.


In Taylor, the decay of his sculptures is simultaneously a decoy for the emergence of personhood, which allows for the manifestation of local histories in specific places, bringing in a texture to the otherwise universalizing setting of the ocean. As in animist art in general, “performances are revelatory in relation to places,” (Harvey, “Animism” 72) and Tylor’s animorphic activism – by foregrounding the ritual of morphing and decomposition - reveals decayed (non)human histories under the waves. Born to a British father and a Guyanese mother, Taylor grew up in Malaysia, where he first started exploring coral reefs. Aware of his own colonial history, he notices that:
I didn’t want to go over to the Caribbean as a colonial British artist and start trying to tell people about their own past. It just wouldn't be read in the right way. I did want to integrate some of the history of the Grenada into my work and seek funding. That meant working with the tourist board and local government, and ultimately compromising, which can make it difficult to preserve your integrity. I also had lots of help from the diving association and fisheries as well as volunteers from the local community college, who made casts of their own faces. (qtd. in Patel)

In the early days of the “Underwater Museum,” one sculpture in particular, “Vicissitudes” caused speculation as to the political nature of Taylor’s work. Elizabeth Deloughrey expresses these interpretative frameworks most convincingly in her elaboration of “the oceanic turn” in Anthropocenic art, and its genesis in the work of Caribbean artists and writers, starting with Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic*, which introduced thinking about race in transoceanic ways, where the ocean is always-already figuring material history (32). The sculpture depicts two schoolchildren, multiplied, forming a circle as if in a child’s game or a prayer. “It is not surprising,” she writes, “when Taylor began to sink life-sized human sculptures under the Caribbean Sea, the majority of viewers assumed it was an act of memorialising the lost lives of the middle passage” (36). While she herself focuses on nonhuman temporalities rather than personhood, she notices that as climate change is “shaping new oceanic imageries” and no longer can be thought as an inert *aqua nullis* awaiting colonialisation by the *anthropos*, Caribbean aesthetics have to be seen as originary of those onto-epistemologies that view the ocean as continually re-made between “the human and the nonhuman, the biological and the geophysical, the historic and the contemporary” (34). Rather than transcending the human, she argues, Taylor’s work is an example of a new oceanic ontology of art, which “figure[es] maritime space as a multispecies and embodied place in which the oceanic contours of the planet, including its submarine creatures, are no longer outside of the history of the
As the prominent African American artist Fred Wilson points out with disappointment, initially Taylor denied that his sculptures related to the middle passage specifically, thus foregrounding biodiversity as his activist axis (13). The wide online discussion about Taylor’s intent and the artwork’s relation to slavery “led the artist to deny any international connection to the middle passage, while later acknowledging that in working with the tourist board he was forced to make compromises [regarding the promotion of the work]” (Deloughrey 39). In his later work, Taylor has been more explicit about his concern for specific “drowned” human histories – one of his first European sculptures, “The Raft of Lampedusa” installed off the coast of Lanzarote in Spain, was composed out of thirteen humanoids placed on an inflatable refugee boat. As is his custom, Taylor based his sculptures on real-life models, including migrants who survived the sea journey. West Saharan Abdel Kader, now forty years old, whose figure is on the top of the boat, made the journey to Lanzarote when he was only twelve, barely surviving it, while many others have died at sea (Smillie). There is a connection via decay between various drowned histories - in the Carribean aesthetics, the Atlantic figures as “as unmarked grave site,” which the writers have
“peopled with human bones, imaginatively figured in the limestone structures of coral reefs” (Deloughrey 35). This process, of course, falls under the category of anthropomorphism – “the process of anthropomorphizing the corals (…) leads to a visual poetics of the submarine debris of human history. *Figuring* [in poetry] nonhuman life forms as human bones enables the visibility of a history” (ibid, emphasis added). Yet, as I have already discussed above, Taylor’s anthropomorphism is animorphic, therefore it is not *figurative*, nor is it representational. The inadequacy of art to represent particular, specific humans is one thing, another is the under-determination of the existing over-representations. This means foregrounding the process of deterioration and using art as a platform for manifesting the knowledge of humans as suspended in decay in specific places that bear historical wounds as the result of specific histories. It is in this process that nonhuman persons emerge and aid as artists and interpreters, taking up the invitation to further destabilise the human form and allow for the emergence of specific *spaces* as the relational platforms where the structuring of personhood between representation and relation plays out.
For Taylor, anthropomorphism does not denote a “figuring” of histories and persons, it is rather an interplay: placing the sculptures underwater invites nonhuman co-operation, thus the emergence of personhood; it also triggers the government and the locals to re-evaluate their relation to the area; finally, it invites the visitors to develop a relation to the particularity of the certain timelessness of the place they are visiting, but – with the collaboration of nonhumans – codes particular histories into it, histories of decay and drowning. To witness nonhumans decomposing these humanoid figures it to acknowledge the weight of death in these particular places. Deloughrey writes:

This experience, unlike that of a terrestrial gallery, depends on weather and currents; impressions are informed by light, the viscosity of the water, the age of the sculptures, and the presence of marine species. While the exhibits are “permanent,” the sculptures are not; they change every day based on their occupation by bacteria, algae, and, eventually, coral. [The work is] transformed by salt, currents, pressure, and the rapid occupation by multispecies ecologies. (37, emphasis added)

This decomposition of the sculptures is then central to the experience of visiting the museum as such, and theorising decay and personhood is in the Anthropocene intimately tied to submergence and drowning. Climate fatalism causes widespread apathy and depression – in 2009, biologist Camille Parmesan confessed that she suffered from a “professional depression” after Texas governors ignored her demands regarding the sustainability of the Galveston Bay; one psychologist who regularly works with climate scientists recounted that they suffer from “pre-traumatic stress, the overwhelming sense of anger, panic and obsessive-intrusive thoughts [because] their work every day is to chart a planetary future that looks increasingly apocalyptic” (Holmes; Loria). As if echoing Donna Haraway’s description of the prophecy of the Anthropocene – “you will come down in a freaked-out ecosystem, where the jellyfish and the slime
will sting you to oblivion” (Haraway et al. 11) – a renowned sailor and the chair of an environmental protection agency, Dame Ellen MacArthur predicts that by the 2050s the weight of the plastic in our oceans will be more than that of its marine life (Wearden) and popular magazines relish the opportunity to toy with the idea that the only surviving species in the polluted waters will be jellyfish (Kinver). The ocean is then reconfigured not as much as the realm of the monstrous yet awesome Kraken and Cthulhu, but as an apathetic, decayed space, a land that will soon be out of circulation, a depleted resource, one more thing that we destroyed. This interplay that Taylor’s work taps into, when he says that he wants to “encourage life” (“An Underwater Art Museum”) in the ocean is crucial to the imaginary of the ocean itself. Without the ocean, there is no life as we know it – it regulates our climate by producing oxygen and absorbing carbon dioxide. Yet, in the Anthropocene, this place has much changed and the aesthetic of decay now underpins it. “I can’t tell you how bad I smelt after the dive – the smell of millions of rotting animals,” says Richard Vevers, a photographer documenting dying coral reefs (Slezak). Writing of Taylor’s “The Last Correspondent,” Allewaert and Ziser note that “the oceanic tranquility of [the sculpture] – rooted to his chair, his mouth and ears stopped, breathless in the filtered tropical light – seems in this particular image to be posthumously menaced by a cloud of sand approaching on the horizon […] even the ironic, Ozymandian consolation that the Anthropocene era too will pass is denied to us” (235). Even though Taylor’s sculptures are beautiful and lively, what they ultimately address is death and decay, often in relation to places that bear witness to specific deaths. Nonhumans-as-artists aid in visualizing this connection between the past and the present, an atemporal yet specific narrative of drowned life, and of the dying ocean. How Taylor’s work responds to this new Anthropocenic aesthetic of the ocean is to activate the particularity of this decaying history, a process facilitated rather by a focus on an animorphic personhood than a general definition of life (vitalism). The “Underwater Museum” does not set out to over-represent humanity within an ethos, or even within history, it weaves no prophecy of extinction, no Virtuvian Man melting into the water. Instead, it allows nonhuman persons to relate to us the very malleability of
our histories, a decay of specific material existences within specific contexts.

3.2.2. Lessons in Decay

Jeremijenko’s, Laar’s and Taylor’s project are large-scale efforts, conceived by more or less established artists in cooperation with various institutions, communities, and scientists. This does not mean, however, that animorphic activism has to be large-scale. I now turn to a small, personal project in the city of Detroit, painstakingly and lovingly crafted by Olayami Dabls. Save for a couple of articles, mostly in regional and local newspapers, and a few short mentions in books, very little is written about Dabls’ work, even though *The Detroit Metro Times* describes the art space that he runs as “arguably one of Detroit’s most iconic destinations, which draws visitors from the world over – including filmmaker Quentin Tarantino” (DeVito). While Dabls’ and other black educators’
work is important for the community, Maya Stoval and Alex Hill note that while “a handful of black men [such as Dabls] have received short-lived media mentions (...) the striking difference [in Detroit] saviour narratives is that white men are mentioned in regards to ‘saving’ the city as a whole, whereas black men are mentioned in media as only ‘preserving’ or ‘revitalizing’ their respective corners of Detroit” (120-121). Contrary to this narrative, I propose that Dabls’ work not only preserves locality and ethnographic detail, but intervenes into the global discourse of the Anthropocene by engaging nonhuman personhood in a way that, on the one hand, links to decay, and on the other, sets its eyes on the very limit of what personhood can be ascribed to – the inorganic.

His biggest project is the Museum of African Beads, which he started collecting back in the 1980s, with most beads in his possession older than 300 years. The building itself, donated to him by a community member, ”is covered in beads, metals, iron sculptures, jagged-cut mirrors: a vibrant slice of creativity pitched in the middle of nowhere” (Pincus and Christian 53). A part of the museum is also an installation, “Iron Teaches Rock How To Rust,” “at a first glance merely a collection of school chairs facing a rack with rusty pipe in its center” (54). It is an installation composed out of various materials, presenting diverse scenes of interaction between rocks and iron – sometimes they are placed in a school, sometimes on a ceremonial stone. Perhahps Dabls’ work is not often discussed because it seems straightforward enough. To a degree, just like with Tylor’s humanoids, while Dabls’ “Iron Teaches Rocks” cannot be considered mimetically representational, it can be read as symbolic. As Steven Panton writes, providing context to Dabls’ work, rocks can be seen as standing-in for African culture, and iron for European. He thus interprets the artwork as a “commentary on how the European education system coerces (African) rocks to rust (aspire to a veneer of European-ness), despire the obvious implications that such attempts are at best futile.” Panton also notices that the installation includes “wood (often symbolizing Native American culture) and thousands of mirror fragments – which represent communication with the ancestors.” Indeed, the installation is heavily symbolic, and in one scene rocks are placed on chairs
as if in a classroom, alluding to the European mission of control through education.

In another, where iron teaches rocks how to eat properly, Dabls explains: “Rocks ate with their hands. Sociologists have discovered that if you eat with your hands out of a common bowl, your bond is much tighter,” thus showing his belief in community values at the expense of what is considered ‘good’ manners (qtd. in DeVito). Dabls’ whole oeuvre indeed deals with reanimating African culture, a goal he states explicitly in interviews – although he majored in engineering, after suffering an injury in a car accident, he reevaluated his career choices and devoted his life to public art and education: “he began painting as therapy [and] began decorating the outside of his gallery in 1983 with recycled materials (…) including a 150-foot wall covered with words from 24 African languages” (Millan and Offen 28). Yet, it is in casting the iron and stones as teachers and learners that he allows for the emergence of another mode of nonhuman personhood from the shadows of these symbolic forms. Nonhuman persons are here understood as teachers and learners as much as they teach and learn how to decay or as Dabls’ says, they teach the responsibility of teaching ourselves how to decay, according to specific needs, rather than allowing established discourses of
generalized extinction of species telling us how to die. “The rocks,” he says, “need to teach *themselves* how to rust” (“Dabls Explains,” emphasis added). To say that rocks and iron can teach, learn and die is already a type of non-representational anthropomorphism that disturbs how the division between the living and the inert is upheld, because, as Hugo Reinert notices: “Eurocenric vocabularies of harm and ethical reflection tend to circle within the space of concern that is delimited by the inorganic as its outer limit, [its] *terra nullis* [from which] no legitimate demand can issue” (105).

