



Universiteit  
Leiden

The Netherlands

## **Art Between Species: Two Case Studies of Animal's Agency in Interspecies Art**

Fischer, D.

### **Citation**

Fischer, D. (2020). Art Between Species: Two Case Studies of Animal's Agency in Interspecies Art, 67-92. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/123086>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/123086>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

# ART BETWEEN SPECIES

## TWO CASE STUDIES OF ANIMALS' AGENCY

### IN INTERSPECIES ART

Dorothee Fischer  
University of Trier, Germany

*By examining two exemplary cases, this paper addresses the contemporary phenomenon of artistic collaborations between human and non-human animals, which is referred to as interspecies art. Interspecies art has become increasingly significant since the beginning of the twenty-first century and excels at challenging binary oppositions by crediting animals' creative abilities. Located within the field of human–animal studies, this article combines art historical methods with agency concepts derived from praxeology and action theory. The innovative approach of connecting these ideas of animal agency with interspecies art provides the framework to analyse Aaron Angell's Gallery Peacetime inhabited by axolotls and CMUK, an interspecies collective consisting of humans and parrots. In order to make the animals' participation visible as well as to provide a deeper understanding of interspecies art, these specific human–animal relations are examined using Lisa Jevbratt's and Jessica Ullrich's criteria for interspecies art and Mieke Roscher's concepts of entangled and relational agency. This analysis is complemented by a field study and proves to be fertile for revealing the animals' strong involvement in the artworks as well as beyond the art context.*

#### INTRODUCTION

The relationship we humans have with other animals has always been conveyed in our art. Painting, drawing, engraving, sculpture, and photography are all reflections of the society

1 Linda Kalof, "Art. Animals in Art," in *Encyclopedia of Human–Animal Relationship. A Global Exploration of Our Connections with Animals. Volume 1: A–Con*, ed. Marc Bekoff (Westport/London: Greenwood Press, 2007), 85.

2 John Berger, *Das Leben der Bilder oder die Kunst des Sehens* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1989), 16.

3 Jessica Ullrich and Friedrich Weltzien, "Der Human–Animal-Studies-Diskurs in der Kunstgeschichte. Disziplinäre Wachstumsprognosen einer marginalisierten Themenstellung," in *Disziplinierte Tiere? Perspektiven der Human–Animal Studies für die wissenschaftlichen Disziplinen*, ed. Reingard Spannring et al. (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015), 106.

4 Jessica Ullrich, "Performative Interspezieskunst im 21. Jahrhundert," in *Das ausgestellte Tier. Lebende und tote Tiere in der zeitgenössischen Kunst*, ed. Bettina Paust and Laura-Mareen Janssen (Berlin: Neofelis 2019), 38.

5 Harriet Ritvo, "On the Animal Turn," in *Dædalus. Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 136.4 (2007), 118–22.

6 Kenneth Shapiro, "Editor's Introduction. The State of Human–Animal Studies: Solid, at the Margin!" in *Society & Animals*

that produced them and represent what was going on in a culture at a particular place in a particular time, such as the form of the human–animal relationship [...].<sup>1</sup>

In the history of art, non-human animals have traditionally been seen as objects; objects one could exploit for producing paint and brushes, or portray for aesthetic and symbolic purposes, as they were understood as less significant compared to humans.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, since ancient times depicted animals were seen only as representations of their species as a whole rather than as individuals.<sup>3</sup> As late as in the second half of the twentieth century, a significant change in both the artistic and the academic sphere has started. This coincided with the establishment of performance art as a specific genre, which innovatively integrated living animals into the context of art.<sup>4</sup> Since then more and more artists have tried and continue to challenge the binary opposition of nature and culture by involving animals into their art practice. By doing so these individuals try to overthrow a hierarchical relation between human and non-human animals. This is indicating a general social change and can be seen as an argument for a partial renunciation of anthropocentrism. In this context, Harriet Ritvo (2007) introduced the influential notion of the "animal turn".<sup>5</sup> As a symptom of this trend, the interdisciplinary human–animal studies aim to not only integrate animals into academic discourses but also to conceptualize them as subjects, as living beings with own interests, experiences, and perspectives.<sup>6</sup> The field of human–animal studies has emerged over the course of the last three decades out of the academic interest in animal rights and welfare movements.<sup>7</sup> Its goal is making animals visible in research and society as well as challenging our anthropocentric everyday life.<sup>8</sup> Observing animals' general aesthetic abilities connects human–animal studies to the field of art. This is illustrated by the common example of different bowerbirds from New Guinea and Australia.<sup>9</sup> The males of the great bowerbird (*Chlamydera nuchalis*) and the Vogelkop bowerbird (*Amblyornis inornata*), for instance, build impressive constructions whose complexity can be compared to human

architecture. Surprisingly, these bowers do not serve the purpose of nesting, but in fact visually support the male's courtship dance.<sup>10</sup> In addition to natural materials such as shells, beetles, and blossoms, civilization waste including plastic lids or broken glass is used by the birds, depending on the respective species' preferences.<sup>11</sup> The finds are sorted by colour and carefully arranged. According to Dario Martinelli (2012), the preferred objects of satin bowerbirds (*Ptilonorhynchus newtoniana*) are blue-coloured.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, these birds have even developed a method to dye objects, solely using the juice of berries they chewed beforehand.<sup>13</sup> Researchers have noticed that most bowerbirds appear to adjust their constructions after some re-evaluation.<sup>14</sup> Periodically, the bowerbirds exchange dried flowers for fresh ones, a process that has no static but only a decorative function. The birds' meticulousness makes the process of finishing a bower an endeavour that might last several weeks.<sup>15</sup> Although the same materials are available to many specimens, it is possible to observe site-specific styles that may be based on regional aesthetic ideals.<sup>16</sup> As art historian Jessica Ullrich (2016) elaborates, many scholars, including myself, consider this to be enough evidence to think that the bowerbirds refute scientific positions that deny birds a sense of aesthetics altogether.<sup>17</sup> Thus, creative action can no longer be understood as a uniquely human characteristic.

