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*Cohabitation: A Manifesto for the Solidarity of Non-Humans and Humans in Urban Space.* ARCH+ gmbH in cooperation with silent green, Berlin, June 4–July 4, 2021. Artistic direction: Marion von Osten, Christian Hiller, Alexandra Nehmer, Anh-Linh Ngo, Peter Spillmann. Design: Modern Temperament/Oliver Klimpel, Till Sperrle

When was the last time you walked with a bird? Or sat down to chat with the spiders in the house? Are other species besides humans happy with this planet? Will our resources be enough for everyone? As human beings, we are starting to understand the importance of living together more and more when resources are getting less and less. The importance of reading the relations with other species becomes more evident. For a long time, people have been exploring new forms of solidarities. Solidarity requires us to share our mutual responsibilities, and it is becoming increasingly fragile on this planet. Cohabitation is a concept that is progressively becoming

not only more difficult but also a core component of solidarity. In recent years it has become apparent that our lives are being governed by the different forms of relationships that we establish. Relating to the concept itself are some questions that need substantial answers and explanations: For example, how do we come together? How do we care for and support each other? What does it mean to live together?

Although it is June, it is a gray and rainy day in Berlin. I am off to visit the exhibition *Cohabitation: A Manifesto for the Solidarity of Non-Humans and Humans in Urban Space* organized by ARCH+ in cooperation with Silent Green Kulturquartier, an independent event and project space in Wedding that had once been a crematorium. *Cohabitation* is not only an exhibition but also a four-pronged project consisting of talks, events, and a journal.<sup>1</sup>

As I slowly descend the ramp at the entrance of the exhibition space, resembling a parking lot entrance, the feeling of going underground alienates me from the concept of an exhibition. The exhibition opens with a video performed by Alicia Agustin (fig. 1), who is presenting Fahim Amir's manifesto "Solidarity is the Tenderness of the Species- Cohabitation its Lived Exploration." The following part of the manifesto read in the single-channel video,

which has a strong introduction to the scenography of the exhibition, clearly reveals the thematic principle of the exhibition from the very beginning:

Cohabitation, on the other hand, means "living with"—something that is not always pleasant, innocent, beautiful, or free of danger. "Living with" fosters the development of neighborhoods, which are the opposite of gated communities, because neighbors are beings whose presence we did not choose. It includes complicity with plants, even those considered weeds, which grow on the side of the road and elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

Fragility—how significant it is in the establishment of mutual living spaces and in the way we form relationships with each other. Our relationship with nonhuman species in the city stems from processes and attempts to domesticate and "civilize" the natural environment. This relationship might seem to be more popular today, but the reason seems to be connected to nostalgic connotations from the past. The artistic aspect of the project, which Marion von Osten started to develop with the curatorial team before her death in November 2020, was carried out by Christian Hiller, Alexandra Nehmer, Anh-Linh Ngo, and Peter Spillmann. There are more than thirty works in the exhibition, divided into three themes: Anthropocity, Ecocity, and Zoopolis.

Anthropocity concerns the life of animals in the city and the shift in the conceptual meaning of "pets" that began in the nineteenth century, thereby leading to urban experiences away from anthropocentric assumptions. Ecocity features projects dealing with urban nature and urban ecology fueled by the desire of humankind, with works that look at how the climate crisis impacts and creates artificial environments which focus on how nature is instrumentalized and capitalized in the city. The third theme, Zoopolis, includes projects which explore possibilities for humans' cohabitation with animals as well as other species. This section in particular focuses on how to shape the city adhering to the reciprocal relationship and rights of all interspecies.



Figure 1: Above: *A Manifesto* written by Fahim Amir, presented by the performer Alicia Agustin. Below: *Mapping the Post-Human City*, multimedia-Installation by Moritz Ahlert und Alsino Skowronnek together with *Pollinations in Blatant Space* (Thomas Haferlach, Adrien Bitton and Niels Warncke). Photograph: Dotgain.info, 2021.

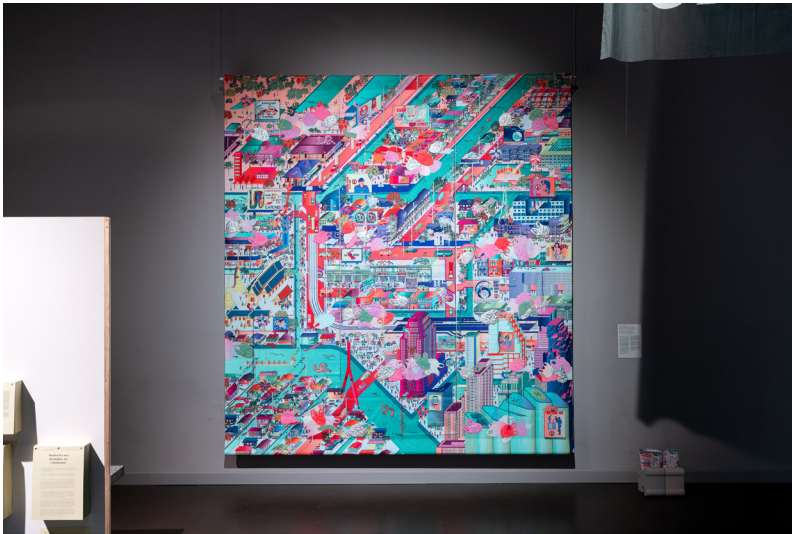


Figure 2: *Bangkok Opportunistic Ecologies* (2019), Animali Domestici (Alicia Lazzaroni and Antonio Bernacchi). Photograph: Dotgain.info, 2021.