Contrary to this discourse, thinking about stone and inorganic material as persons links to the post-natural state of Detroit itself as a local *space* in which the platforms for the emergence of personhood can be staged. Just like the ocean frames the rituals of personhood in Tylor’s work, the deteriorating industrial city is the environment that dictates Dabls’ animorphic engagements. As already stated in the introductory chapters, “the environment is a relative term,” writes animism scholar Tim Ingold, “relative, that is to the *being* whose environment it is” (“The Perception” 20). While one might colloquially think that it is only those, who can be in general considered lively or animate that animorphism engages, Dabls’ work extends this concern to the inorganic, thus also showing us that “nature” in a city like Detroit, for example, is synonymous with its industrial composure, and that the environment is shaped equally by the inorganic as it is by the organic. Thinking about the possible role of stones as persons, as Reinert writes, must situate them in “the present moment defined, increasingly, by catastrophic violence and the unfolding collapse of planetary ecosystems” (95). Considering *rusting* of the iron or the stone undoubtedly points us to thinking about the rusting of automobiles, Detroit’s most recognizable emblem, one that became the embodiment of the state of the city itself. Perhaps even before we recognize the collapse on a planetary scale, Detroit was already embodying certain markers of the Anthropocene. As Stephen Hren writes, when Henry Ford’s roaring industrialism was put to a halt in the 1970s, when the oil spikes compromised the auto industry, caused social unrest and left swaths of the city burnt to the ground, Detroit was to become the blueprint for the very problems that the cities that rely on fossil
fuels were likely to face at some point in the near future (2-3). Intersecting that with the narratives of the Anthropocene, we can understand Dabl’s statement that “rust is a state of deterioration” (qtd. in DeVito) not only as a commentary on the European civilisational missions (which themselves frame our current geo-political catastrophe) but also on the coming planetary, cosmic precarity, where homelessness becomes the a priori condition of multi-species extinction. For Haraway, the Anthropocene is precisely the “wiping out of most of the refugia from which diverse species assemblages (with or without people) can be reconstituted after major events (like desertification) (“Anthropocene, Capitalocene” 159).” The Anthropocene, in its dissolution of the future, its annihilation of the possibility of reconstruction, reveals the status of (non)human persons as displaced or as refugees to various degrees, in local and planetary contexts. Detroit became emblematic of this disappearance of the future, with aesthetic trends like “ruin porn” capturing the general imagination, where ruin and decay itself is perceived to be the unavoidable future (Woodward). Hren posits the city as a stage where this dynamic plays out:

Detroit is dying, Detroit is pulsating with life. The place is […] undergoing a metamorphosis from a corporate car town to a thriving hub of grassroots artistic and regenerative experimentation. While broad avenues built for massive car traffic now lay barely used with plastic bags caught in dead weeds growing through cracks in the pavement, the residents of the city are reinventing themselves by growing their own food on abandoned land. (1)

To not bring the disappearance of the future into the web of concern at this moment in time seems impossible, and yet, as Reinert notices, the powerful discourse in which “corporate impact projections post that the nonhuman life destroyed through [disposal] will ‘bounce back’ within a certain timeframe after cessation of [extractive or destructive] activities” prevails (103). Detroit is one such space that embodies in the public imagination the idea that it is impossible to simply
bounce back. Working in the spaces marked by human and more-than-human death and deterioration, both Taylor and Dabls tackle this problem by using decay as a method, rather than placing it on the speculative horizon of thought as something-to-come.

16 Old theater in Detroit. Web.

Just like for Taylor, for Dabls’ lending the artwork to the process of nonhuman rusting and decay is an integral part of his aesthetic: “part of the work is how it fades with the sun and the rain. The blue here [a pale-duck-egg color] used to be a navy blue. What I do is, I just go back around and I might add some dots of clor here and there to reactivate it, but the fading is part of it so I don’t interfere too much with that” (qtd. in Lowndes 166). Both artists approach decay as de facto condition of the Anthropocene, one that can be seized as a methodology of revealing nonhuman personhood, and in its light creating new vantage points, different histories for the Homo sapiens.

Dabls’ tells us that current deteriorating of the city as an organism, where people cannot afford basic food items and old buildings are rotting away, is the consequence of Detroit’s dependence on fossil fuels, a relation to the inorganic that he sees as characteristic of the European civilizational
mission, and one that he wants to challenge by personalising stones and iron as teachers rather than resources. Reinert, in his work on stones as persons, tells us that “if extractive resource capitalism is a sort of an ontological machine – that continuously remakes the world as already-given [by deciding what is an inert object for exploitation and who is a living person] then it is all the more vital to question the paradigms (...) that produce not just nonhuman life but also nonlife as domains of control” (96).

17 Iron Teaches Rock How To Rust by Olayami Dabls. Web.

If Taylor’s revealing of the interplay of representational and relational (non)human personhood can be described as submerged, Dabls’ can be one of rusting. Rusting or deteriorating, just like submergence, can be a technique of hiding or occluding certain things in order to allow for the emergence of the otherwise. By a seemingly representational anthropomorphism, a different
mode of nonhuman personhood is allowed to manifest. In the middle of his installation, Dabls placed a humanoid figure made of materials traditionally used in African cultures but now serving as construction material for the Google dome, the corporation’s headquarters. Yet, Dabls describes that this representational humanoid is meant to draw the attention away from the rituals of personalisations of stone and iron happening at the installation side. Visitors can drive nails of iron into the figure, asking for this protection by occlusion. “The first purpose,” he describes, “is that it allows the city [officials] *not to see us*, and the second to *hide us* from vandalism” (“Dabls Explains,” emphasis added). Dabls’ elaboration is worth quoting at length:

> I’ve got no actual right to be here - with permits and regulations and such. But the people around here, they have accepted this. I use materials that we’ve been using for hundreds of years – rocks, iron, and mirrors. Do you know there’s enough iron in your body to make a nail? These materials are not just familiar to us, they are also in us. I used to scour the streets looking for materials but now a lot of people donate materials to me. They say it is seven years bad luck if you break a mirror so as soon as it happens they want to get rid of them. (qtd. in Lowndes 166)

This occlusion, hiding in the fold or flying under the radar is itself an activist tactic. In a city that is disappearing, one has to disappear into it in order to start the task of community building, of letting the inorganic teach us how to rust according to different ontologies and histories than those (Eurocentric, colonial, capitalist, Cartesian) that dictate what is visible in plain sight. Within this process, as any animorphic artist, Dabls interacts with the community, perhaps to a greater extent that any of the artists discussed so far. He himself recalls: “You cannot do anything without community approval (...) I didn’t think anyone knew me. I was at the gas station a mile down the road, and the guy said, ‘Man, you’re the guy from that bead store down there. You have all them white people down there looking at that stuff!’” (qtd. in DeVito). Rituals of occluded nonhuman
personhood, of carving out the space for the otherwise and inviting others to inhabit them with us, are equal to rituals of protection from the threatening possibility of actual material disappearance of communities and communal spaces. Dabls was worried, for example, that if he did not take over the house where he currently hosts the museum “it [would have been] available to be stripped of everything of value,” a reference to “scraping” in Detroit whereby buildings are manually taken apart in the search for any valuables that can be cheaply sold (ibid). Engaging nonhuman persons is also engaging them as hidden, constructing scarecrows that paradoxically draw the attention away from what can be taken, stolen, and sold, from a community that can be dissolved. This allows for a creation of space in which naturalism and its dogmas are temporarily suspended (which is just what Descola and Kohn believe art is able to achieve), so that “the work of imagination – of extending the mesh, of internalizing the externalities and populated spaces constructed as empty – extends beyond the focus on species interdependence – activists speak of accountabilities to the dead and to the unborn, to the sea, to the Earth itself” (Reinert 103). By figuring stones and rust as teachers, Dabls’ work shows that it is not only “them who are in us” but – animorphically – us in them. And if the placement of mirrors at the installation can be a means of communicating with the ancestors, it can also aid in a strategic deployment of (semi)representationalism. They are there in order to destabilise the humanoid form by reflecting it: “People are fascinated by mirrors,” Dabls says. “There’s just something about mirrors that makes us comfortable, because we can see an image of ourselves, and you can look forward and see behind you (…) I was disappointed that people were just looking at themselves in my art (…) So I said, ‘OK [if that’s what you want], I will forever use mirrors [but only broken ones]’ in order to let people see that there is a located, specific community reflected in a city that has been broken, and one that needs to inhabit the cracks of the aftermath of its fossil fuel dependence.

To think of this artwork as animorphic is not to say that Dabls’ rocks are not representative and symbolic, it is to say that they are also allowed to be something else, or rather – someone else. Looking for the otherwise, Reinert writes: “[we need to find] a differential imaginary of what earth,
land, stone and living beings are or can be to each other, of what kinds of relation they enter into” (101). We can return to the Ojibwa proposition that rocks lying around the river might be inanimate but those that matter to upholding social relations are not - “Are all the stones we see about us here [are] alive? No, but some are” Nils Oskal, a reindeer herder and a philosopher similarily describes that “common courtesy indicates that you should greet [a ceremonial stone] and wish it well in your thoughts when passing by,” describing it as a kind of a neighbor rather than a supernatural entity (qtd in Reinert 99). Through looking for a different relation to the inorganic – for Dabls, rooted both in traditional African knowledge and in contemporary Detroit being-together with those, who rust – is looking for an alternative to what Elizabeth Povinelli calls “carbon imaginary,” a pre-analytical orientation that parses the world through the lens of organic life” (Coleman and Yusoff 62). Dabls is asking, what would it mean, in this specific city that was built on fossil fuel economy, to try to imagine another relation to the inorganic or the nonliving, where it is not a resource but – as he himself describes – “a teacher” and “an ancestor” (“Dabls Expains”)? This, for him, is “animism” – to reframe decay as a process of teaching and studying: “In animism,” he believes, “you die in order to become an ancestor. In [current thought about death], you die in order to be judged” (ibid).

3.2.3. Animorphic Museums of the Non-living

“It’s strange,” [art critic Jonathan Jones] concludes. “There’s a sort of dreamlike, redemptive poetry to it.” If you consider that the sea is already a museum littered with artefacts and remnants – wrecks of Carthaginian ships, ancient Greek statues depicting heroes, warriors and gods – it begs the question: what will future generations make of our modern world as imagined by Taylor? [These sculptures of] passive viewers of television,
people taking selfies, this benighted raft of the hungry and hopeless. “Maybe he’s dreaming of a time where humans have been left behind, a nature that’s survived us,” offers Jones. “We might be the forgotten ones.”

(Smillie)

Both Taylor and Dabls label their artworks as “museums.” “Visitors to the various underwater museums who are able to sink themselves beneath the waves,” describes Taylor, “can experience the reality of marine life more directly and intimately than a traditional white-walled museum” (“Overview”). As he states, however, “The Raft of Lampedusa” is not meant as a tribute or a memorial, but serves as a reminder of our collective responsibility” (ibid). If we are to consider his work as a memorial or an archive, we need to reconfigure it via nonhuman cultures in the Anthropocene. Similarly, the lessons in decay and rusting that Dabls’ work encourages in the setting of a post-natural Detroit reflect a new role for the museum or the archive in the Anthropocene, one that is facilitated by the foregrounding of nonhuman persons as creators of a culture that provides a different vantage point into the seemingly uniform era. Following Descola, animism has it that the cultural and natural domains are in fact one domain of culture that includes human and nonhuman persons acting towards each other, following social norms that are common to all, just like in naturalism physical norms are deemed common to all. As such, in animism, the natural environment is the milieu where both human and nonhuman persons create a culture that is not representation but relational and expressive. While this is already one thing that makes for a museum that spills beyond the walls of an institution, what is specific to Debls’ and Taylor’s work is that they engage with the question of decay, thus inserting their animorphic personalisations specifically into the problematic of extinction and governance of local histories of death in the Anthropocene. According to Vincent Normand, art in the Anthropocene could serve two functions:

[A] materialist imperative for art history thus requires a double move: an archaeology of the
grand narratives in which a series of “great divides” historically emerged (between nature and culture, reason and unreason, subjects and objects, etc.) in order to find a vantage point from which to address their structures; and a practice of art’s inscription in these structural divides in order to situate its role in their conceptualization and possible transformation.

(63-64)

On the most apparent level, Dabls performs, within his installation, an institutional and post-colonial critique. Pointing to a smaller scene within the installation, he describes: “Iron [European colonizers - BK] frees people, but it locked the history of those it freed in these filing cabinets, and surrounded them with a moat” (“Dabls Explains”). Dabls’ dissatisfaction with the museum and the way meaningful objects are appropriated through plunder as cultural artefacts stems from the fact that he himself used to work at one. In including nonhuman persons as teachers in his museum, Dabls performs an institutional critique suitable for the Anthropocene. He recognizes that the museum is the result of the great divides of modernity and seeks to remedy it by figuring himself as a storyteller alongside nonhuman teachers. “When I was working at the Museum of African American history, one of the most difficult things to talk about was the exhibit on the civil rights decade,” he says (qtd. in DeVito). He adds that locked within human histories and points of view, the civil rights struggle became the point of debate and contestation. He instead wanted to experiment with social and political commentary by implicating it into a nonhuman framework. It is through the efforts of staging this interplay between generic personhood available even to the inorganic, and a specific, human history of both slavery and industrial decay that “a low-budget, community-based museum has reached the attention of the world” (ibid). Dabls calls himself a storyteller, not an artist, explaining that it is his responsibility to be an educator, because that is his understanding of the animist African tradition of art (qtd. in Pincus and Christian 53). “I can get away with a lot as a storyteller,” he says. “The purpose of the artist is to educate outside of books (...) We learn through interaction, senses, and observation, through common sense” (ibid). It is this
effort that finally reconfigures the city of Detroit itself as an entity. Dabls believes that “The city will come back. There are lots of old culture groups left in the city – here, alone – but I see things coming back (…) This place has taken up a life of its own” (qtd. in Held). The African Bead Museum and the Underwater Museum, then, are museums inasmuch as they are spaces of nonhuman culture and of community creation, where another relation to the nonhuman can be inscribed.