*Interspecies art* shares this observation and goes as far as understanding animals not only as individuals with aesthetic abilities, but as artists in human and non-human collaborations. According to Ullrich (2019), the term interspecies art was first introduced in the 1970s, coined mainly by Jim Nollman.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, it has only just become established in the twenty-first century due to a multiplicity of exhibitions on human-animal relations.<sup>19</sup> In 2009, Lisa Jevbratt, an artist and professor of media art technology at the University of California, Santa Barbara who focuses on interspecies networks, published a first field guide on how to collaborate artistically with animals.<sup>20</sup> As stated in her pioneering work, "[t]he concept of interspecies collaboration is intended to be somewhat humorous, invoking a smile", but can also question the

10.4 (2002), 331–337, quoted in Reingard Spannring et al., "Einleitung. Disziplinierte Tiere?" in *Disziplinierte Tiere? Perspektiven für die Human-Animal Studies für die wissenschaftlichen Disziplinen*, ed. Reingard Spannring et al. (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015), 17.

7 Sven Wirth, "Fragmente einer anthropozentrismus-kritischen Herrschaftsanalytik. Zur Frage der Anwendbarkeit von Foucaults Machtkonzepten für die Kritik der hegemonialen gesellschaftlichen Mensch-Tier-Verhältnisse," in *Human-Animal Studies. Über die gesellschaftliche Natur von Mensch-Tier-Verhältnissen*, ed. Chimaira – Arbeitskreis für Human-Animal Studies (Bielefeld: transcript, 2011), 80.

8 Gabriela Kompatscher, Reingard Spannring, and Karin Schachinger, *Human-Animal Studies* (Münster: Waxmann, 2017), 226.

9 Jessica Ullrich, "Jedes Tier ist eine Künstlerin," in *Das Handeln der Tiere. Tierliche Agency im Fokus der Human-Animal Studies*, ed. Sven Wirth et al. (Bielefeld: transcript, 2016), 255; Dario Martinelli, "Tierästhetik aus semiotischer Sicht," in *Tierstudien. Animalität und Ästhetik 1* (2012), ed. Jessica Ullrich (Berlin: Neofelis, 2012), 83–86.

10 Jessica Ullrich, "Kunst aus der Vogelperspektive. Zur Rolle

von lebenden Vögeln in der Gegenwartskunst," *Zeitschrift für ästhetische Bildung* 8.1 (2016), 16.

11 This is illustrated in: BBC, "The crazy courtship of bowerbirds," accessed 30 January 2020, <http://www.bbc.com/earth/story/20141119-the-barmy-courtship-of-bowerbirds>.

12 Martinelli, "Tierästhetik aus semiotischer Sicht," 83.

13 *Ibid.*, 83–84.

14 Ullrich, "Jedes Tier ist eine Künstlerin," 255.

15 Ullrich, "Kunst aus der Vogelperspektive," 16.

16 Ullrich, "Jedes Tier ist eine Künstlerin," 255.

17 *Ibid.*

18 Ullrich, "Performative Interspezieskunst im 21. Jahrhundert," 39–40.

19 *Ibid.*

20 Lisa Jevbratt, "Interspecies Field Guide," accessed 11 June 2019, [http://jevbratt.com/writing/interspecies\\_field\\_guide.pdf](http://jevbratt.com/writing/interspecies_field_guide.pdf).

21 Lisa Jevbratt, "Interspecies Collaboration – Making Art Together with Nonhuman Animals," accessed 31 January 2020, <http://>

nature/culture dichotomy and the anthropocentric world order generally.<sup>21</sup> She elaborates by explaining that interspecies art avoids practices that are disturbing or harmful to the animals involved.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the animals do not have to be trained to show specific behaviours that lead to art products. On the contrary, as Ullrich proposes, the aim is to let the animals work freely and embrace whatever emerges, to thereby give the creativity of the non-human contributor its own value. Thus, ideally, interspecies art emerges through respectful dialogue.<sup>23</sup>

But is this form of art even possible? By examining two case studies, the objective of this paper is to gain an enhanced understanding of interspecies art. Analysing specific human–animal relations in case studies is motivated by Donna Haraway (2003) and her example of engaging directly with living animals to derive theoretical output.<sup>24</sup> The examination of Aaron Angell's *Gallery Peacetime* (2014) and the interspecies collective *CMUK* (since 2014) will show different attempts of humans collaborating with animals. To be able to analyse these artworks in terms of interspecies art, I will combine the definitions provided by Ullrich and Jevbratt. Since it is unclear how many conditions have to be fulfilled or whether there are different levels of interspecies art, my definition includes all aspects mentioned above. The degree to which the animals in these interspecies relationships act freely and make independent choices as individuals (with or without intention) is referred to as their *agency*, on which I shall elaborate further throughout this text. I hypothesize that the criteria of interspecies art and concepts of agency complement each other to evaluate cases of human–animal relations in art. Therefore, the paper aims to answer the following questions in this order: Firstly, can both cases be considered examples of interspecies art? Secondly, to which extent can the applied concepts of agency help to develop a nuanced understanding of human–animal relations within art? Thirdly, is art with animals, who express entangled and relational agency, necessarily considered interspecies art?<sup>25</sup>

## CONCEPTUALIZING ANIMALS' AGENCY: ENTANGLED AND RELATIONAL AGENCY

Within the human–animal studies there is the objective to attribute subject status to animals.<sup>26</sup> As Kompatscher, Spannring, and Schachinger (2017) argue, admitting animals' agency supports the process of understanding them as subjects.<sup>27</sup> However, the concept of agency was solely used for humans and explicitly denied for animals for a very long time.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the recent trend to apply agency to animals faces some challenges. Animals' agency is still highly controversial and discussed among various fields, also within the progressive human–animal studies.<sup>29</sup> Sarah E. McFarland and Ryan Hediger (2009), for instance, connect the term agency with “free will, ability, rationality, mind, morality, subjectivity”, characteristics that are traditionally associated with men.<sup>30</sup> Yet, due to the amount of, and partially even contradicting, theories, they stress: “[A]gency is problematic”.<sup>31</sup> Mieke Roscher (2015) proposes: “A general definition of agency with regards to animals might be reduced to the following parameters: the ability to trigger change without the need to possess self-awareness, language, morality, or culture”.<sup>32</sup> The historian, who transported agency into her research field of animal history, recommends a differentiation of the term, inspired by action theory and praxeology.<sup>33</sup> Roscher proposes to distinguish between *entangled* agency, *relational* agency, *embodied* agency, and *animal* agency.<sup>34</sup> Targeting different questions about human–animal relationships requires the use of specific, but at times even overlapping, agency concepts.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the field of interspecies art has to rely on concepts such as agency to be able to examine the properties of human–animal interaction. Even though this section points out the need for a more selective theory, Roscher's categories help to establish a nuanced understanding of animals' agency in general. For the following cases entangled and relational agency are most fertile, seeing that they cover two major aspects of the notion.

jevbratt.com/writing/jevbratt\_interspecies\_collaboration.pdf; Jevbratt, “Interspezies-Kollaboration: Kunstmachen mit nicht-menschlichen Tieren,” in *Tierstudien. Animalität und Ästhetik* 1 (2012), ed. Jessica Ullrich (Berlin: Neofelis, 2012), 116; Ullrich, “Performative Interspezieskunst im 21. Jahrhundert,” 41.