Figure 3: Exhibition view of *Cohabitation: A Manifesto for the Solidarity of Animals and Humans in Urban Space*. Photograph: Dotgain.info, 2021.

After the manifesto video, Moritz Ahlert and Alsino Skowronnek's four-channel video installation *Mapping the Post-Human City* welcomes the audience. The project reveals Berlin's rather enigmatic situation by reflecting on and mapping how over twenty thousand recorded animal and plant species exist in urban life. Due to the empty spaces in the city, owing to its division into two parts during the Cold War, and the buildings built in those areas, species mostly thrived well. While this work shows the relations with the nonhuman species in the city, it also includes algorithms—another essential part of daily life in the city—to speculate for the potentials of new species.

Although the exhibition's use of the discourse of solidarity is positive, it nevertheless seems to indicate that humans have an upper hand in the grand scheme of things. While solidarity seems to be the ultimate solution these days, as a mutual state of being that one can only understand by sharing and participating in, do nonhumans really understand it? In this context, one of the works that caught my attention was Urban Fauna Lab's (Alexey Buldakov, Anastasia Potemkina) drawing series called *Valley of Beggars*. While Urban Fauna Lab has shown solidarity with stray cats through simple drawings in their field research in Moscow, they investigate how people care for cats,

birds, mice, crows, with a “minimum” level of “solidarity.” This exposes the inherent fragility, but also it brings into question how people should think and react whilst caring for these species, and creates another control mechanism based on the idea that humans are exerting ownership over other species.

After entering the exhibition space and passing through a small area, one arrives to a large hall. One of the most impressive works here is Cyprien Gaillard's video *KOE* projected onto the wall. We see birds flying in a city with the camera moving at almost the same speed as they do. These images are of the flocks of rose-ringed parakeets that were imported from India and southern Africa during Germany's colonizing ventures, returning every evening on their search for food to Düsseldorf's Königsallee.

Although some environmentalists call it a representation of a globalized urban nature, this journey of birds actually raises other questions. Colonialism, while exploiting resources from distant parts of the world, also triggered irreversible transformations. Gaillard's work depicts this very strongly, and I think this is the very reason behind curators' placement of this work in the middle of the exhibition. Furthermore, the artistic duo Animali Domestici (Alicia Lazzaroni and Antonia Bernacchi), talks about how wild species of the growing metropolis struggle to adapt to urban life in their work *Bangkok Opportunistic Ecologies* (fig. 2). This work is a detailed collage that marvels at interspecies relations. By showing all the layers of the city, it reveals its relations with species and creates an eye-catching work.

Humankind's desire to dominate nature is aligned with the idea that technology exists only for humans. This approach delineates their relationship with other species by revealing how human beings take advantage of technology and hints at the other kinds of territories we could discover by merging technology with other species. With such considerations, Kolbein Hugi imagines a fictional internet with his work, *Animal Internet*. In this internet reality, not only





Figure 4: Exhibition view of *Cohabitation: A Manifesto for the Solidarity of Animals and Humans in Urban Space*. Photograph: Dotgain.info, 2021.

humans but also animals are included as developers and users. This communication with neural interfaces explores how animals can be involved in decision-making processes. Overall, it is an extremely psychic installation that imagines the convergence of the internet of humans and the internet of animals.

I found the general structure of the exhibition and its works very successful. The visual language of the exhibition fits very well with the spatial organization of the works. Also, the innovative exhibition design opens another way to discuss the artworks, which were all placed meticulously from the entrance to the exit, that kept the experience consistent. On the other hand, I am also thinking of ways to design and curate exhibitions for nonhuman species. Perhaps we should now investigate possibilities to change the overall perception of exhibitions for all beings within this discourse. Just as I left the exhibition, I came across the *Pet-City* work. Almost every second home in Berlin has a pet, and *Pet-City*, an artistic research business, reveals the economy around pets just as strikingly in its own language.

*Cohabitation: A Manifesto for the Solidarity of Non-Humans and Humans in Urban Space* reveals relationships that emerge when the art aims to include

not only the human viewpoint but an exploration of other perspectives. It makes me think of Istanbul, a city famous for its cats, pigeons, and other animals. Istanbulites have a perpetual cohabitation with other species in their daily lives. Recently, for example, a wandering street dog, Boji, has become an international media sensation.<sup>3</sup> The dog is commuting every day in Istanbul's public transportation and socializing with the community.

In Istanbul, there is a huge culture of sympathy and care for other species. However, the urban development and mega construction projects have been destroying the city's urban ecology. Experts have stated that Istanbul's third airport that opened in 2018 jeopardizes migratory bird routes.<sup>4</sup> With the destruction of northern forests in Istanbul's European side because of these projects, the city is losing its variety of species.

We should find new ways for solidarity by thinking about resistance structures we can establish with other species. Constructing romanticized narratives through solidarity serves as a warning to humankind to face the reality of the crisis. With a new understanding of the value of cohabitation developed in recent decades, the exhibition shows how humans can only "evolve through reciprocal

relationships with other species." How can we change our practices and research methodologies to create more inclusivity? How can we take our approaches beyond anthropocentric assumptions? The exhibition does not answer these questions directly but draws a very strong frame for further deliberation and inspires new ways of thinking.

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1 "Cohabitation," accessed October 11, 2021, <https://archplus.net/de/cohabitation/>.

2 Fahim Amir, "Solidarity is the Tenderness of the Species Cohabitation its Lived Exploration," accessed November 2, 2021, <https://archplus.net/en/cohabitation/#article-28947>.

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4 Elif Ince, "Istanbul's third airport threatens birds' migration routes," September 12, 2014, accessed October 14, 2021, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/istanbuls-third-airport-threatens-birds-migration-routes-71628>.