That the “Raft of Lampedusa” is not a memorial means that Taylor is not interested in memory as an activist function, which benefits only those who remember – the living. Seeking to rather provoke action, he extends to those not-yet-dead yet the unavoidability of death. The museum here becomes not a memorial but a site of active cultural decay of both human and nonhuman histories. Where decay already exists, it cannot be figured as an event-to-come but a condition that must be addressed in the present through action, rather than imagined in the future through speculation. The setting of the underwater museum itself, and the oceanic depth it provides encourages an active, rather than a passive engagement:

The experience of being underwater is vastly different from that of being on land. Objects appear twenty-five percent larger underwater [and closer]. Colours alter as light is absorbed and reflected at different rates, with the depth of the water affecting this further. The light (…) produces kaleidoscopic effects governed by water movement, currents and turbulence. Water is a malleable medium in which to travel enabling the viewer to become active in their engagement with the work. (Fabricius)

In this decaying museum, (non)humans are not objects or artefacts; rather they are the makers of a culture that allows to see human history in a different perspective. Against the desire to preserve, Taylor and Dabls invite nonhumans to morph or rust away the very objects that could be reframed as cultural artefacts, allowing them to emerge as co-creators or interpreters in submerged
and occluded manners. It is not that objects (physical objects) do not figure anywhere into their work – it is rather that they navigate the space between the representational and relational so that the naturalist gap between mute nonhumanity and cultural humans does not persist easily. That both artists construct museums that are supervised and altered by nonhuman cultures could be a response to Dipesh Chakrabarty’s assertion that all industrial human history is the contemporary in the Anthropocene, and that there is no space or temporality currently outside of it (“The Climate of History”). By engaging nonhuman persons within specific histories of decay, both artists address not only current environmental and industrial problems, they also populate the territories once considered terra nullius, showing that there exists a (non)human culture in the empty spaces of the ocean or the industrial ruin, and as such they are not up for grabs for any colonising missions of the anthropos. They accelerate a certain convergence between human and nonhuman persons, deaths, and histories, as if saying: we are all in this together now, and because it is so in the present, it has always been so. For Taylor, paradoxically, it is the fact that the objects decay that turns the ocean into a space worthy of protection. He comments, “museums are places (…) where we keep [what is] of great value to us, where we simply treasure [artefacts] for being themselves [sic]. If someone was to throw an egg at the Sistine Chapel, we’d all go crazy (…) yet every day we dredge, pollute and overfish our oceans. And I think it’s easier for us to do that, because (…) we don’t see the havoc we’re wreaking” (“An Underwater Art Museum”). Once the sculptures are submerged, they become artefacts of nonhuman culture, one that implicates humans in its histories of decay and lends them a new visibility.

That Taylor and Dabls both engage decay is symptomatic in the light of what Elizabeth Povinelli calls “geo-ontological power,” a mode of late liberal settler governance that focuses not as much on the biopolitical governance of bodies but predominantly on maintaining the distinction between Life and NonLife. “When the abstraction of the Human is cast as the protagonist of the Anthropocene,” she writes, “a specific set of characters crowd the stage – the Human, the Nonhuman, the Dead, the Never Alive” (“Geoontologies” 26). Animorphic art of Taylor and Dabls
both localizes specific histories and extends personhood to persons other than the *Homo sapiens*. As such, it presents alternative modes of possible governance, one that does not rely on the *distinction* between Life and NonLife, or humans and nonhuman, but one that recognises them as persons subjected to histories of decay. This decay is not a decay of an abstracted Human but of specific violences, connected to transoceanic slavery, the refugee crisis, European civilisational missions, and fossil fuel dependence, the consequences of which underpin the violence done to (non)human persons in all of the discussed artworks. Sustaining these nonhuman communities, engaging them at the intersection of life and decay, is in itself the extension of what a participatory culture, or a participatory democracy, could be. It could be, a response, for example, to the declaration of nonhuman rights in Bolivia in 2008, which states that “[the planet] is an indivisible community of all living systems and organisms, interrelated, interdependent and complementary, which share a common destiny” (Mirzoeff, “Visualizing the Anthropocene” 229). Yet again, animorphic arts work from this very interplay of the indivisible, the generic, the common, and the local, the particular, the intersectional. This very interplay allows nonhuman personhood to emerge and manifest nonhuman cultures, thus activating the otherwise, an animorphic undercurrent that underpins contemporary activism. Allewaert and Ziser write: “we might as well adapt ourselves to the privations threatening us and learn to breathe underwater (...) it is not (...) a Prufrockian retreat from drowning human voices but proof that we can do and demand more than the rhetoric of limits has allowed. This “more” requires building lyricisms, stories, and inhabitations of place that tell us how we got to where we are and that give us the tools to remake the present otherwise“ (240).
3.3. Animorphic Verminhood: Predation, Pests and Interspecies cohabitation

Nonhuman animals are assumed [in Western modernity] to be above all else inferior to humans, having been constructed as passive, ahistorical, unfeeling, or unthinking, but inevitably lacking Western, colonial, or, more recently, neoliberal virtues.

(Willett 30)

Kin-making is making persons, not necessarily as individuals or as humans.

(Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene” 161)

Laura Gustafsson concerns itself with human/animal difference, arguing that “throughout history, declaring a group to be nonhuman or subhuman has been an effective tool for justifying slavery, oppression; a common factor in genocides is that other people are not humans but rats, cockroaches, pests, or bacteria, threatening the purity of the human (…) rhetoric paves the way (…) the murdering can begin once words have done their job.” Haapoja and Gustafsson both investigate this rhetoric, extending it to the treatment of other animals and the root cause of the environmental crisis as well as seek alternatives, arguing that “the problem is not the idea of the animal, but the practice of boundary-making in itself” (ibid). They investigate various ways in which violence done to animals and humans operates by subjugating them as nonhuman (Tuomivaara).

Terms such as “pest,” “vermin” or “plague” take on a new significance in the Anthropocene, where the ability to overcome the condition of multi-species pain, illness, and decay, to remain healthy in a decomposing world becomes the pinnacle of success and privilege.

18 Museum of Nonhumanity by Terike Haapoja and Laura Gustafsson. Web.

Constructing undesirable persons as dirty or as the vessels of plague and disease adds another layer of despise in a precarious era when the ability to embody one's safety and health is becoming a
depleted resource. On a global scale, the state of homelessness and precarity that defines the Anthropocene - “ask any refugee, of any species” (Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene” 161) - has been assigned to some as an ontological condition supported by the neoliberal economy, growing displacement and the simultaneous decisive destruction of the remaining places of biodiversity, from which life on Earth could be reconstructed. It is a vulnerable time, when the narrative of progress develops into an unstable condition of forced nomadic life, unpredictable weather patterns, systemic violence, temporary labour and volatile markets. Those, whose bodies most visibly inhabit this precarity are constructed as a threat to public health. Just one day after the Brexit vote, printouts stating, “Leave the EU. No more Polish vermin” were plastered all over Huntingdon. Previously, David Cameron described migrants as a “swarm” (Shariatmadari) and columnist Katie Hopkins compared them to cockroaches (Plunkett). Haapoja and Gustafsson argue that Euro- and androcentric humanism maintains itself by figuring other bodies as nonhuman. The very visibility of these bodies threatens the purity of the healthy, male, stable *anthropos*. The same impulses inform the figuring of those who are undesirable, such as migrant workers, as vermin, pests, scavengers or the plague that threatens the purity of the civilizational and capitalist project, even though it is this very project that invalidates the possibility of home and health, thus creating the very “plague” that it uses to legitimise its own projected stability and superiority.

This rising precarity and the progressing environmental crisis are intimately connected. A study in *Nature* has recently found that climate change will reshape the global economy, with income projected to drop by 23% of its current state by the end of the century, which will likely lead to a political upheaval (Burke, Hsiang, and Miguel), while researchers at the Postdam Institute for Climate Impact Research state that with the growing rate of natural disasters, there will be growing displacement, deregulation, homelessness and violence (Schleussner et. al.). In her lecture commemorating the work of Edward Said, Naomi Klein argues that while Said was “no tree-hugger,” environmentalism is no longer a problem of the physical environment, neither a luxury item of care for those who can afford it, but something irrevocably tied to the systemic and organised oppressions
based on *othering*. She recalls that Said taught us how:

once the other has been firmly established, the ground is softened for any transgression: violent expulsion, land theft, occupation, invasion. Because the whole point of othering is that the other doesn’t have the same rights, the same humanity, as those making the distinction. What does this have to do with climate change? Perhaps everything.

This is precisely why animorphism argues for a generic humanity, a generic personhood as a way of resisting objectification by the most obvious means: allowing personalisation. Haapoja and Gustafsson want to examine the cut that makes the *non*human. They advocate for better practices of figuring this cut by placing it differently – creating differences of degree rather than of kind. “The History According to Cattle,” the first museum to present history from the assumed point of view of this species, does so by deploying a representational anthropomorphism. In the booklet accompanying the exhibition as well as on the various cards in the museum, the artists impersonate the species in writing, filling the museum with various artefacts, giving the impression as if it was “cattle” narrating their histories. Not negating the ethics of this practice, I want to continue following the methods of a non-representational anthropomorphism. While both Haapoja and Gustafsson and myself seek an expansion and a mutation of the human, the difference with animorphism is that it leaves the human or personhood underdetermined, thus remaining radically non-representational. I have so far considered animorphic activism in relation to pragmatism, health and care, as well as histories and representations of death and decay. In this chapter, I want to consider the modes of animorphic nonhuman personhood that take as their condition of emergence displacement and waste. What if these conditions, persistently used in the political discourse to dehumanise, are used to rehumanise, to reveal personhood?

When newspaper columnists compare migrants to a swarm, we may recall Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s insistence that “swarming” can become a technique of resisting the attempts of the
state to map and govern; the faceless swarm resists tracking (“A Thousand Plateaus”). The pejorative can be inhabited in a subversive manner. At this moment in history, when persons are sentenced to extermination and disposal based on their perceived invasiveness, what questions can we raise about the personalised relations between the Homo sapiens and other species, against or alongside whom we struggle for territory, whom we seek to preserve or displace, or who displace us? What are our non/human pest communities like? Ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood, whose work remained in extensive dialogue with traditional indigenous knowledge (that she referred to as animism), once reflected on her experience of nearly losing her life in a crocodile attack in Kakadu, northern Australia. Yet, she insisted that the animal should not be hunted down and killed, as is the usual response, instead labelling herself as an intruder into its territory. Despite the collapse of social-ecological life, we are also witnessing the re-wilding of urban territories, the rapid evolution of entire species and the hybridisation of nature and technology – certain plants, for example, thrive in urban and industrial settings (del Tredici). In his book The New Wild: Why Invasive Species Will Be Nature's Salvation, Fred Pearce argues that there is a certain xenophobia in the way that classic environmentalism, focused on preservation, vilifies “rogue rats, predatory jellyfish, suffocating super-weeds” (11). We need, he argues, a new wild rather than the revived old, which is too far gone to ever be recovered.

The works discussed in this chapter have to be viewed alongside these debates about alien and indigenous species, migrants and citizens, health and illness, refugee and homelessness in the Anthropocene. Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson, an artist duo that have been working together for over a decade, consider these very questions. In an artistic research project set in Svalbard, Norway, where encounters between polar bears and men are frequent, they notice that local law places regulations that seek to prevent bear deaths when possible. “The right of the indigenous animal to this landscape,” they write, “which the Spitzbergen human community has come also partly to occupy, is paramount, instilling and reflecting a different sense of respect and environmental order” (“Feral Attraction” 3). Considering the categories of feral, wild, domestic and vermin species,
their animorphic work is also set within a domestic wild, a local territory of the neighbourhood or home. Researching various histories of interspecies precarity, they often rely on displacing the very representations that seek to displace the displaced by overdetermining them – by undoing this sufficiency, they allow for a less representational and deterministic mode of nonhuman personhood to emerge. While Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson are themselves skilled researchers and scholars, thus showing how the practice of research itself can be an animorphic platform, my last case study hails from the exact opposite territory. The avant-garde Japanese collective Chim↑Pom work within the framework of post-Fukushima activism, yet they do not deploy pragmatic tactics with regards to environmental health or the survival of non/human communities. To the contrary, their ambiguous and controversial activism is at odds with “green” art. By showing that nowadays vermin persons emerge within a predatory loop of damage and toxicity, they redefine the Anthropocene to be an era of atomic wastefulness and garbage. In the process – and on occasion - they deploy animorphic methods in order to frame the kinship among vermin species as a tactic of living in a damaged world, thus posing questions about how animorphism could work in ethically controversial practices. Animorphism thus traces these attempts at addressing non/human communities in the Anthropocene that necessitate or arise from damage, toxicity and violence.