22 Jevbratt, “Interspecies Field Guide”. Especially training animals to paint is a critical practice. Natasha Daly, “Wundervolle Fotos – unsichtbares Leid,” *National Geographic. Das Tier und Wir* 6 (2019), 51.

23 Ullrich, “Performative Interspezieskunst im 21. Jahrhundert,” 41.

24 Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People and the Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 1–3. Haraway's broad interests are located within the fields of science and technology studies as well as ecofeminism and posthumanism.

25 Even though the following theoretical concepts of agency and the ethics of interspecies art are closely related topics, this paper disregards ethical discussions in order to gain a concise understanding of agency.

26 Shapiro, “The State of Human–Animal Studies: Solid, at the Margin!” 17.

27 Kompatscher et al., *Human–Animal Studies*, 23.

28 Markus Kurth, Katharina Dornenzweig, and Sven Wirth: "Handeln nichtmenschliche Tiere?" in *Das Handeln der Tiere. Tierliche Agency im Fokus der Human-Animal Studies*, ed. Sven Wirth et al. (Bielefeld: transcript, 2016), 21.

29 Mieke Roscher, "Geschichtswissenschaft. Von einer Geschichte mit Tieren zu einer Tiergeschichte," in *Disziplinierte Tiere? Perspektiven für die Human-Animal Studies für die wissenschaftlichen Disziplinen*, ed. Reingard Spannring et al. (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015), 83; Kurth et al., *Das Handeln der Tiere*, 38; or Kompatscher et al., *Human-Animal Studies*, 202.

30 Sarah E. McFarland and Ryan Hediger, "Approaching the Agency of Other Animals: An Introduction," in *Animals and Agency. An Interdisciplinary Exploration*, ed. Sarah E. McFarland and Ryan Hediger (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 3.

31 The scholars articulate that hitherto existing agency concepts are insufficient and tried to sharpen the terminology by editing a collection of essays. However, they relativize their endeavour as follows: "it [agency] is functional for the purposes of this collection, but more broadly we must also insist that agency is problematic. It depends on the animal in question, it depends on the circumstances, it depends on how

Firstly, agency can be understood as an individual ability to act. Therefore, as an acting individual, every animal has agency.<sup>36</sup> To elaborate, this form of agency can be differentiated in *competent* and *dependent* agency. Animals of the same species can have different agencies depending on their setting, especially their relation to humans.<sup>37</sup> Domesticated animals are limited in their agency within a human-given framework of actions (dependent agency). These relationships are not necessarily only limiting but can also offer benefits such as providing shelter from external dangers. Wild animals, in contrast, can express a competent agency by providing for themselves but having to defend themselves, too.<sup>38</sup> By transferring wildlife into the human sphere, the agency of an individual animal can change — from competent to dependent and vice versa.

Secondly, agency can also be understood as the effect or product that emerges through animals' participation in networks; animals produce agency.<sup>39</sup> In this regard, Bruno Latour's *Actor-Network-Theory* (ANT) is crucial.<sup>40</sup> The ANT, evolving since the mid-1980s, understands action as interaction: as a collective, uncontrolled and not necessarily as an intentional interplay between all involved "actors" (also referred to as "entities").<sup>41</sup> Actors, in this sense, can be human as well as non-human beings, but also objects. Based on this theory, *entangled* agency shifts the focus towards the effects and products generated by networks.<sup>42</sup> This idea can also be found in Haraway's (2003) term *naturecultures*.<sup>43</sup> Interactions of human and non-human animals ("beings-in-encounter") can go as far as sharing everyday life and shaping a "becoming with".<sup>44</sup> The borders between living beings as well as nature and culture, thereby, become secondary.<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, ANT's basic assumptions lead to some downsides. One of them is the anthropocentric tendency that animals are only conceptualized via their relationships to humans without elaborating on the qualities of these relations.<sup>46</sup> The theory aims at overcoming asymmetric relationships between

humans, animals, and objects (nature and culture) by explaining actions as outputs of relations. Abolishing asymmetries within relations on the micro level, however, does not imply considering proportions of power and hierarchical structures.<sup>47</sup> To compensate for this weakness of the entangled agency concept, it will be complemented by Roscher's *relational* agency. Addressing the first type of agency (animals have agency), this concept considers relational face-to-face interactions between individuals, or groups, of different species.<sup>48</sup> Observing these relationships does not only shed light on (potentially existing) hierarchies, but also on the impact animals can have on other entities through personal contact. In contrast to ANT, which also considers outcomes of interactions, relational agency combines specific interactions with actual consequences for the respective participants. Because this concept implies that every single encounter affects all participants reciprocally, Roscher, among others, identifies a co-evolution of humans and non-human animals.<sup>49</sup> Stressing the importance of nonhumans within humans' history contradicts a distinction between humans as subjects and animals as objects.

To sum up, within this framework the term agency includes two notions. Firstly, agency is understood as a set of specific actions of an individual animal. Secondly, agency can refer to the effects that are produced by and consequences that arise from animals' relations to other actors. To specify, relational agency is an expression of agency via concrete interactions between all involved actors, resulting from face-to-face communication. Entangled agency, on the other hand, describes animals' actions as their impact within these networks, visible through the emerging products (such as artworks). This understanding of agency is the foundation to investigate the following cases.

#### CASE STUDY I: GALLERY PEACETIME (2014)

British artist Aaron Angell's *Gallery Peacetime* (2013–2017) is a project space established as a provocative reaction on the increasing number of galleries

agency itself is framed". McFarland and Hediger, *Animals and Agency*, 16. On the difficulty of the term: Philip Howell, "Animals, Agency, and History," in *The Routledge Companion to Animal-Human History*, ed. Hilda Kean and Philip Howell (New York: Routledge, 2019), 198; Kompatscher et al., *Human–Animal Studies*, 180; and Mieke Roscher, "Zwischen Wirkungsmacht und Handlungsmacht," in *Das Handeln der Tiere. Tierliche Agency im Fokus der Human–Animal Studies*, ed. Sven Wirth et al. (Bielefeld: transcript, 2016), 54.

