

FOREWORD

It is a pleasure to introduce our visitors to the work of Julie Andreyev. *passages* is a new media/performance exhibition that examines relationships with our urban environment and interactions with the pets (dogs) to whom we often attribute human characteristics. Andreyev's work *FWDrift [remix]* provides a glimpse of the Mississauga landscape edited into a audio and video performance while her *Animal Lover* series present a personal introspective look at the artist's close association with her two dogs Tom and Sugi.

Thank you to the artist, Julie Andreyev and to the other participants for their contribution to the successful realization of this project, Simon Lysander Overstall, Linda Thomas and Niwah Visser. A special thank you to Rikke Hansen for her insightful analysis of Andreyev's works in *passages*.

Robert Freeman
Executive Director/Curator
Art Gallery of Mississauga



MORE-THAN-HUMAN SUBJECTS: THE WORK OF JULIE ANDREYEV

BY RIKKE HANSEN

Where do we, as human subjects, begin and where do we end? This is a question which continues to haunt the work of Julie Andreyev, as the artist urges us to think beyond our traditional comfort zone, challenging us to look closely at our surroundings with fresh eyes.

In *FWDrift* [remix], 2004-present, we are asked to pay attention to the relationship between humans, the city and techno-sensory experiences. The work consists of a multimedia, interactive performance, which utilizes pre-recorded sounds and visuals as experienced from the position of a local participant driving in a car through an urban setting, while being guided by another local participant. Having collected these data, the artist manipulates the recordings to create an alternative, forever-changing image of the city within the gallery space. As the work moves from city to city, it becomes subject to a number of changes, allowing it to respond to a particular location. For most people, the car is a necessary, yet highly symbolic tool to get from A to B, a straightforward means of transportation in an age of increased mobility and speed. But, as *FWDrift* [remix] suggests, no clear-cut boundaries exist between us and the “stuff” that surrounds us. Maurice Merleau-Ponty notes how we, in everyday language, tend to perceive the car as an extension of ourselves, or even of our selves, rather than something separate from our own embodied movements. In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, the French philosopher observes that “if I am in the habit of driving a car, I enter a narrow opening and see that I can ‘get through’ without comparing the width of the opening with that of the wings”. Here, the car becomes something like a phantom limb, an incorporation of a foreign body as well as an out-corporation of the body itself, car and subjectivity merging with one another. We tend to use expressions such as “I am driving” or “I am parking” without making any linguistic reference to the vehicle itself. The piece, as it reaches its final stages within the exhibition, is no traditional panorama; it does not give us a wide-angle view of the city, nor does it turn us into masters of the cityscape, as mid-19th century panoramic paintings used to do. Instead, it presents a techno-cultural *dérive*, a movement through the built environment which is forever subject to chance and change, quite literally a “drift” through a space that cannot be dominated by the gaze but which exists as a series of fragments, a space within a space that is both public and private.



The *Animal Lover* works by Andreyev examine the networks people enter into via looking at our relations to non-human animals. While technological innovations, such as the car, are today everywhere to be found and continue to alter our perceptions of the world, non-human animals, John Berger argues, have become increasingly marginalized within late modern societies. And yet, animal imagery remains everywhere to be found. Andreyev's work investigates alternative ways of depicting animals, ways that may allow non-humans to participate in the creation of their own representations, thereby avoiding overtly anthropomorphic interpretations. *Bikeride*, 2009, a looped video installation, also shows a trip through the city. Here, as in several other works, the artist calls upon her two companion dogs, Sugi and Tom, as co-creators within the piece, the animals running alongside Andreyev as she cycles through Vancouver. In this work, the city is shown to belong to both human and non-human animals, as the dogs remain central within the frame.

Another example is *Rockstar*, 2010, a high definition video work which, like *FWDrift* [remix], uses car travel as its theme. The protagonist of the piece is the dog Tom. It has been suggested that the pleasure canines appear to gain from traveling with their heads out of moving cars works like a sensory psychedelic overload. While this experience cannot be directly translated to the human sensory apparatus, our embodied mode of being-in-the-world nonetheless equips us with the empathy it takes to relate to the event. In Andreyev's work, this is not so much a question of scientifically explaining the cause-and-effect of this particular enjoyment, but to





revel in the wonder of it, as she aims to convey the pleasure by producing an aesthetically mesmerizing interpretation, slowing down the close-up footage to allow us to dwell on the details of the animal's face, while using sounds taken from Tom's voice and the noise from the artist's car engine to create a hypnotic soundtrack.