3.3.1. Posthumously Wild

A name is a signifying skin assigned to stand for something. That skin, like all representations, serves unwittingly (or not), to occlude the thing it is supposed to represent – [for example an] animal that exists within and part of an environment, for which that environment is an extension and the overall constitution of which informs and contributes to its being. This name, and our human reliance upon it as a handle of convenience, supplants the real. It appears to denote but in fact simply directs our understanding towards an illusion. (Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson, “The We of the We” 2)
How to counter the desire for tidiness, for removing the alien and the refugee, for a seamless erasure that aligns with the narrative of the Anthropocene as “an intensifying of modern ontology, [which] anticipates the fully human Earth” (Davison 300) but “human” only in the sense of the anthropos? Having collaborated for more than a decade, Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson examine both historical and contemporary interactions between humans and animals, especially those within cycles of violence or erasure, be they domestic and personal or colonial and national. Techniques of elimination, appropriation, representation, or domestication of individual animals or entire species play out, as they do in animorphism, between the generic and the local: “conscious of the necessarily misrepresentative effects of generalization,” the artists write, “we have always been at pains strategically to ground our work by means of the specific within the context of the general” (“The We of the We” 2). While their intensive artistic research investigates each animal history in its particularity, they are also concerned with creating a generic collectivity: “there is a palpable avoidance and/or reluctance to use the term “we” to signify anything other than the human species (...) significant change in exploitative habits and capitalist consumption will never satisfactorily or effectively occur, unless we collectively acknowledge, accommodate and mobilize the use of the term “we” to mean not only humans, but all organisms living here on planet Earth” (ibid 1-2). In mobilizing this ethics, they are especially interested in the problems of displacement or being out of place, being unwanted, or staying stubbornly present where one should not be.

In terms of practice, their work is largely concerned with undoing the determinations that claim that they can represent the displaced animal and thus undoing the presumed sufficiency of representing animals as “a species” rather than as individual persons. As Astrida Neimanis writes on the very problem of representations, “any claims of representation to give us total unfettered access to the real should be treated as suspect” (2). As long as this naturalist gap between mute nonhumanity and cultural capacities of humans persist, we can never arrive at an animist reconciliation and we will remain caught between (nonhuman) reality and (human) representation – an objective nature on one
side, and a subjective culture on the other. Yet, it has been a challenge for any aesthetic or artistic practice to not claim to provide some kind of an “access” to the animal. For example, individual animals can be displaced by subsuming them under a generalised category of a species. The failure to notice individuality in animals is especially visible with regards to the polar bear, who has in the recent years become a vessel for the grand narrative of global warning.

Saddening images of emaciated polar bears seemingly stranded on melting ice blocks have been circulated widely in the popular media for a few years now, making the animal a harbinger of the Anthropocene, and turning any artwork that engages with it into a commentary on climate change. Discussing this very overriding of specific problems by circulating images that portray the animal as a symbolic vessel, Zoe Todd writes, “it is easier for Euro-Western people to tangle with a symbolic polar bear on a Greenpeace website or in a tweet than it is to acknowledge arctic Indigenous peoples and their knowledge systems and legal-political realities” (“An Indigenous Feminist’s” 6). The extent to which the polar bear has become symbolic undermines not only its own individuality, but displaces it from the kinship relations in which it usually lives, including those with the arctic peoples.
For “nanoq: flat out and bluesome,” a work that deals with “the vicissitudes of displacement” (Chaudhuri 47), Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson located every single mounted polar bear in the United Kingdom and photographed them in their bizarre “homes” - as exhibits in the collections of the wealthy, in museums or in zoos.

Their process, as always, was accompanied by extensive research, where they tried to find out where each of the bears originally lived, how it was captured, where did it undergo the process of taxidermy, and where was it auctioned off to. Exposing the fallacy of using individuals as stand-ins for a species or – even more so - “the untamed,” they hold up a mirror to the mentality of colonial plunder and the colonizers’ “self-congratulatory narratives through the display of the ‘tamed wild’” (“After nanoq” 293). These frozen over-representations of the animal, they write, “must always be a depletion and distortion of that which is represented” (ibid 297). Their apophatic task of undoing the presumed sufficiency of this representation focuses on “bring[ing] singularity to the remains of the specimen whose individual, cultural purpose has been to act as representative for a species – and sometimes, even more generically, its environment” (ibid). The photographs are accompanied by the little information that they were able to recover about each of the bears, who themselves cannot be brought back to life, but a semblance of individuality can be recovered through this residual trace. And yet, even though the original exhibition took place before the images of scrawny polar bears completely sunk into the popular imagination, art critics argued that the work was a commentary on climate change. Una Chaudhuri writes that the artists portrayed a “notional community of animals that shared a similar fate,” one that also awaits humans who, upon visiting the exhibition suddenly gain an “environmental awareness,” grasping that “we are one species among many” (50). This is to the dismay of Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson, who dismiss the tendency of commentators to subsume their efforts to “return a specific history of each [animal]” (“After nanoq” 295) under the grand narrative of environmental collapse.
Coming back to my initial considerations of the universalising tendencies of the Anthropocene, it is significant that the artists whose work is so visibly concerned with displaced or dead animals resists the narrative of using the plight of other species for the purpose of our own “warm pride.” We are indeed one species among many but this is not what Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson care to show here. Rather than drawing an allegory, they want to personalise the bears by memorialising them as the indigenous inhabitants of a space from which they were removed.

Displacement is not a metaphor and “nanoq” does not treat it as such. While we should not conflate the efforts of Western artists with the decolonial efforts undertaken by native practitioners in their specific contexts, “nanoq” is a modest attempt at considering animals as indigenous to a land, as well as of figuring their decoupling from their land as colonial and capitalist violence parallel to that exerted over the Homo sapiens. While it is more common to speak of animals as endemic of rather than indigenous to a land, Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson want to uncover the possibility of saying “we” in a multispecies collective, opposing the figuring of some as being of a land, rather than having the
The previously quoted Chickasaw writer Linda Hogan recalls the words spoken by Onondaga elder, Oren Lyons, at the first meeting of international indigenous peoples with the United Nations in the 1970s: “[I do not see a delegation for the Four Footed.] I see no seat for the eagles” (19). Although expressing sympathy with the variety of frameworks coupled together under the term “animism,” Hogan stresses that she is interested in them inasmuch as they intersect with traditional indigenous kinship ethics, where both “human and animal people” are considered as indigenous to a land because all animals are political and social citizens (ibid). Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson's attempts at a post-mortem justice to the bears who have been displaced and locked in the houses of collectors or museums uncovers their broad preoccupation with a possible recuperation, through artistic practice, of a parallel approach.

“Feral attraction,” another artistic research project, further betrays this interest, this time considering the unruly character of feral animals. In 2009, the capture and subsequent slaughter of a small flock of feral sheep that has inhabited an inaccessible part of an Icelandic fjord for decades generated nationwide attention. Ironically, because the Icelandic animal welfare law prohibits that sheep roam around wild in the winter, the flock had to either be sheltered or captured. No one, however, was particularly keen on the task. There were multiple attempts as disposing of the flock beforehand, including one that involved trying to shoot them down from a helicopter. Given the multiple attempts to kill them, the sheep became increasingly suspicious of humans, but also more adept at evading their murderous efforts. While they have never reciprocated the harm directly, some have reported incidents in which the feral flock attacked the domesticated sheep. Resilient and adaptive to the harsh environment, the flock persisted, until one winter a group of men and dogs risked their lives to climb the cliffs and capture them. Nineteen sheep were caught and transported to a slaughterhouse, five escaped only to be captured later on and another five threw themselves off the cliff.

Feral animals undo the very perception of what sheep should be like: an obedient and domesticated, non-violent species that could not thrive without human oversight. The obsessive hunt
of the flock and their immediate slaughter might seem perplexing because unlike “urban foxes and seagulls [which are the] most consistently contested species and their presence is alternately construed as pleasant, desirable or offensive” (“Feral attraction” 12), the Tálkni sheep were not pests. The territory that they inhabited was not occupied by anyone else, and the family who owned Tálkni did not mind them being there, yet there still was “a legal necessity to erect houses for [the sheep's] shelter and upkeep” (ibid 9). The sheep going feral, suddenly becoming alien, destabilised fixed categories. Curiously, as the hunt for the sheep commenced, Iceland itself was undergoing structural changes, perhaps accompanied by an anxiety about the progressing urbanisation of rural life, and the loss of “the old ways.” The presence of this seemingly known species that has grown more and more alien was coupled with the nationwide campaign preaching the need for modernisation and the general unsustainability of farming and small rural communities. Many inhabitants have moved from the rural parts of the Vestfjords to the cities. During the hunt, farmers, city and government officials, animal rights activists from all over the country and the general public debated over who should have the right to kill the “pests” and on what grounds.

Presenting a very moderate disturbance, however, the sheep migrated away from the human communities. It is this very unreliance on humans that became their death sentence. Even though, as Pearce notes, nowadays “nature's resilience is increasingly expressed in the strength and colonizing abilities of [evolving and alien] species,” there are also corresponding horror stories about alien takeovers set on remote islands and in small villages, where the human population simply loses their territory to other animals” (14). Yet, figuring the sheep as an undesirable alien was not exactly pragmatic, neither was it part of a territorial struggle. The hunt became not only a battle on the territory of legislation, but one on the ontological level, where the sheep’s condition as the undesirable had to be resolved by force, no matter if they were actually disturbing anything. Pearce already makes the obvious connection that conservatism, whether in natural or social conservation, “too often becomes fear and hatred of the foreign and the unfamiliar” (ibid). Indeed, there were efforts to justify the aberrance of the sheep, whether to make arguments for their extermination or
protection. It was argued, for example, that they carry disease, although a proof was never presented. More important was the argument that the sheep had different physiological features than domestic sheep, which was never proven because the captured animals were killed so hastily that even the scientists interested in the case could not access any remains to determine whether there was indeed a difference. This would had been an important victory for the conservation movement – if the sheep were indeed different than their domestic cousins, they could have deserved protection as a new species. Determined to be an aberration, however, the sheep had to be disposed of. Sara Ahmed writes about how the overdetermination of subjects as “alien” is harmful: “the alien then is not simply the one whom we have failed to identify but is the one whom we have already identified in the event of being named as alien: the alien recuperates all that is beyond the human into the singularity of a given form” (Strange Encounters” 2). While Ahmed's study deals with the affects and micro-governances surrounding human migrants, perhaps a similar anxiety parallels the presence of aberrant species, or those who do not fit the designations that society allowed for them.

In their project, Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson interviewed members of the local community, especially those who had participated in the hunt. They were fascinated with how the presence of the feral flock within an otherwise familiar landscape effectively rendered it nonhuman, thus “challenging the scope of human representation by means of a paradigm shift. In its apparent self-determination, the animal in question can be seen to have grown into ‘its larger self’ through its adoption of this landscape as a permanent home beyond human accessibility and control” (“Feral attraction” 8). They state that the media images and reports of the animals escaping capture solidified a certain admiration for the sheep as worthy opponents, in contrast with the obedient farmed sheep. One of the given assumptions about sheep, of course, is that they are meant for consumption – which is what happened immediately after capture in order to “correct” the image of the sheep from resilient feral animals to consumable meat. “When humans slaughter animals,” Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson write, “their imposed departure is one of transformation, not normally regarded as one of eradication” (ibid 9) – they turn into meat, clothes, cosmetics or artworks. A purpose of consumption, it is
commonly argued, invalidates the argument of doing violence to animals, because it is inevitable. In the case of the Tálkni sheep, however, the artists reveal how even though consumption was not inevitable, the slaughter had to be inflicted nevertheless, because the sheep troubled the existing legislation, as well as the idea of a domestic animal versus a feral one. What their investigation shows is that the erasure of the flock was not seamless or invisible, but allowed for the emergence of resilient verminhood, where one resists being moved because one desires to continue living. As with “nanoq,” however, this a-signifying personalisation of the deceased animal becomes a mourning ritual.