32 Roscher, "Geschichtswissenschaft. Von einer Geschichte mit Tieren zu einer Tiergeschichte," 86. [trans. Dorothee Fischer]

33 Mieke Roscher, "Tiere sind Akteure. Konzeptionen tierlichen Handelns in den Human–Animal Studies," in *Philosophie der Tierforschung, Band 3: Milieus und Akteure*, ed. Matthias Wunsch, Martin Böhnert and Kristian Köchy (Freiburg/Munich: Verlag Karl Alber, 2018), 94. The sociological action theory combines macro- and micro level factors to integrate the subjective perspective into observation of underlying structures of society. Praxeology examines the continuous interdependence of social structure and the individual's agency.

34 Roscher, "Zwischen Wirkungsmacht und Handlungsmacht," 43–66. This distinction, however, is conceptualized within the field of history, as a tool



for the so-called animal history. *Embodied agency* is concerned with animals' bodies as reflections of human-animal relationships: Visible changes in an individual's physic or its whole species' appearance embody altered humans' practices (e.g. breeding of preferred characteristics); *ibid.*, 59. The term *animal agency* is used by Roscher to distinguish between different species' agencies but especially for animals living outside of humans' proximity; *ibid.*, 60. In consequence, these two concepts are not of interest to neither of the case studies discussed here.

35 *Ibid.*, 43 and 55–61.

36 Kompatscher et al., *Human-Animal Studies*, 183.

37 Mieke Roscher, "Wie viel Akteur steckt im gesammelten und bewahrten Tier? Ein Kommentar aus Sicht der Human-Animal Studies," in *Akteure, Tiere, Dinge. Verfahrensweisen der Naturgeschichte in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Silke Förschler and Anne Mariss (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2017), 250. The terminology was originally introduced by Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka in *Zoopolis: A political theory of animal rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

38 Kompatscher et al., *Human-Animal Studies*, 189.

39 *Ibid.*, 183; Howell, "Animals, Agency, and History," 201.

opening up in London, England.<sup>50</sup> For his critique, Angell satirically uses a transparent cube, an aquarium with a capacity of 150 litres, as gallery space (Fig. 1). This minimalistic aquarium consists of a glass cube and a white steel rack, contrasted by a black pump that purifies the crystal-clear water. It was first exhibited in continental Europe at the group exhibition *POOL* at *Kestnergesellschaft* in Hanover, Germany in 2014. Within the whole exhibition *POOL*, four solo exhibitions took place inside the aquarium *Gallery Peacetime*, curated by Angell and changing weekly.<sup>51</sup> Along with Angell's own piece *Police*



Fig. 1. Installation view of *Gallery Peacetime* with Aaron Angell's *Police Helmet*  
 Aaron Angell, *Gallery Peacetime*, 2014. Exhibiting: Aaron Angell, *Police Helmet*, 2013  
 137 x 91 x 46 cm, powder-coated steel, glass, water, pump, glazed ceramics, living axolotls  
 Installation view: *POOL*, *kestnergesellschaft*, Hanover, 2014  
 Photo taken by Raimund Zakowski

*Helmet*, Isabell Mallet's *Emilio, Pancho, and Francisco Plot a Revolt*, as well as Allison Katz' *Casa de la Taza Blanca* and Esme Toler's *Fashion of the Maelstrom (Return trip)*, were displayed.<sup>52</sup>

When Angell presented his work *Police Helmet* in the *Gallery Peacetime*, visitors encountered a large dark ceramic object on the ground of the aquarium right at its centre. This ceramic resembles an upside down cone whose uppermost part protrudes a few centimetres from the liquid. The hard surface of the ceramic is partially coated with gloss. Standing out against the dark finish, white letters form the combination "POL" in the middle of the piece. An opening appears at the bottom of the cone shape framed by white teeth-like spots, making it look like threatening jaws. The transparent floor is covered by little pieces of faeces, the water is vibrating from time to time, suggesting that the composition is not solely constructed with inanimate elements. With some patience, the inhabitants of the *Gallery Peacetime* introduce themselves to the viewer. Three Mexican walking fishes, also known as axolotls, two leucistic and one wild type, are inhabiting the glass cube (Fig. 2). Sometimes they pause and remain motionless for minutes until they start moving again, unhurried, half swimming, half crawling, and shrugging their external gills. Exploring their accommodation, they move freely within the aquarium, yet they remain exposed to the human gaze. Most of the time they are sitting as a group in the middle of the aquarium, housed by Angell's ceramic work. The other artists invited by Angell — Mallet, Katz, and Toler — had to fulfil special criteria for exhibiting in *Gallery Peacetime*. The contributions must include pottery, were not allowed to have sharp edges and needed to provide a retreat from exposure for the inhabitants.<sup>53</sup> Thus, fulfilling the animals' basic needs was a priority for the human-made artworks.

The choice of the artist to exhibit axolotl is not random. The axolotl (*Ambystoma mexicanum*) is an endemic aquatic species, meaning it occurs naturally only in one region, at Lake Xochimilco, Mexico. Since this terrain is increasingly

40 See exemplarily Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

41 Roscher, "Tiere sind Akteure," 99–100.

42 Ibid., 103. Sometimes this concept includes larger networks on a global and/or ecological level as well. Roscher, "Zwischen Wirkungsmacht und Handlungsmacht," 58–59.

43 Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 1–5.

44 Haraway, *When Species Meet*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) 4–5, 17, 32.

45 Esther Köhring, "Donna Haraway," in *Texte zur Tiertheorie*, ed. Roland Borgards, Esther Köhring, and Alexander Kling (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2015), 288–89. For a more recent discussion on overcoming the nature/culture dichotomy: Judith Elisabeth Weiss, "Konstruktionen und Dekonstruktionen des Natürlichen. Eine Bestandsaufnahme von Natur in der Kunst nach dem Ende der Natur," in *Kunstforum International, Kunsthistorie / Naturkunst. Natur in der Kunst nach dem Ende der Natur* 258 (2019), 44–85.

46 Roscher, "Tiere sind Akteure," 101.

47 Ibid., 102 and 107.

48 Ibid., 106 and Roscher, "Zwischen Wirkungsmacht und

Handlungsmacht," 57.

49 Roscher, "Zwischen Wirkungsmacht und Handlungsmacht," 57–58.

50 Veit Görner, Heinrich Dietz, and Antonia Lotz, eds., *POOL. Kunst aus London* (Hamburg: Textem Verlag, 2014), 34–35.

51 Visitors could participate at the exhibition openings and observe the axolotls' reactions to their new environment, i.e. the newly added artworks.