This use and manipulation of the animal "voice" is something Andreyev returns to in other works. *Aria*, 2009, borrows the format of a well-known operatic form. In this piece, Tom and Sugi are seen running through a beautiful, iconic Canadian landscape. An aria usually consists of a self-contained musical piece for a single voice. In Andreyev's piece, this voice belongs to Tom, yet his song also seems to "grow" from the landscape, as the artist manipulates recordings of Tom's voice to create a musical score representing the sounds of birds, insects and the wind.

This constructed mimicry, through which one voice is made to stand in for or copy another, serves to remind us that the voice is a complex thing that does not solely belong to the "speaker". In traditional philosophy, non-human animals have tended to be deprived of "voices", perceived to produce only "sounds" or "cries". The German word *Stimme*, meaning "voice" and related to the notion of "voting", implies that being robbed of one's voice is also to fall outside representation, and Jonathan Rée notes how "having a voice is much the same as having a vote, it seems, and some languages use the same word for both. Voices could almost be seen as part of the constitution of representative government, or even the meaning of politics itself". We tend to think that to have a voice is to be able to stand up for oneself, yet, we also talk about the need to find one's voice, as if it was somehow floating around outside us, something to be captured and nurtured. Just like mimicry calls into question whether or not voices are fully "of themselves" or fully "of the other", Andreyev's manipulation of the animal voice inserts uncertainty into an already existing system of language by asking us what the notion of "owning" a voice really means. Furthermore, as the soundtrack to these works take the form of musical scores, ranging from jazz, to rock, to electronica, we are brought into these more-than-human worlds, as the incorporation of music and song creates what Gernot Böhme calls an "aesthetic of atmospheres". After all, is this not what song does? It is part of a scene; it seduces us, carries us, informs our mood and thereby stands for a form of language that does not simply convey a personal message but implies a "towardness" between beings, an encounter that moves us and takes us beyond and out of our selves.

While not directly addressing the idea of voice, *Screen Test – Sugi and Screen Test – Tom*, both 2009, nonetheless extend the theme of the human-animal response. Here, the viewer is met by the attentive gazes of the artist's two dogs. Taking their common title from a celebrated body of work by Andy Warhol, these slow-motion video portraits depict interspecies communication in minute detail by paying attention to the tiniest changes in facial expressions. In these works, duration is key, as the animal eyes demand our continued concentration before the monitors. But what is the nature of such a plea? According to Emmanuel Levinas, it is the face-to-face encounter with another being that brings about an ethical demand. What such a meeting of gazes call for, is a non-violent, non-reductive understanding of the Other in his or her otherness, without projecting any pre-existing ideas onto that other being. It would follow, that anthropomorphism, the attribution of human characteristics to animals, is a kind of violence. Yet, when it comes to interspecies encounters, Levinas retracts his claim and states that: "I cannot say at what moment you have the right to be called 'face'. The human face is completely different and only afterwards do we discover the face of an animal". This is a claim that has been highly contested, and in many ways Andreyev's work follows the same line of protest. What do I look at when I stare into the eyes of a dog? Alphonso Lingis notes how the desire for the reciprocation of the gaze is also the desire for the annihilation of the eye/I; or rather, that when encountering the face of an animal, "your eyes entirely cease to be organs for observing, cease to be organs, become only surfaces". So, as opposed to the gaze being a simple means of mastery, what we experience here is the desire to be with animals, to belong to their world, rather than merely looking in from the outside.

Importantly, when viewed together, these works, from *FWDrift* [remix], to *Bikeride*, to *Rockstar*, to *Aria*, to *Screen Tests*, show us some of the complex networks we enter into on a daily basis, networks that consist of humans, animals, things and technologies all acting upon each other. Is there an ethical plea happening in the work of Andreyev? I would say so, although it is not a didactic one. Instead, what she seems to ask us to do is to stop, pay attention and respect those non-humans who make and shape us, who are our everyday companions, without whom we would not exist, and who, in the end, help us to ask questions about our own self-hood.

Rikke Hansen is an art critic. She lives and works in London, England.



IMAGE CREDITS

FWDrift [remix] 2004 – present, preliminary drive (photo courtesy of Daniel Mirer)

FWDrift [remix] 2004 – present, performance (photo courtesy of Liana Schmidt)

Bikeride, 2009, single channel HD video loop

Rockstar, 2010, single channel HD video

Screen Test - Tom, 2009, single channel HD video

Screen Test - Sugi, 2009, single channel HD video

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