Both “nanoq” and “Feral attraction” are animorphic memorial insurrections, where a person is untangled from a representational overdetermination by the artist or the researcher's slow and detailed undoing of the presumed sufficiently of the overrepresentation that stands in the way of emergence and particularity. Rather than replacing one representation with another, Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson are interested in how the totality of their collective and relational research practice allows to “find a glimpse of a life having been lived” (“The We of the We” 5, emphasis added). They write:

> When examining a nonhuman animal, the repeated application of a [species designation] reduces our capacity to grasp the idea that it might be something other than a construct that human beings have the faculties to register. In this act of naming, the appreciation of the individual animal itself and its particular ecological conditions is thereby suppressed or extinguished entirely. (ibid 3)

> What is interesting about these artworks is that in considering endemic or feral animals they use underdetermination and displacement itself as (research) methods of revealing nonhuman personhood. “Displacement and détournement are very much a part of [artistic process],” they write, because they invite the complexity and uncertainty when it comes to approaching other species (“After nanoq” 301). They thus “[want to] displace the controlling apparatus of
representation” in favour of underdetermination and practice in the local context (“Feral attraction” 1). On their own side, the practice is an apophatic way of *undoing* the overdetermination, and a way of aligning with the real moment and the presence of specific persons – animals as individuals. This is especially interesting as they are trying to engage the personhood of the animal *posthumously*, thus working within what we might call the final displacement – death. In “Feral attraction,” they write:

As there was no opportunity for scientific study to be conducted on the flock before or after slaughter, we mark a space in which this extension hovers between being a memorial and a relational corollary of being feral in a mountainous landscape. With this intervention, we keep alive the story of a community of domestic animals, which despite climatic inclemency and the seeming impenetrability of this landscape, survived without human care for three decades and indeed showed every sign that they might have continued to live there in perpetuity. (11)

Writing about the Yukaghir personalisation of reindeer in the relations of hunting, Rane Willerslev notices that there are significant attempts to not only recognise the personhood of the hunted animals, but to apologise for the grave misery of having to kill them for food. “The greatest peril of life lies in the fact that human food consists entirely of souls” (Rasmussen 55–6). By dismantling representations and “seeking a glimpse of a life lived,” Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson notice that naturalists lack such rituals to placate and honour those who give their life, bodily comfort and well-being for our pleasure or survival. “A necessary psychological distance has been established between us and those species over which we exercise the most control,” they notice (“Radio Animal”) and perhaps their work wants to inhabit this imbalance of power more consciously, especially in the case when it is exercised unfairly, cruelly or wastefully. This is why they end up staging the emergence of personhood by undoing sufficiency of representations or absences that can be filled with personalisation and specificity, even if post-factum.
In another project, even as they are dealing with presumably alive animals, they stress *absence* as the possibility of personalised emergence, or absence as an antidote to representation, a tactic of insurrecting a ghost. For “Radio Animal,” part of a bigger project “Uncertainty In The City,” they travelled around various places in the United Kingdom in a van, interviewing people about their experiences with invasive species and local pests, with animals “hidden in the fabric of their home [or] in the garden” (“Radio Animal”). The interviewed “hundreds of participants in relation to their encounters with animals within and around the margins of their home. Along with an invitation to retell their stories we invited them to consider ideas of ownership, colonization and encroachment” (“Feral attraction” 12). At the heart of this research is the perceived proximity of invasive species to the home and the question of being forced into an interspecies cohabitation. Because these relations are territorial, they involve trickery, violence and ambiguity. An interviewee reflects on how “humans are a great ape, and one of the most violent animals on the planet,” and thus themselves perpetually inhabit a contested space (“Radio Animal”). Another narrates how when he was a teenager, an enormous pig escaped a nearby slaughterhouse and invaded his garden. He describes it as “a shocking experience (…) this huge animal running amok” in hope of escaping death. “It knew what was going to happen,” he continues, “and it fought bravely against the four men that showed up in order to club in back to the butcher” (ibid). This experience of seeing the animal “asserting itself in my own space,” he confesses, made him look at slaughterhouses from a different point of view and he ultimately regretted that the pig was clubbed into obedience (ibid). In other interviews, there is also an unease and tension between the necessity of cohabitation with other animals and the harm it might bring. This extends beyond the relations between the *Homo sapiens* and other species. One interviewee describes how two mice she once caught into the same trap ended up fighting each other to death because they were “territorial,” while another describes how the British mole poses a threat to local cattle rather than humans, and therefore eradicating the mole is an act of protection of the domesticated animals. The various experiences recalled turn ethics into a contextual matter. From a pest exterminator who “adored rats,” to the purchase of a rare half-wild breed of a cat for $22,000,
and a long discussion about parasite maggots feasting on a deer, these recollections scale down the
narrative of invasive species to a local level. For one interviewer, a pest is only a pest when it is inside
her personal space – she is frightened by a mouse moving inside the walls of her house, but strangely
peaceful over ants conquering her balcony: “my balcony belongs to the ants, I am only a tolerated
presence out there” (ibid).

Another recalls how she developed a relation of cohabitation with a mouse that she was
first terrified of and felt was “terrorizing her” in her own house. Yet, they managed to develop a
respectful relationship, where they generally try not to get in each other’s way. “After I gave him a
name,” she adds, “it all became easier, especially since he sometimes leaves for months on end. We
do not have a monogamous relationship (…) It is not an invasion if it is only one individual” (ibid).
It is impossible to posit a relation of complete similarity between global climate migration of human
groups in the Anthropocene and the displacement of species - Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson do not
attempt to do so, neither do I. Yet, animorphic practice is focused on underdetermining conceptual
barriers like “difference” and “sameness” when it comes to human and nonhuman animals, or
human and animal people, as Linda Hogan would say.
If personhood happens once each time and is determined by specific relations in specific communities, so does the ethical practice that must follow from it. Recognising animals as persons, individuals and cohabitants in our communities rather than species or pests forces a deeper recognition not only of the characters of each animal or group, but also of the ways in which our own human community draws the borders between the alien and the familiar. It forces an explication of how we think about personhood - who is considered a person worthy of protection, respect, or of appropriate rites and appreciation if violence had been done. Some types of animism take violence as an organizing and unavoidable axis of personhood. Yet, precisely because it is so, additional care must be taken in how relations of personalisation are drawn. These relations are put at the centre of Amerindian or Yukhagir ontologies. Willerslev recalls how the Yukhagir hunters explained that while every species is seen to behave according to its own moral code, there are always rules – the Yukaghir would “decline to eat elk meat if they suspect it has been killed in a
morally improper way and some don’t eat bear because they are so similar to humans that it would be cannibalism” (95). Bird-Rose similarly explains how in interspecies practices she participated in, “when an emu person dies, nobody eats emus until the emu people tell them they can, and the first emu to be killed is treated with special ritual” (142). Both these examples, as well as Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson's detailed revealing of the personhood that has been neglected through the overdetermination of an animal show that even though relations of violence are present and even may be a necessity, objectification does not have to follow from them.

3.3.2. Real Strange

Therein lies the rub. This repertoire of realism is ill-equipped to imagine “the real” in the Anthropocene. When nature is not inert, when the human/non-human divide is breaking down, when events and actors are no longer confined to slices of place and time, and when the seemingly enclosed and orderly world is interrupted by external, uncanny powers, the [modernist realism] is at a loss, unable to represent such a world.

(Fan 945)

In a meeting facilitated by the notorious Japanese artist Makoto Aida, the 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 20s. They consider themselves as activists who respond immediately, intuitively and transgressively to “the real of [our] times” (de Wachter). Labeled “neo-dadaists” (Petty), the “l'infant terrible” of contemporary Japanese art or “prank artists (…) with a mischievous punk attitude” (de Wachter) (the group's name sounds like “penis” in Japanese, causing endless embarrassment to journalists who try to both report on their work and keep a straight face), they perceive themselves as historians of the present, giving voice to the strangeness and resilience of the contemporary life for the benefit of the
speculative historians of the future (“The Influencers”). Describing the earthquake in Tokyo in 2011, they recall that it felt as if reality was “reversed” when the everyday material and safe existence of life in the capital evaporated along with the basic products off the market shelves. Yet, they also consider this feeling of reversal 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. In its simultaneous criticism and deployment of consumerism, capitalism and globalised youth culture, their work is creating a distinct lineage for the Anthropocene, foregrounding the co-habitation of non/human persons as pests within a global environmental crisis, framed by the atomic drive that led first to the disaster in Hiroshima in 1944, and later in Fukushima in 2011. Their methods can be considered extreme, and they themselves explicitly state 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” (qtd. in Petty).

Besides their most recent work “Don't Follow the Wind,” a curated non-existent exhibition speculatively staged in the no-entry zones near the Fukushima power plant, they are most known for their debut, “Super Rat,” which, as they say, exemplifies their themes (“The Influencers”). The famously crowded hi-tech Shibuya district of central Tokyo has been dealing with a rat infestation and the local newspapers do not mince their words - *The Japan Times* delivered headlines such as “Alien Invasion: Vexatious foreign species are increasingly taking up residence in Japan” (Kikuchi) and “Rodent population thrives on Tokyo's misfortunes” (Gilhooly). The rhetoric of invasive, alien, foreign communities taking the place of the righteous citizens cannot be stressed enough – Sara Ahmed wrote perceptively about how the imagination of the forthcoming nonhuman invasion draws demarcation lines between the citizen and the unwanted: “alien takes on a spatial function, establishing relations of proximity and distance within the home(land) (...) by coming too close to home, they establish the very necessity of policing the borders of the knowable and inhabitable
terrains” (“Strange Encounters” 3). When it comes to dealing with vermin, the crucial function is that of removing them from sight, of cleansing or at least making them invisible within the home space. Chim↑Pom's logic is rather reverse – they aim to make the vermin hyper-visible. “Super Rat” concerns specifically a large species of rat in Shibuya that is supposedly immune to poison, exceedingly clever, aggressive and difficult to eradicate. Introducing this project at the 2013 “Influencers Festival” in Spain, Ellie, dressed in a Pikachu costume, explained that while a lot of Japanese teenage girls hang around Shibuya sporting the very same outfit in a tribute to the cute rodent character in the popular anime series Pokémon, they have little respect or regard for real super rats, whose powers include resistance to extermination. At the same time, she noted that she perceived both the rat and the teenage community as rodents - “they are both rats” (“The Influencers”). She described how in the contemporary Tokyo humans and rats are species of vermin locked in a territorial struggle in a world filled with waste:

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. (ibid)

She confesses that Chim↑Pom respect and admire the “strong and strange” rats, who adjust well to toxic conditions via accelerated cultural evolution (ibid). Rats and humans are opponents in the territorial struggle in the Anthropocene – the very fact that the need to be fought, or that humans need to compete with them is what elevates them in Chim↑Pom's eyes to the status of a person, someone who needs to be respected in the fight. Willerslev notices that animosity can be the kernel of personhood: “the hunter is forced to recognise himself as an animal, and is [therefore] forced to
see it as a person” (135). While the relations between humans and rats cannot be described as hunting, Chim↑Pom admit that, “we like wild animals living in the city because they are the same as us” (ibid). Seeing verminhood as an equalising vector between themselves and the rats, they 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” (“Super Rat”). The “ecology” or the “web of life” that Chim↑Pom sees between human and rat vermin is one of damned comradeship, delineated by paradoxical relations of sympathetic violence, more akin to hunting, predation or black magic that those typical of environmental restoration.

Unfortunately, this potential animorphic approach quickly turned into just the opposite – a naturalist overdetermination of rats as symbolic, as mute, inert bodies onto which cultural meaning must be projected. In 2006, Chim↑Pom has first captured six rats, killed and taxidermied them, then dyed the corpses neon yellow in order to make them resemble the cuddly Pikachu, and placed them in the busy market square of Shibuya. Ellen de Wachter writes for Frieze:

While the work has serious implications relating to the co-existence of people and vermin, and the environmental consequences of a consumer society, it also represents a subtle provocation aimed at the canon of Japanese contemporary art. The Japanese pronunciation of ‘super rat’ sounds like ‘superflat’, the term for Takashi Murakami’s manga-influenced art movement, which has dominated Japanese contemporary art for the past 20 years. For Chim↑Pom, the super rat also symbolizes the Japanese people in the wake of catastrophic nuclear incidents, because of its intelligence and ability to evolve in order to survive poisonous attacks. As Ushiro explained: ‘We identify with the super rats. We have some sympathy for them and respect them as peers.’ When a Japanese collector purchased the first Super Rat piece, Chim↑Pom revelled in the irony of vermin being valued as desirable commodities, something they saw as ‘flattening society and annihilating class and financial divisions.’
Chim↑Pom explain that they first captured six rats in order to create self-portraits; they also wanted to symbolically comment on the contemporary art scene through portraying themselves as rebels against the old guard. Super rat against super flat. In 2011, when the project was repeated, the focus of their work shifted to examining pollution, toxicity and nuclear power in the national and global framework, and thus they stressed that the taxidermied rat bodies symbolised the entire Japanese nation, rather than their own position within the Japanese art scene (“The Influencers”).