52 Görner et al., *POOL. Kunst aus London*, 34.

53 Ibid.

54 Spiegel Online, "Schwanzlurch in Gefahr. Axolotl vom Aussterben bedroht," accessed 31 January 2020, <http://www.spiegel.de/wissenschaft/natur/axolotl-in-gefahr-mexikanischer-schwanzlurch-vom-aussterben-bedroht-a-991399.html>. Axolotls have been a significant food source for thousands of years. Hobart M. Smith, "Discovery of the Axolotl and Its Early History in Biological Research," in *Development of the Axolotl*, ed. John B. Armstrong and George M. Malacinski (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3–4. Being endangered, however, is a result of the extreme pollution of their natural habitat.

55 Smith, "Discovery of the Axolotl," 5.



Fig. 2. The aquarium's inhabitants  
Aaron Angell, *Gallery Peacetime*, 2014. Exhibiting: Allison Katz, *Casa de la Taza Blanca (Detail)*, 2014. 137 x 91 x 46 cm, powder-coated steel, glass, water, pump, ceramics and wood, living axolotls. Installation view: POOL, kestnergesellschaft, Hanover, 2014. Photo taken by the author.

uninhabitable due to man-made environmental conditions, the axolotls are endangered and are losing their competent agency almost completely.<sup>54</sup> Since the first axolotls were introduced to Europeans in 1804 by Alexander von Humboldt, they have merely been kept in aquariums from then on.<sup>55</sup> Having external gills and due to its incomplete lungs, the axolotl is living in neoteny, a permanent larva-like stage.<sup>56</sup> This condition is triggered by a hypofunction

of the thyroid, however, by intake of a specific hormone they can go through metamorphosis.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, the animals are extremely interesting for embryonic research and have a long history as test animals.<sup>58</sup>

One important difference between this scientific perspective on the axolotl as an anonymous object for research is that the axolotls in the *Gallery Peacetime* have individual names. During a guided tour, visitors learnt that “Bottle Blonde”, “Gill Frond” and “Mill Pond” are living inside the aquarium. According to Kompatscher et al. (2017) an animal’s status is changing from object to subject, hence being an individual, as soon as it is given a name.<sup>59</sup> However, naming is also an anthropocentric and anthropomorphic practice, as Mona Mönning (2018) ascertains.<sup>60</sup> Besides this aspect, the naming of the axolotls highlights another fact: The axolotls in Hanover are not Bottle Blonde, Gill Frond, and Mill Pond, who live in Angell’s gallery in London, but specimens bought in a pet shop in Northern Germany.<sup>61</sup> Since the axolotls could not travel for the exhibition in Hanover, the London axolotls are replaced by “actors” of the same names.<sup>62</sup> One could ask: Does this mark their replaceability and negates any individuality? On the one hand, conceptualizing them as involuntary actors degrades them to objects. On the other hand, their replacement is only changing the discourse around them but not their life within the aquarium. Thus, the agency of the axolotls in Hanover is not necessarily limited, but the one of the “originals” is widened. Angell ascribes Bottle Blonde, Gill Frond, and Mill Pond a constitutive role within the *Gallery Peacetime*.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, if one takes Isabel Mallet’s work title *Emilio, Pancho, and Francisco Plot a Revolt* (Fig. 3) into account, it is striking that the axolotls got yet other names. In my interpretation, Mallet is not only providing an ironic comment on Angell’s renaming practice but supporting the axolotls’ status as actors who take on different roles. In addition, there is a political dimension. The names chosen by Mallet are the ones of the Mexican freedom fighters Emilio Madero and Francisco “Pancho” Villa. On an eye-catching ceramic piece, one can find the words ‘TIERRA Y LIBERTAD’ (land and liberty), the slogan of the Mexican freedom movement

56 Despite these facts, they are capable of reproduction. Franz Ambrock, “Steckbrief Axolotl,” accessed 31 January 2020, <https://axolotl-online.de/index.html>.

57 Franz Ambrock, “Neotenie,” accessed 31 January 2020, <http://axolotl-online.de/html/neotenie.html>. After the complete metamorphosis, they look similar to the related *Ambystoma tigrinum* (tiger salamander).

58 Christian Reiß, Uwe Hoßfeld, and Lennart Olsson, “Der mexikanische Axolotl als Labortier im Wandel der Zeit,” in *BioSpektrum*, 22.6 (2016), 660–661. For deeper insight on the axolotl: Christian Reiß, *Der Axolotl. Ein Labortier im Heimaquarium 1864-1914* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2019).

59 Kompatscher et al., *Human–Animal Studies*, 61.

60 Mona Mönning, *Das übersehene Tier. Eine kunstwissenschaftliche Betrachtung* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2018), 318.

61 This was revealed when attending the guided tour during the exhibition in 2014.

62 Görner et al., *POOL. Kunst aus London*, 35.

63 Besides, stressful travelling could only be avoided by replacing them.



Fig. 3. Isabel Mallet, *Emilio, Pancho and Francisco Plot a Revolt*.

Aaron Angell, *Gallery Peacetime*, 2014. Exhibiting: Isabel Mallet, *Emilio, Pancho and Francisco Plot a Revolt*, 2014.

137 x 91 x 46 cm, powder-coated steel, glass, water, pump, glazed and non-glazed ceramics, living axolotls.

Installation view: POOL, kestnergesellschaft, Hanover, 2014. Source: Contemporary Art Daily, accessed 13 June 2019,

<http://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2014/07/pool-at-kestner-gesellschaft/>

Image courtesy of kestnergesellschaft

64 See, for example, Ricardo Flores Magón, *Tierra y Libertad. Ausgewählte Texte* (Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2005).

at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>64</sup> The work is parallelizing the social situation then with the current situation of the animals, thus encouraging critical reflection. The axolotls might want to escape the aquarium (liberty) and get back into their natural environment (land). Although with a wink, Mallet is stressing the three axolotls' agency in general, who can fight as representatives of their fellows that can still live freely at Lake Xochimilco.