Turning the rats into a blank canvas onto which meaning can be projected, the nonhuman is not even “represented” – it is rather rendered inert and incapable of producing its own culture, and thus merely a material ready for the use of human cultures. Part of policing the “alien” or of the “nonhuman” is the over-representation of those, who are perceived as beyond representation: by naming something to be “beyond representation” we already overdetermine it as “the unknown” (Ahmed, “Strange Encounters” 2).
Chim↑Pom, aiming to make visible the status of rats as equal to the vermin humans dressed up in Pikachu suits nevertheless force the rats to appear as such by literally rendering them inert so that this meaning can be projected upon them, or represented through them. Puig de la Bellacasa explains that nonhuman ethics should focus on generating care for those “who have not managed or are not likely to success in articulating their concerns, or whose modes of articulations indicate a politics that is ‘imperceptible’ within prevalent ways of understanding” (94-95). It is not that nonhuman persons do not express themselves, it is that naturalism renders them mute a priori or a posteriori. It cuts the ground from under their feet before they even step on the stage or it censors their speech. In “Super Rat,” rather than presenting an animorphic rodent-person like Natalie Jeremijenko's does, they join in
with the long line of artists who abuse rodents in order to “learn something about ourselves,” the most publicised of which is Kim Jones, whose inexcusable performance “Rat Piece,” in which three rats were tortured to death and burnt alive, was justified by the artist as an opportunity to see whether the audience would stop him. To assign oneself the privilege of using another’s body in this over-representational and determining manner, in order to discuss symbolic structures and forces while perpetuating real violence to living individuals is the very pinnacle of the naturalist preoccupation of representing ourselves through the nonhuman.

Could it be addressed differently? Rats are not the only vermin that Chim↑Pom sees as implicated in the territorial struggle in the Anthropocenic Tokyo. There are also crows. While crows are not usually considered to be pests, Tokyo has been struggling with an increase of particularly territorial and clever crow communities over the last years. In The New York Times, Martin Fackler traces this situation, which he describes as “straight out of Hitchcock,” back to “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” (emphasis added). In “Black of Death,” a title that perhaps references the Black Plague in Europe in the 14th century, Chim↑Pom describe garbage and waste as the connective tissue between non/human vermin persons:

Garbage always reflects the paradox of our society,’ Ushiro told me. ‘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.’ (de Wachter)

What then, if the conditions of dwelling in a toxic world, filled with garbage and waste, was taken not as a motivation for constructing representational objects that project the idea of the nonhuman as inert, but as the platform of emergence of vermin personhood, one that also embeds humans in the process, implicating both in the struggle of surviving in the Anthropocene? This
attention to illness and waste, and the reference to the Black Death is telling. The plague, carried by fleas that live on rodents, remains a powerful symbol of the entanglement of human and animal species on the axis of public health and natural disaster. It also deploys the very “despise and blame” logic mentioned in the opening paragraphs of this chapter – because 14th century medics could not explain the disaster, scapegoats had to be found, mostly among Jews, who were accused of poisoning the wells (S. Cohn). It thus remains an example of implicating certain communities into natural disasters by figuring them as unsanitary. Coming back to Haraway’s definition of the Anthropocene as the annihilation of the spaces of refuge and the condition of multi-species homelessness, we can also say that the ability to use the state of dwelling in garbage, in the discards of the wealthy, in the ruins of the world and our industrial past-present-future could be a clever tactic. What fascinates about crows and rats is their resistance to being moved, their insistence on staying where they want to stay, and their stubborn dwelling in their position as pest and vermin. 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 have been sabotaging “Japan’s super-modern technological infrastructure,” with almost 1400 reported cases of crows cutting fiber optic lines and closing down high-speed train services or jamming their beaks into power lines (Fackler). They have also been seen attacking humans in order to steal food and are generally disruptive of the idea that Japan has of itself as “living in harmony with nature,” as Fackler argues. While some have proposed to build a sustainable habitat for crows outside of Tokyo, it is unlikely that the animals would move given the orgy of garbage available to them in the capital. They are winning – “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” (ibid).

“All around the world,” writes Pearce, “alien species are on the march, often with human help. Mostly they are moving into places we have messed up” (23). In admiration of Tokyo crows, the first time Chim↑Pom staged the “Black of Death” performance was in the capital. As often, they produced video documentation of the project, which shows Ellie and other members slowly driving
through the capital with a decoy crow and a simple sound amplifier which emits the local crow calls. Using this lure, they were able to get large numbers of crows to follow them around iconic city landmarks, where they finally photographed the crows and created souvenir postcards, thus showing what they believe to be the real image of Tokyo – a battleground between vermin species. Chim↑Pom admire the sense of community among Tokyo crows, and they believe that the damaged condition of industrial city life had strengthened their bond: they describe, for example, repeating the project in Lithuania, where the crows gave up very quickly, while Tokyo crows followed them mercilessly (“The Influencers”). “They didn’t give up,” Ellie describes, “they have an amazing sense of fellowship” (ibid). They stage this emergence of personhood to show that crow communities find resistance in being together and learning to thrive in drastic, toxic conditions of the contemporary life. On a sensory level, their presence in the city is amplified, they are lured out of their usual life in the shadows. One online writer who analyses “Black of Death” as a tactical media project sees it in a broader socio-political commentary of many ways in which the desire to be together or in group makes us easier to manipulate: “the ideas of being psychically manipulated in subtle and often un-noticed ways align with many global political concerns like corporate and governmental data collection, global economic systems that seem completely out of our control and industrial destruction of our environment” (“Pile O'Words”). As Chim↑Pom argues, it is also a tactic that makes species survive. The artwork is animorphic in that it starts from an assumption of a community that forms and molds verminhood, and manages to show this without harming individual persons or reifying them into symbolic commodities. Fellowship in the times of waste is the condition of vermin personhood. Crows emerge as kin, and recording their community practices is the axis of the artwork. Vermin personhood becomes an antidote to a planetary uprooting and the loyalty to one’s kin becomes an important ethical practice.
Chim♣Pom’s interest in community, survival and fellowship is especially telling in light of the Fukushima tragedy, which we can see as framing Chim♣Pom's work as a whole. In 2011, “Black of Death” was restaged there. After the Fukushima disaster, crows proliferated in the no-entry danger zones. They were seen feasting on decomposing carcass and groups of crows have been spotted occupying the abandoned houses (“The Influencers”). Surprisingly, Fukushima becomes the stage of resistance: the robots that were sent there for research cannot withhold the radioactivity (McCurry), yet around the irradiated site there grows a beautiful, mutated daisy species (Howard) and the wild boar population has been thriving (A. Taylor). Chim♣Pom are interested precisely in this ability to adapt, and the ability to resist displacement. They point out the paradox: atomic waste
can never be moved and yet it forces other species to move and leave their homes. “You cannot put nuclear waste anywhere. The products enable us to move society ahead, but there is always some rubbish left behind,” often in the form of persons discarded in the process of atomic development (de Wachter). We can recall again Chakrabarty’s assertion that the Anthropocene means that no time is a time free from human industrial history. The Anthropocene is an event that projects itself retrospectively onto the past, while simultaneously erasing the possible future, thus creating a stagnant loop of extinction. “Ours is an epoch of squandered energy,” writes Bourriaud, “nuclear waste that won’t go away, hulking stockpiles of unused goods, and domino effects triggered by industrial emissions polluting the atmosphere and oceans” (“The Exform” 12). Chim↑Pom's art, even that created before Fukushima, can be understood as Fukushima art, especially because they have long drawn attention to the fact that while the victims of atomic catastrophes are memorialised, people vote for politicians who pledge to develop atomic power. They have also criticised the Japanese desire to transform into a wealthy nation by the reliance on nuclear development (“The Influencers”). Yet, within this destruction of refuge, Chim↑Pom perhaps still believe that, as David R. Cole, Rick Dolphijn and Joff Bradley write, “the geo-trauma of the nuclear disaster acts as a spur away from the black hole of entropic capitalism, and toward an irradiated homelessness that holds the promise of a new utopos, a site of world-formation, and a people yet-to-come” (211). This optimism they surely rooted in their reliance on the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, who believed that the “people that are missing,” who are otherwise unable to be resurrected after a disaster (in Deleuze's argument, it was the Second World War), could be invented by art practice – art could not as much represent them but facilitate in their creation and renewal after a catastrophe (“Cinema 2”). But can this apply for Chim↑Pom's project of revealing the verminhood that binds humans to other species?

Chim↑Pom have their own take on public art or on the task of community building. “Six members is already a society,” they describe themselves, “one that can have real effects in the rest of the world” (de Wachter). For “I Want to Go to the Landfill,” their first project outside of Japan,
they flew over Bali 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, which started at the highest price (“the actual prices of Damien Hirst’s works,” as they say) (“The Influencers”). With time, the prices drop, so that the donors are challenged to stop the countdown and pledge as much as possible to the charity. Yet, these communities are phantom ones – Chim↑Pom reveal a state of suspension, of being invisible, being where one is not wanted. Human and nonhuman persons are equalised in their status as the disposed-of, and the governments are not sought after as valid responders to the situation. To honour the lives lost 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. Chim↑Pom are not interested in creation or fabulation, they rather desire an activation of the strange reality of being a vermin person in an atomic wasteland. The “imagination” of the artists or the philosopher is not sufficient, but can be oriented towards a realist exposure of personhood, which can be revealed in its damaged state.

Architect and writer Léopold Lambert notes that the “Black Of Death” “ project is appealing (…) for the introduction of wildness in our tamed domestic environment (…) I thus interpret this operation as a manifesto for strangeness as a political weapon.” However, while Chim↑Pom consider both Hiroshima and Fukushima shocks to thought, this is also what makes them the real. In Fukushima, they filmed themselves trespassing on land near the TEPCO nuclear plants in hazmat suit climbing a nearby hill, where they installed a white flag, which they then turned into a Japanese flag, which they then turned into a symbol for nuclear energy. “Media is not allowed to go there,” they explain, “but regular people still work there and no one minds” (“The Influencers”). The artwork was called Real Times, and as they explain, it stands for three things: the contemporary, but also a chronological periodisation a’la Chaplin’s Modern Times, and journalism like The New York Times.
Reality rather than “strangeness” form the base of their practice. We can here draw a parallel with Frida Kahlo's response to Andre Breton, when she claimed that she was a realist rather than a surrealist, because she was visualising the reality of her life (Haynes). In The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable, Amitav Ghosh writes that the realism of the Anthropocene is neither about the primacy of predictable processes nor of unlikely events – in fact, the typical realism which focuses on portraying the everyday human life is not realist anymore - “the very gestures with which it conjures up reality are actually a concealment of the real” (“The Great Derangement” 53). The focus on “normal, everyday life” is an occlusion of the strange, disastrous, atomic times into which Chim↑Pom have been born.

Within this context, Chim↑Pom's work is neither Dadaist nor surreal, it can rather be a realist staging of a platform for the emergence of verminhood as kinship, or as a model of survival in the Anthropocene. Given the smart tricksters that they are dealing with, it is fitting that in order to bring out crow personhood, Chim↑Pom utilize similar techniques of decoy, detour and manipulation – it is indeed a tactic of coercion, for the crow calls that the animals are following are not made by a real crow. In the Tokyo performance, Chim↑Pom wanted to bring out the idea of Tokyo as a playground for vermin species, in Fukushima they additionally led the crows to the decomposing cattle carcass so that they could feed on the remains, re-initiating a cycle of predation.
that was disturbed by the nuclear explosion. Making sure that the crows are always able to follow
them by adjusting the driving speed to the flock, or by imitating crow sounds, they engage in a kind
of “mimetic empathy,” which Willerslev sees as the everyday incarnation of perspectivism. He
notices that because it is the body where the (animist) personhood is located, we cannot really
understand anyone’s else’s perspectives, because we live in our particular skin. What the animists
do to remedy that, as Willerslev describes, is to mimic the bodily movements and behaviours of the
animals that they hunt in order to produce an empathy of partial understanding (123). For them,
“this empathy functions even when there is an objective conflict of interest” (ibid 121). In parallel,
we could say that Chim↑Pom's animorphic staging of platforms for the emergence of verminhood is
in a behavioural sync with the crows, with whom they seek an establishment of mimetic
communities – while they recognise that they species might be locked in a territorial battle and
therefore remain in the relation of hostility, they admit the personhood of the opponent.

3.3.3. Persons in Animosity

At a time when environmental peril is discussed as a global issue and overheard in some form by
us on a daily basis, leaving us often with a sense of impotence in the face of the inevitable, [we]
are examining what ‘environment’ might mean in a more intimate and domestic sense – where
consideration of this term might trigger a more meaningful and evocative recognition for
individuals and where the sharing of space between species and its consequences might resonate
more powerfully, allowing some chance of new understanding (and even, new behaviour).
( “Radio Animal”)

We pursued rats and dreams/ for our works coming into being/ in the midnight center of Japan/
where ever thing sounds like an excuse.
( “Super Rat”)
The key to Amerindian perspectivism or Siberian animism is that predation, which creates the basis of personalising animals within an ecology of relations must be reversible. This is why predators and game are honoured as persons, while other animals may not be recognised as such.