In contrast to the idea of animals with agency one could argue that the axolotls are objects just as the artworks next to them in the gallery and hence do not produce any relational agency with respect to the artists. However, I do not consider this to be the case as I am convinced the opposite is true: Although Angell exhibits the axolotls next to the artworks, the animals' reactions to the pieces are taken into serious consideration by him. As soon as an art piece enters the axolotls' limited space, they have the possibility to comment on it without the influence of the human artist. The animals review the artworks within the gallery space by ignoring or engaging with them, for example by using the exhibits as a hide-out. Although the animals' behaviour could be interpreted as instinctively searching for shelter, this would not deny them agency. Angell is observing their actions and optimizes further ceramics accordingly.<sup>65</sup> The artworks are, consequently, results of the entangled relationship between the involved artists and the axolotls. At the same time, the animals achieve a position of superior authority in the humans' work process. Thus, their participation is work-constitutive and therefore also a manifestation of relational agency. All things considered, the network of artists–aquarium–axolotls leads to the specific *Gallery Peacetime*, whose exhibits are products of the entangled and even relational agency of the axolotls. The axolotls' status as subjects, however, seems rather secondary to Angell. Being part of *Gallery Peacetime*, they not only get renamed but also showcased non-stop, hence are instrumentalized for human purposes. Even though Angell does not wish to stress out his London axolotls by travelling, simply being exhibited in a gallery space may be stressful for them and, of course, for the Hanover axolotls, too. These aspects indicate that Angell orientates his *Gallery Peacetime* on rather anthropocentric conceptions of animals.

Although the animals are the protagonists of the artwork and are of utmost importance for this analysis, it is essential to pay attention to the exhibition space and the interaction with it as well. As the owner of *Troy Town Art Pottery*, a ceramic workshop for artists, Aaron Angell (2014) emphasizes that

<sup>65</sup> Angell generously provided this information in an interview with the author in June 2016.

pottery can be more than functional and “aims to promote ceramics as a material for sculpture outside the auspices of craft and design”.<sup>66</sup> Ceramics combine diverse physical states changing from a soft to a hard condition during their firing manufacturing process. Angell exhibits the solidified material in a water-filled aquarium made of glass, which is produced in a similar process changing from a liquid to solid. Combining these liquid and solid elements with the axolotls’ neoteny, them oscillating between youth and adulthood, water and land, is underlining their always living in-between. Hence, being liminal animals, they are mediating between the different physical states of the solid ceramic and the water within the aquarium. Moreover, these animals do not only link things inside the aquarium, but also outside by functioning as mediators between artworks and humans. It can be difficult for gallery visitors to develop an understanding of contemporary art. The axolotls can help, firstly, by attracting attention. Relating to animals might be easier for most people than relating to art. Especially axolotls arouse human interest due to their unusual appearance so that even laypersons’ art appreciation could be won over through the animals’ presence. During the exhibition, visitors stopped at the aquarium just to talk about, and often with, the axolotls.<sup>67</sup> Such interactions establish, secondly, a starting point for interpretations. By bringing a rectangular-shaped glass cube into a white cube gallery situation, the former reflects on the latter by mirroring it.<sup>68</sup> Just as the gallery space, *Gallery Peacetime* is a room with walls, a floor, and even living beings in it. The axolotls can be interpreted as the viewers’ surrogates: both viewers and axolotls are located within a minimalistic space matching their particular proportions. These metalevels of the axolotls as the gallery’s visitors and the aquarium as gallery space is stressed by the frequent replacement of the exhibits within the *Gallery Peacetime*. While traversing within the aquarium, the axolotls engage with the art and provide guidance to the visitors on how to receive the artworks, for instance as worth looking at or not. This can also be interpreted as a comment on how humans view art, engage with art, and behave within art contexts. Thirdly, according to this interpretation, the viewer is also demanded to critically reflect on the

66 Görner et al., *POOL. Kunst aus London*, 35. Although he does not endorse any practical use, in this case, ceramics do function as a shelter for the axolotls. For additional information: Aaron Angell, “Troy Town Art Pottery,” accessed 31 January 2020, <http://www.troytown.org.uk>.

67 This was observed during the author’s visits to the exhibition in 2014.

68 The exhibition concept of the white cube aims to minimize the architectural impact on its exhibits by presenting artworks in preferably square rooms with white painted walls. Further reading: Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1986).

setting. Because the gallery can be entered and exited voluntarily, whereas the aquarium is a closed space, even ethical discussions might be triggered. Through offering these face-to-face communications, the axolotls have a direct impact on the visitors and, therefore, express relational agency also in this regard.

Based on this analysis, it can be argued that due to environmental conditions axolotls are almost extinct in the wild and the animals can only show a dependent agency. Furthermore, regarding the relations of the axolotls to the artists as well as to the visitors, they express entangled and relational agency within and beyond the framework Angell provides them with. Although Angell is considering the axolotls' behaviours and needs when shaping ceramic objects for their aquarium, some points of critique need to be raised with respect to interspecies art. *Gallery Peacetime* does not include active creativity by the axolotls, nor does it lift the dichotomy between culture and nature — even though the visitors might reflect on their relation to animals and concept of art. Changing the axolotls' names repeatedly underlines their limited status as individuals. The axolotls are exhibited next to the artworks within the gallery space, which can be criticized as displaying animals as show objects. Consequently, the axolotls cannot be seen as co-authors of the *Gallery Peacetime*. Therefore, bearing in mind the aforementioned criteria, this case can be understood as art with animals, but not as ideally collaborative interspecies art. The concepts of agency showed, however, that the axolotls have an impact in personal contact and can even be elevated to being subjects for the visitors. Thus, the question if art with animals, who express agency, is inevitably considered interspecies art can be partially rejected.

## CASE STUDY II: THE INTERSPECIES ARTIST COLLECTIVE CMUK (2014 – PRESENT)

The investigation of CMUK, an interspecies artist collective proposing an alternative to the traditional model of the sole-creating human genius, provides



an arguably more successful example of interspecies art. CMUK consists of the human artist duo *Hörner/Antlfinger* and their parrots, who live and work together in Cologne, Germany. The collective's name CMUK is an acronym of its founding members. It negates any anthropocentric hierarchy by including everyone no matter their species. Moreover, it is alternating not only species but gender; CMUK stands for Clara (female African grey parrot), Mathias (male human), Ute (female human) and Karl (male African grey parrot).<sup>69</sup> Ute Hörner and Mathias Antlfinger have been working as an artist duo since the early 1990s and within an interspecies collective since 2014.<sup>70</sup> Because the parrots were adopted from an animal shelter there is a lack of information about their origin. However, it is likely that Karl was born in the wild — in central Africa about 60 years ago.<sup>71</sup> Even though pet-keeping is controversial, I argue that these birds have a richer life, compared to their fellow species living in captivity, by being part of CMUK. Ute and Mathias view Clara and Karl not as their pets, but as equal partners. Both humans try to live with the parrots as mutually as possible, e.g. by having joint routines such as taking walks and excursions or by creating art in a shared working place (Fig. 4). Because the parrots have such an influence on the humans' behaviour and their life, these examples illustrate the parrots' strong relational agency.