How could animorphic practice that deals with displacement and vermin species parallel these predatory modes of personalising? Based on the relations of reciprocal or unilateral violence, these relations do not fit easily into the colloquial model of animism as a vitalistic or joyous project, at least not in the way that these terms are usually defined. Kinship or camaraderie between species is regulating the acceptable ways to kill, consume and interact within specific geopolitical contexts, rather than excluding them. If in animism we are persons because others treat us as such, personalisation can be a tactic deployed for specific purposes. Anthropologist Axel Köhler recalls how Baka hunters explained to him 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’” (417). As such, Baka hunters generally abstain from harming these persons, until there is nothing else to eat or on a rare, special occasions. However, within the paradigm of capitalism and private ownership, personalisation becomes objectification: the Baka work for their Bantu patrons who pay good cash for the gorilla or for the elephant, normally considered ancestors and hunted sparingly. Danny Navey and Nurit-Bird David comment: “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” (34). Thus, naturalist or animist approaches to animals can be entertained even within the same day, depending on the context. What could this tell us about displaced and vermin persons in the Anthropocene?

As Bird-Rose writes, “unethical killing 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
These insights from the animists who hunt and consume animals could provide models for theorizing animorphic art practice and the limits of predatory personalisation. Of practices, we could ask two decisive questions - which axes of power does the killing align with, and can one criticize something by perpetuating it, a question that has been pervasive in the study and practice of art? In “Super Rat,” Chim↑Pom engages a practice where the animal body is rendered into a symbolic material, and individual animals are considered disposable within the species. We can recall Reinert's argument from the previous chapter that capitalism maintains that nonhuman populations will always bounce back, thus solidifying the acceptance of inflicting torture and death on specific individuals. Similarly, Chim↑Pom disregard criticism by stating that the rats were to meet their death anyway at the hand of the exterminator and that they hope “the criticism is leveled at the government killing 500 rats a day” rather than them trying to expose the very proximity of human and rat rodents in Shibuya (“The Influencers”). Where does that figure within animorphic ethics? The killing of rats aligns with state power, therefore can hardly be used to criticise state power. In the opening quotation of this section Chim↑Pom seem to be aware that their tactics are cynical, and “everything sounds like an excuse” in Tokyo. Chim↑Pom write that they only want to expose the hypocrisy of humans: “we capture the [rat] comrades/ one by one with a net we bought at Donki/ it’s not to chase them away/ We can swear by our strong humanism towards animals/ so much that we are unable to even touch/ the original forms of meat that we consume every day” (“Super Rat”). The killing of animals for sustenance and survival versus for pleasure or, as with the artwork, a representational moralising lesson to be learnt seem to be two different tasks. Chim↑Pom, although they want to dignify the vermin by saying they are just like us, or they are the real-life super-rats and their presence should be made visible rather than hidden, still kill rats and use their bodies as mere materials for a symbolic protest that is meant for the human community of Tokyo to appreciate. If anything, “Super Rat” shows that a reciprocal predatory ethics cannot be an ethics anymore once it is wasteful and / or not reversible. It turns from ethics to ironic aesthetics. This returns us once more to the questions of producing representations that overdetermine and freeze the
nonhuman in its perceived muteness that needs to be enriched with meaning by humans, which is a naturalist tactic.

Building on the work of Walter Benjamin, Willerslev posits that non/human personalisation within the relation of predation works via mimicry and mimesis. The goal is not to represent the other, but to take power over it using the strategy of partial identification, which preserves difference, without which everything melts into unity and the relations of power are impossible (28). In hunting as described by Willerslev, mimesis cannot become totalising because then the imitator would become the other that he is trying only to partially mimic – this would be a metamorphosis that would make predation impossible because the victim would become ourselves, thus forcing us into cannibalism (29). It is then a certain dissimilar similarity as in the work of Jacques Lacan, a being in-between, a placing of oneself in enough proximity to claim power over someone, but not enough to be like them, because then the desire to have power over the-other-that-is-now-me would be invalidated (42). “Super Rat” could be considered a predatory, animistic practice of personalisation – it personalises via partial identification in order to kill, even if the victim is respected and considered as kin. Yet, the key to achieving this state, as the Yukhagir explain, is to mimic the bodily behaviour of the animal, rather than project onto the rubric of symbolism. In line with this non-representational anthropomorphism, in “Black of Death” Chim↑Pom try to provoke flocking by initiating flocking behaviour, carrying with them a faux animal emitting crow calls. The video recording of the performance is arresting and they admit that they were impressed with how persistently the crows followed them. 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”) – no wonder that the group is so eager to see a commonality between themselves and the rogue species that they admire.

Kaeli Swift, a scientist who studies crow thanatology and mourning in animals, undertook research into burial rituals in crows, describing how upon spotting one of their dead, they noisily flock to the deceased bird en masse. Although crows can show great appreciation for those who treat
them well (mostly in the form of gifts), they can also be rather vengeful and remember the face of a person who harmed them, even teaching their young to recognize it (Marzluff and Angell). For this reason, just like Chim↑Pom deploy decoy and trickery in order to engage with crows, researchers at the University of Washington who study crow mourning rites had to wear masks to hide their faces.


Swift writes that this is because the researchers, in order to study crow behaviour, would bring a taxidermied crow to a site and observe how the animals mourn: “volunteers wore one of six realistic facemasks with neutral expressions to preclude contaminating effects of facial expression” (188). While various behaviours have been observed in mourning dolphins, bisons, elephants and primates – from sexual arousal to regular pilgrimages to burial places long after the specific corpse has been reduced to bones – Swift studied how crows “make inferences about novel predators based on [their] proximity to dead conspecifics” (194). When Chim↑Pom position themselves alongside a dead crow, they attempt to get the attention of the flock, which constitutes a certain predatory opening; in certain types of animism predation is the relation par excellence, which conditions one's ontological status as a person. Unlike in “Super Rat,” this predatory cycle of personalisation is open-ended and can be
reciprocal – crows can vilify humans if they wish so, because they remain alive. With “Super Rat,” however, the response-ability has been denied, thus foreclosing the possibility of a reciprocal predatory personalisation.

Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson perform different funeral rites. They are interested in local histories of specific animals that were stifled and muted within naturalist and colonial practices, forced into representational dynamics as a species, pests or “ferals.” In an experimental ethnographic article, anthropologist Annette Watson and hunter Orville H. Huntington of the Huslia tribe describe how killing becomes the foundation of personalisation. Huntington explains: “I told Annette that you also accept a moose’s past; ‘they’re like us, they have a story behind them.’ Respect is also about acknowledging this history of an individual animal” (261). As with Taylor and Dabls, Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson produce a powerful institutional critique, challenging the way that cultural (nonhuman) identities are commodified in a symbolic reification, which “underpin[s] the colonial accrual and narratives of knowledge” (“After nanoq” 298). The key to their critique is undermining the idea that animals can only ever be universalised representatives of a “species,” rather than individuals. They believe that the museum practices of collecting specimens that stand in for a species or a culture rarely privilege or acknowledge the particularity of animals. Through careful research and interviews with local communities, they untangle singular persons from the histories of overdetermination and allow personhood to emerge post-humously, moulded by the predatory relations that precede it. In “nanoq,” by stripping the bear specimens of any catalogue information that would contextualise them as a species or make them embody an environment, they were rather interested in making “the bears themselves the prevailing context for each other” (“After nanoq” 297). The representation of bears-as-species is supposed to give way to a realism, where the bears stand in for their own carcass; they emerge as individuals who have been displaced from their specific histories and their homes in order to be locked within colonial narratives of wilderness and progress.

Writing about nonhuman ethics, Lucy Suchman demands that we pay attention in research to “what kind of social relations are assumed to be desirable (…) whose interests are represented, and
whose labors are erased” (224). Researching animal histories post-humously, Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson avoid speaking for the dead, they rather seek to highlight the histories that led to the capture or death of an animal, posing questions as to how and why we personalise. These histories are often tied to the category of the dangerous, the undesirable, the exotic and the alien, mapping onto the issue of homes, borders and migration in the Anthropocene. Puig de la Bellacasa advocates generating care for those “who have not managed or are not likely to succeed in articulating their concerns, or whose modes of articulations indicate a politics that is ‘imperceptible’ within prevalent ways of understanding” (94). Animorphic practice re-frames the stage so that these expressions can be noticed – it reconfigures worlds in order to facilitate the emergence of personhood. Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson do it by pointing out the tragedy of assuming that nonhumans are mute in the first place and need to be spoken for, a wrong that can be accounted for in the afterlife of the animal. Such a caring is different from taking charge or imposing. Animorphism avoids falling into a moralism: “caring should not become an accusatory moral stance – if only you would care! – nor can its knowledge become a moralism in epistemological guise” (ibid 96).

In the case of feral or predatory animals, or pests the ethic of care becomes more ambiguous. Huntington explains, for example, that “Once you’ve shown animals respect and the honour they deserve, they grow curious, and respectful of you, and then it is just their time” to die (261). Thus, the closer the relationship between the predator and the prey, the more possible the animal’s eventual demise, which Watson describes as “a gift”:

Non-natives most often employ the verb ‘to take’ to describe hunting; this is the verb employed in Federal subsistence legislation: ‘fish and wildlife 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. (ibid)
Unlike for the Tálkni people, for the tribes hunting is often necessary for survival, yet it is this necessity that prompts a greater respect. Because the animals offer their lives as gifts, their killing is regulated by moral codes: no one can hunt the calves under any circumstances, 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 (ibid). In the absence of such ritualised and personalised practices within Western modernity, Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson attempt to invoke these absent and devalued labours of caring for those whom naturalism labels mute, for vermin and the displaced, while also mapping the relations of violence between species. In August 2017, animal rights groups worldwide were appalled at a case of mistreatment on an industrial farm owned by Adriaan Straathof, one of Europe’s biggest meat producers (Simons). While the violence committed at the farms beforehand – such as the beating of ill animals to death, keeping them in cages that are barely bigger than them for their whole lives while the animals suffer broken bones and blistering – earned him a ban in Germany and multiple animal abuse settlements, his license has never been revoked. In August, 20,000 pigs burned to death on one of his farms, with nowhere to run, captured in their small cages. These mistreatments are abundant – globally, it is a common practice to throw live male baby chicks into an industrial grinder at hatching farms, as the quickest and most efficient way to dispose of them (McKenna). Theseviolences are not only particularly calculated, cruel and unnecessary types of objectification, they are also invisible. Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson’s artistic research practice aim to redefine visuality in the Anthropocene, highlighting the intersections of harm and care between species in industrialised modernity. Their work signalises that the Anthropocene could constitute a space where we begin to theorise these relations as implicated in modern capitalism – in Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times, Marxist theorist Nicole Shukin argues that the bodily labour of animals is the invisible labour of industrial capitalism; factory farming is also one of the main culprits to blame for the environmental crisis. Showing where animals’ histories are muted is “not simply adding ‘ready-made’ explanations for their absence in terms of, for
example, capitalism, gender, or race” or species (Bellacasa 96). The underdetermination of animorphism – the refusal to be determined only thorough the eyes of the (naturalist, colonial, capitalist) oppressors prevents seeing in the supposed absence of nonhuman personhood the success of modernity, or colonialism, or, indeed, the Anthropocene.