69 Despite Karl's passing in 2018, new members (the parrots Casper, Giselle, and Theo) are maintaining the mission of challenging traditional artistry as a continuation of Karl's legacy. Ute Hörner and Mathias Antlfinger, "Über CMUK," accessed 31 January 2020, <http://h--a.org/de/cmuk/studio-destructiones/>.

70 Ute Hörner and Mathias Antlfinger, "Biographies," accessed 31 January 2020, <http://h--a.org/en/biographies/>. Within Hörner and Antlfinger's oeuvre, the parrots' role shifted from being muse and motive (*Contact Call*, 2006; *KRAMFORS*, 2012) to being actively involved in the artistic processes (continuing from 2014).

71 This information was shared during an interview between the author and the human artists in August 2017.

CMUK mainly produces wood sculptures and works made of paper and cardboard. While Clara and Karl shred natural materials with their claws and beaks without being interrupted by Hörner and Antlfinger, the humans see their duty in arranging the products to complete art pieces to make them accessible to a broader public within the art discourse. In 2016, their first works (*Weekly* and *Subtraction One*) were exhibited in a white cube situation (Fig. 5 and 6). For *Weekly*, Clara and Karl have been editing booklets of the national German newspaper *Die Zeit* regularly every week since 2014, provided by the human artists. While the parrots shape the former booklets into new arrangements, Hörner and Antlfinger capture the results by photographing them (Fig. 5). The resulting works stimulate art historical references, which has already been



Fig. 4. The parrots and Mathias Antlfinger in their shared work place. Photograph provided by CMUK

exemplified by Ullrich (2016) on *décollages* (collages created by destruction).<sup>72</sup> Reflecting on art history demonstrates the further aesthetic value of the series *Weekly* as an exemplary comparison between CMUK's pieces and works by avant-garde artist Wolf Vostell (1932–1998) shows. The visual similarities make it hard to distinguish which piece is solely man-made and which one is not. Although the assumption that the parrots are aware of Vostell's pioneering art or the concept of *décollage* is not very likely, the parrots' traces in the material strongly resemble humans' artworks and vice versa. Showing these similarities

<sup>72</sup> Ullrich, "Kunst aus der Vogelperspektive," 17 and Ullrich, "Jedes Tier ist eine Künstlerin," 252.



Fig. 5. CMUK's *Weekly* exhibited 2014  
CMUK *Weekly*, 2014–present. 40 x 60 cm each, *décollage*/photograph  
Installation view: *we, animals – biographies*, Meinblau, Berlin, 2014  
(Photograph provided by CMUK.)

to human artefacts, only additional information can disclose that more than one species was involved. CMUK's first series of sculptures, *Subtraction One* (Fig. 6), consists of cork items shaped by Clara and Karl. The parrots' traces correspond to those produced by human instruments and artists' brushwork, thus reflecting their individual style. Their work process is reminiscent of the human artistic technique of "direct carving", an immediate carving without a template. The birds are operating intuitively with their body, working without additional tools. This is an important aspect since many artworks in



Fig. 6. Installation view of  
*Subtraction One* (2014)  
 CMUK, *Subtraction One*, 2014  
 180 x 180 x 240cm, cork sculptures,  
 table, ceiling with lights  
 Installation view: THE WORLD WE  
 LIVE IN, kjuh kunstverein,  
 Cologne, 2014  
 (Photograph provided by CMUK.)

human–animal relations arise by humans teaching animals their way of doing art. Elephants or apes, for instance, are often trained to work with artificial paints and brushes.<sup>73</sup> The parrots, on the contrary, only use their body parts as instruments, which might imply a more intrinsically motivated attitude rather than one that was forced upon them by humans. In addition, Hörner

<sup>73</sup> Daly, “Wundervolle Fotos – unsichtbares Leid,” 51; Ullrich, “Jedes Tier ist eine Künstlerin,” 261.

and Antfinger insist that both parrots have individual techniques: While Clara works with her whole body shredding huge sections (Fig. 7), Karl pays more attention to detail, scratching small pieces out of paper and wood (Fig. 8). In *Weekly* and *Subtraction One*, animals and humans have equal authorship. Both species are not only work-constitutive but Hörner and Antfinger also publicly acknowledge Clara and Karl as co-authors and co-producers of the final works by including them in their collective's name. Thus, every art piece by CMUK illustrates their entangled agency.



Fig. 7. Clara's rough style (*Weekly*)  
CMUK, *Weekly*, 2014. 40 x 60 cm, décollage/photograph.  
(Photograph provided by CMUK.)



Fig. 8. Karl's style (*Weekly*)  
 CMUK, *Weekly*, 2014. 40 x 60 cm, *décollage*/photograph  
 (Photograph provided by CMUK.)

In the summer of 2017, I was given the opportunity to visit the shared home of the artists to gain first-hand experience on what entangled agency looks like in practice. While visiting them in Cologne, I was able to witness CMUK's remarkable (artistic) human–animal relation in everyday life as well as in their work routines. During my stay, the parrots actively chose to interact with the human attendees, illustrating how the border between human and non-human sphere is continually blurred. In Haraway's words, "[they] enter the world of becoming

with".<sup>74</sup> The parrots, being with us the whole time, gave the impression that the focus lies on living together in an interspecies household rather than for the sole purpose of making art. They live as equal inhabitants of the flat, visible in their participation in everyday practices such as eating together at the same table.<sup>75</sup> The birds are always free to choose whether they want to rest in their open enclosures or to engage with Hörner and Antlfinger and/or artistic objects. Yet, while I was there, Clara shredded pieces of cardboard and a cork tube for over forty minutes straight, stepping back from time to time, seemingly to reflect on what she had done so far. This behaviour of evaluation and correction is similar to the bowerbirds' working process.<sup>76</sup> The parrots do not use the emerging products as food or for nesting purposes, apparently working with the material only out of pleasure. During my observation, Clara was extremely engaged, rolling her eyes, eagerly ripping pieces (Fig. 9). Although one can of course never know for sure, she seemed to express creative joy. The whole time she was working, none of the attendees interrupted her; the product of her effort was only examined after she focussed on something else and left the scene. Despite Clara and Karl having a dependent agency as inhabitants of a human household, they have an unquestionable impact within this human–animal entanglement. The applied concepts of agency help to point out that the artworks are products of a strong entangled network as well as relational agency between the non-human and human artists. In contrast, the differentiation of the concepts also reveals that there might be only a very limited relational agency on the macro level: Within exhibition contexts, it is unlikely that visitors who only receive the artworks superficially notice the animals' involvement.

74 Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 19.

75 This is displayed in a rather satirical video clip: "Lunch in a cross-species household," accessed 31 January 2020, <http://h--a.org/de/project/lunch-in-a-cross-species-household/>.

76 Ullrich, "Jedes Tier ist eine Künstlerin," 255.

In conclusion, CMUK's artworks are literally figurations of an interplay between humans and animals, they function only with the participation of both species. Hörner and Antlfinger interpret the parrots' actions not as destructive but as a creative performance of equal living beings. Consequently, by acknowledging the animals' individuality and subjectivity, they are appreciating non-human



Fig. 9. Clara at work. Photograph taken by the author in Cologne 2016

creativity. During my observation, the collaboration was characterized by a warm casual tone of interaction. Even if Clara and Karl do not know that their work is partially exhibited and that they are not paid, at least not financially, they have no disadvantage from this collaboration but a richer everyday life. Regardless of their dependent agency, Hörner and Antlfinger try to provide their parrots with a space where they can live as competently as possible. The animals act in their usual environment, not in artificial settings, supporting the view of them living together as a family in an interspecies household rather



than having a professional relationship. Seemingly abolishing the dichotomy of nature and culture, this is an ideal example illustrating Haraway's theoretical concept of *naturecultures*. Nevertheless, hierarchical structures still exist as a necessary but critique-worthy precondition to their collaboration. Those can exemplarily be seen in the clear distribution of the roles. Whereas the birds produce without restriction, the humans are still the ones to decide at which stage the creative output is complete. Furthermore, since animals are excluded from further participation in the art world, even this collective cannot avoid an unbalanced human–animal relation in this respect. Still, by openly disclosing the involvement of the parrots, CMUK's works are revealing the possibility of considering animals as artists. All things considered, CMUK provides an almost ideal realization of interspecies art as Jevbratt and Ullrich suggest it.

#### FINAL CONCLUSION

Two examples of artistic human–animals collaborations showed that interspecies art proposes to lessen the opposition between human and non-human animals by acknowledging animals' undeniable artistic qualities and thereby stressing the need for rethinking traditional images of artistry. Accompanying the three axolotls and Clara and Karl provided insights into collaborations that scrutinize anthropocentric world views by shifting attention to (Angell and Mallet), or even overthrowing (CMUK), established power relations. CMUK makes a more suitable case than the *Gallery Peacetime* regarding the criteria of interspecies art, illustrating that fulfilling all aspects of Jevbratt's and Ullrich's demands is possible, and even complements them by the criterion of an entangled everyday life. In comparison, Angell's *Gallery Peacetime* does not match all criteria, which becomes most apparent in the undeniable hierarchy between Angell and the axolotls resulting in a lack of non-human creative contribution. Hierarchical structures, however, exists in both cases and are e.g. illustrated by the fact that axolotls and parrots are living in captivity, hence, in a dependent dynamic with humans.

What does the application of agency concepts add to the discussion about interspecies art? Roscher's concepts have been beneficial to understand the animals' impact on interspecies art since they address the networks on the macro level as well as the specific human–animal relationships on the micro level. The axolotls and parrots perform agency even without a subject status or humanlike intentions being attributed to them directly, but they can only express dependent agency. With respect to their artworks, both cases display entangled agency. CMUK relies on all parties playing an equally important role, presuming the animals' active contribution to this output. In contrast, *Gallery Peacetime* and its exhibits are at least not harmful to the animals. For the relational agency it is vital to distinguish two levels: first, the relation between the animals and the human artists, and secondly, the relationship emerging between animals and museum or gallery visitors. Corresponding to the former level, in the *Gallery Peacetime* the axolotls express relational agency by influencing Angell's work process regarding their basic needs. But more significant seems their face-to-face communication with visitors. Thus, in contrast to only judging the collaboration regarding its relationships of the non-human and human artists, relational agency also pays attention to how the nature/culture dichotomy can be abolished in contact with recipients. In comparison, the parrots in CMUK have a limited relational agency in the exhibition context due to a lack of frequent contact with visitors. As argued in the sub conclusion above, it is still a strong case for interspecies art, which is supported by the parrots' remarkable relational agency in regard to the human artists. Through daily face-to-face interactions, they shape a "becoming with" (Haraway, 2008). The birds have a major impact on their humans' everyday life and without them the artworks would not emerge at all. Despite these results, this paper demands a more concise theoretical framework of agency. Roscher's concepts were useful in attempting to develop a nuanced understanding of the collaborations, showing that the criteria of interspecies art and concepts of agency complement each other. However, each case exemplified both entangled and relational agency, indicating that these concepts are not specific enough. Even

though the agency concepts help to elaborate on the specific relationships in interspecies art, *Gallery Peacetime* shows that art with animals — who express agency — does not necessarily qualify as interspecies art in its ideal form. Nevertheless, the case studies at hand can only be considered as a first assessment of the matter, encouraging the ongoing discourse on the definition of interspecies art. Since there are multiple agency concepts, analysing more case studies can be useful in evaluating the relation between animals' agency and this form of art. Also, alternatives for agency might be an interesting topic for future work regarding interspecies art. All in all, this paper makes a strong position in favour of interspecies art, not only as a contemporary art phenomenon but as an important step towards a future that acknowledges non-human animals as equally living beings.<sup>77</sup>

77 Acknowledgements: I would like to thank the artists for providing valuable insights. Special thanks go to Carole Martin and Timo Kuklau.

Dorothee Fischer holds a MA in Literature–Art–Media and has studied at the Universität Konstanz (Germany), the University College Cork (Ireland) and the Universität Wien (Austria). Her research interests lie within art, the spheres of human–animal studies and the interdisciplinary approach to apply concepts of animal agency to art. She specializes in the relationships between human and non-human animals with a particular interest in aquatic animals. After researching the specific relationship between humans and parrots in an artistic collaboration for her bachelor thesis (2017), her master thesis (2019) examined human–animal relations in aquaria of the nineteenth century and contemporary art. Her PhD project is concerned with marine animals in the modern period.