**Conclusion: Slow Violence; Or, Adaptive Cultures**

By “slow violence” I mean a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all. Violence is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility. We need, I believe, to engage a different kind of violence, a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales. In so doing, we also need to engage the representational, narrative, and strategic challenges posed by the relative invisibility of slow violence. Climate change, the thawing cryosphere, toxic drift, biomagnification, deforestation, the radioactive aftermaths of wars, acidifying oceans, and a host of other slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes present formidable representational obstacles that can hinder our efforts to mobilize and act decisively.
In “A Live Monster that is Fruitful and Multiplies: Capitalism as Poisoned Rat?,” Tom Holert writes that abstraction and destruction “have converged to an extent that has no historical precedent.” Through these mechanisms of abstraction, living beings are transformed into objects and value is assigned to the extraction of different existences - human and nonhuman persons can be considered disposable on an ontological level; a seemingly inescapable “disposability” is what marks our comradeship with others in the Anthropocene, an era defined by the excess of abstracted production and short-term development. The language of economy and ecology are permeated by a sense of crisis - it is not only drowning, as Monique Allewaert and Michael Ziser have already noticed in subchapter 3.2., but toxicity and waste: “the most striking image of refuse and discharge occurs in the economic sphere: junk bonds with toxic assets (...) the matter plainly reveals the real of globalism: a world haunted by the spectre of what is unproductive” (Bourriaud, “The Exform” 13-14). Concurrently, things are becoming increasingly alive, just as persons undergoing the processes of deterioration and violence related to the environmental crisis as classified as unproductive objects. Mark Fisher wrote playfully that it never mattered for capitalism whether consumers believed in the “aliveness” of commodities, because the commodities themselves did (“The Religion”). Vibrancy, networks and aliveness, themes much beloved by the contemporary theory preoccupied with the nonhuman, align themselves with the contraption of what Steven Shaviro describes as “capitalist animism,” where “capitalism [is] an animator of the inanimate” (“Commodity Fetishism”). Elizabeth Povinelli notices a similar phenomenon, when she describes the “Animist” as a figure of both governance and resistance:

Capitalism has a unique relation to (...) the Animist (...) insofar as Capitalism sees all things as having the potential to create profit; that is, nothing is inherently inert, everything is vital from
the point of view of capitalization, and anything can become something more with the right innovative angle. Capitalists can be said to be the purest of Animists. (“Geoontologies” 38)

Capitalism, however, equalizes all being as vital as much as it believes that all beings can be *extracted as value*. Cautious of those reading of animism that stress its vitality and animation, I instead committed to animism as a framework of nonhuman personhood, with the idea that personalisation can provide a different route than objectification, which is the mechanism by which capitalism extracts and assigns value. Writing about his fascination with animist as opposed to capitalist subjectivity, Félix Guattari states that “our survival on this planet is not only threatened by environmental damage, but by a degeneration in the fabric of *social* solidarity and in the modes of psychical life, which must literally be reinvented” (15, emphasis added). When I first started studying the rich body of work that grew around the concept of animism, I was interested in its inherently relational nature, which could form an antidote to a culture that relies on the ongoing commodification, reification and production. “Process” also appeared to be a relatively safe space for impulses of resistance, where relations cannot yet crystallise into “the spectacle,” as Guy Debord would describe the prerogative of capitalist reification. Yet, Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker wrote perceptively about how in our networked society, a “network” or a “decentralised” structure cannot be taken as an *a priori* method of resistance, revolution, or a political method. Because everyone is related to everyone else as a producer and a consumer, relationality and processuality seem to have grown into yet another set of fangs on the tentacular beast of capitalism. The answer is not that we need more entanglement, more relationality and more networks – this is precisely how our current economic system *operates*, by distributing itself in a shimmer of vibrant matters. If climate change means anything is that we are *too* networked and *too* entangled with the world. Alien geographers will possibly find human imprint in the radioactive material from the atomic bomb tests, plastic pollution, rising carbon dioxide levels and the incredibly large amounts of electronic waste that take much longer to decompose than any organic body.
My case study chapters record my evolving understanding of this issue as well as my growing ambiguity as to the politics and ethics of engaging with nonhumans in artistic practice. As I grew increasingly suspicious of relationality, vibrancy and aliveness, I focused more on genericity, underdetermination and vulnerability. The lens of a “generic humanity” or personhood, which I use interchangeably, allowed me to move away from the current trends in theorizing nonhumans in terms of agency or by framing them as cultural constructs. The category of a “nonhuman person” is inherently political, social and ethical. As a framework, animorphism, devised in dialogue with animism, decolonial, critical and feminist theory, records the toxicity and violence of the Anthropocene as well as the mechanisms by which nonhumans are drawn into the social and cultural sphere as persons. More often than not, their inclusion into culture exposes that they are already implicated in relations of violence, threat or predation - whether they reside in medical labs, cause a possible danger to human communities, live in polluted waters, deteriorate in the industrial fabric of the city, give their life to the ideology of conservatism, or catalogue within their bodies the violence of the atomic era. In *Slow Violence and The Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon describes how the questions of scale and temporality are crucial to devising policy changes in the times of an environmental crisis. Toxicity, pollution, the ongoing exploitation of those who are “othered” by the *anthropos* are “slow” violences, they happen imperceptibly. “The narrative challenges posed by slow violence,” he writes, “are challenges of catastrophic miniaturism (...) ‘What would constitute adequate protection’ Rokke asks of depleted uranium? ‘There is none. This stuff is 21 microns.’” (216). While I wanted to follow Guattari’s suggestion that art is well-suited to imagining new modes of social life, the case here is similar: how can harm be explicated or prevented when the violence considered is small and slow, and most of the time would not be classified as violence at all?

I wrote the chapter on Jeremijenko and Laar early on, seeing in their work a labour of constructing an alternate epistemology, where knowledge is founded not on objectification but on personalisation. Rather than discussing what this epistemology would be, both artists prefer to carry the future out in a programmatic gesture. Through personalising nonhumans, they attempt to create
networks of care, where everyday devalued labours would constitute different ways of understanding the social. Jeremijenko is concerned with the multispecies health crisis and with providing platforms for communication and community creation. She moves between different media with the goal of utilising technology as adaptive to the collaborative survival of species. Laar’s practice is less studied and more ambiguous; it reveals some of the contradictions of personalisation in art by intersecting it with corporate animism in the legal sphere. While he pays attention to the vulnerability of the non/human Alpine community, where the well-being of the glaciers should be maintained in order to prevent harm to humans, his epistemological goal of prioritising personal interactions instead of catastrophic, epic narratives is compromised by its implication in corporate power. With collaborative practices like theirs, one must ask what are the politics of creating environmental art alongside scientific and governmental institutions, with which both artists collaborated.

In choosing Tylor’s and Dabls’ work for my second case study, I was focused on projects that were more explicitly concerned with specific political and economic coalescences related to the environmental crisis. Taylor is a well-known and celebrated environmental artist, whose work has had an impact on policy. In thinking about how his practice is responding to the changes in the ocean, I wanted to highlight both the way in which he engages decay instead of conservation in his marine activism as well as the ambiguous politics underlying it. While his work does not concern itself explicitly with the Middle Passage, it is nevertheless rooted in this history of violence via its aesthetic and thematic motifs. There is a similar preoccupation with durational violence and histories revealed through rusting and disintegration in Olayami Dabls’ understudied work. Dabls is relatively unknown outside of his community in Detroit. Instead of lending his city a new visibility, he is aware that Detroit has been over-represented as a ruined environment. He thus carries out a protective ritual, re-framing nonhumans as teachers and ancestors in order to occlude the labour of community creation before the eyes of power. The histories of slow violence that he engages - racism and the fossil fuel economy - are re-inscribed into a larger, nonhuman culture, weaving an alliance between the rusting city and the communities harmed by exploitative development strategies. In both of these practices,
the framing of human histories within nonhuman cultures lends them a restorative potential; animorphism here operates as a regenerative death drive. Underwater, the coral is thriving and drawing attention to past and present violences in the ocean, while Dabls believes that the city will ultimately revive itself through community practices.

My last case study chapter, unveiling alongside the problems of migration and precarity, waste and pollution, health and illness, alien and indigenous species and a general multispecies displacement, focused on the practices of two art collectives, Chim↑Pom and Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson. While Chim↑Pom rewrite the Anthropocene as the era of atomic waste, ironic youth culture and predatory violence between vermin species, Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson intervene both as artists and scholars, giving us a template for animorphic research. The practices considered intersect with the problems of (over)representation in various manners, exposing how interspecies relations are governed by ambiguity and violence, but also how they can be the method of living together in a damaged world. In these artworks, animals emerge not as romanticised “natural” subjects worthy of conservation and protection, but active, predatory and territorial persons who remain loyal to their kin and have their own cultural community practices.

Cultural, political and economic practices that continually redefine the status of beings as either objects or persons are in themselves nothing short of ritualistic, at least in the language that they use. The way Naomi Klein describes the fossil fuel economy is akin to dark magic, a sacrifice of persons on the altar of short-term profit:

And the thing about fossil fuels is that they are so inherently dirty and toxic that they require sacrificial people and places: people whose lungs and bodies can be sacrificed to work in the coal mines, people whose lands and water can be sacrificed to open-pit mining and oil spills. As recently as the 1970s, scientists advising the US government openly referred to certain parts of the country being designated ‘national sacrifice areas.’
It would be difficult to claim ignorance of this sacrifice – since the establishment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, we know exactly the environmental cost of the meat we consume, the resources we rely on, the persistence of the fossil fuel economy. These violences would not be possible without many types of othering –speciesism, colonialism and racism. Those who have been cast out of the anthropos and into the nonhuman suffer the most under this climate. Giorgio Agamben already wrote about how the “perpetual state of exception” is used by the dominant powers in order to strip humans to “bare life,” where killing can be committed without any accusations of homicide. Human lives are posited as bare biological facts, without any inherent value. In 2016, the year that has been defined by the figure of the dispossessed, the migrant and the refugee this holds as true as ever - life is disposable and mobility is the condition of bare survival (Nail). For nonhumans, however, this has always been the case under the reign of modernity, which Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Marmon Silko, one of the most acclaimed writers within the literary movement called the First Wave of the Native American Resistance dubbed the “reign of the Death-Eye Dog” in her novel *Almanac of the Dead*, a striking work in which the planet itself is the only sympathetic character. Nonhumanity has in fact become the reference point of violence, cruelty and disposal. Animorphic art practices, by insisting that nonhumans are persons, address these matters of unhonourable killing, wasteful consumption of animal bodies, the prolonged torture of rodents used in medical research, and even the melting of the glaciers in the effect of anthropogenic development. By recognizing nonhumans as persons they relate to us how these phenomena could be classified as violences.

At the same time, animorphism leaves “personhood” itself undefined. It is this refusal to place parameters and values on non/human lives that is an additional protection spell cast against reification. Animorphic artists engage nonhuman persons in their particularity; they do not create representations, but stage platforms for emergence. There is no accident in how nonhumans are personalised, only specific ethical and political strategies that serve specific communities, and perhaps make little sense to the machine of reification outside of them. Precisely because personhood remains generic, in the dark of the ocean and in the waste land of the atomic explosion, it is
impossible to represent or put a value on. Placing it as the kernel of thought shifts the focus towards a practice of activation, and activism. Personhood is not an internal essence, but a practice that materialises in the real. Personhood is proper to all but manifests through specific behaviours. Harry Garuba writes that if there exists a unifying trait to animism is that it refuses unlocalised, unembodied persons. In the Anthropocene, it might even be beneficial to make ourselves generic - it turns our attention to the crime being particular.

Describing the time she had spent exploring the deep sea, oceanographer Sylvia Earl recalls that the suspension of light and an altered experience of time allowed her to realize that each person with whom she spent time underwater was discreet and particular, rather than a universal animal “species” (“Mission Blue”). Animorphism seeks to explicate the ontological possibilities available to nonhumans at a time when we must be weary of colonising nonhuman ontology for the purpose of aesthetic or existential pleasure. The animorphic artist is not interested in becoming-animal, she is rather interested in providing the opportunity for individual animals to become-persons. As John Ó ’Maoilearca writes, “the assertion that [we] think and write ‘for animals’ and even become animal (...) is really only [about] human becoming (...) the animals’ part in this pact most often appears as only a means to an end” (201-202). In the times when humans are conceptually dissolved into nonhumanity, animorphism presents an alternate strategy, keeping “personhood” as a generic “x” that underlies all activist operations. The way animorphism approaches nonhumans as persons is perhaps best explained with the Heisenberg principle: in order to localise a particle, one must also underdetermine it. Within artistic practice, all the definitions of personhood are simultaneously underdetermined (“who a person is” or “what is the general condition of personhood”) and localised (“one is a person if one is treated as such contingent on the rules of personalisation within a given community”). Thinking alongside animorphism as a way of mapping activist art practices that engage such ideas of nonhuman personhood could sketch different vectors for thought, where otherwise muted ontologies come to the fore. In an interview, Michel Foucault made one of the most succinct and accurate commentaries on the function of thinking:
I don't say the things I say because they are what I think, I say them as a way to make sure they no longer are what I think. I don’t believe in the virtue of using language for 'self-expression', the language that interests me is the one that can actually destroy all the circular, enclosed, narcissistic forms of the subject and oneself. And what I mean by 'the end of man' is, deep down, the end of all these forms of individuality, of subjectivity, of consciousness, of the ego, on which we build and from which we have tried to build and constitute knowledge. The West has tried to build the figure of man in this way, and this image is in the process of disappearing. And so I don't say the things I say because they are what I think, but rather I say them with the end in mind of self-destruction, precisely to make sure they are no longer what I think. To be really certain that from now on, outside of me, they are going to live a life or die in such a way that I will not have to recognize myself in them. (“The Lost Interview”)

Thinking through the matters of nonhuman personhood and the end of man, adaptive or disruptive artistic practices in the Anthropocene that can either contribute to the flattening of persons within the machine of spectacle or, the opposite, can include them in the social apparatus, admitting to them the status of a person, could be one such process of making sure that the way we used to think is not the way we continue to think.
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