

# *Designer and Goldcrest*

Erik Sandelin



Illustrated by  
Ravachol Fonseca





Designer and Goldcrest

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Illustrations: Ravachol Fonseca

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# *Designer and Goldcrest*

THE STORY



## C L I E N T

Make me a Birdhouse! said Client.

A house where birds get to live? asked Designer.

No, of course not. Make me a beautiful house, so people will come from all over the world to learn about our birds, and look at them through panorama windows and powerful telescopes.

Designer was taught to listen to all voices, no matter how weak. Maybe we should ask the birds what they want? Perhaps they can help? thought Designer.

Client, who was already halfway through the door on the way to his next meeting, interrupted Designer's thoughts. Birdhouse must be ready by September, before Honey Buzzard travels south. It's spectacular, you know!

Client closed the door and left.

Why didn't I say something? thought Designer. But what would I have said? I don't know how to design with birds.

Designer decided to head out into the world to ask for help.



## G O L D C R E S T

Pine trees swayed heavily in the breeze. Designer noticed tiny feathery balls fluttering slowly to the ground.

Designer picked up one of them. It was a very small bird with a bright yellow stripe on its head. It felt soft and its claws were like tiny staples, prickly against the skin of Designer's palm.

Hiker appeared from the woods.

It's Goldcrest, Hiker told Designer. The poor thing is exhausted from the strong wind and a long day's flight. Let it rest for a while, and it will soon be on its way.

Designer carefully put Goldcrest down on the soft moss, hoping that Honey Buzzard was not around today.

Hiker began to walk away, then looked back over his shoulder. Don't forget to wash your hands! he shouted. Even small birds could have scary bugs.

I wonder if Goldcrest is worried about human bugs, thought Designer, and started walking towards the mountains.

## G O A T M A N

It was a steep uphill climb. Designer passed a flock of goats grazing on the green grass sticking out between craggy rocks. Designer spotted a strange creature sitting on a small boulder, holding a horned helmet in his hand.

Phew. It's harder to climb down than up, said Goatman, and wiped the sweat from his forehead. I've been living with the goats for two days now and I'm already exhausted.

What is it like to live as a goat? asked Designer.

You should probably ask Goat, said Goatman. My arms really hurt from walking on all fours. I tried to eat grass, you know. I even went to Doctor to get a new stomach but Doctor said humans can't eat grass.

Goatman paused and gazed out over the valley and the snow-capped mountains. It's beautiful here. I will write a book about being Goatman, Goatman said dreamily.

Will you read it to the goats? asked Designer. But Goatman was already galloping downhill, trying to catch up with the flock.





## P R I M A T O L O G I S T

Designer tried taking a few steps on all fours but stopped when a sharp rock cut Designer's hand. Designer looked up to a slope on the other side of the valley and spotted a group of baboons. They were grooming each other. One of them had long white hair and was wearing a vest. When Designer came closer all the other baboons jumped away.

Shh, careful, whispered Primateologist. The baboons are really shy. For three months I have been trying to get close to them. First I was pretending to be a rock so that I wouldn't scare them. But they thought I was really rude since I couldn't even bother to say hello.

How do you say hello to a baboon?

You need to spent lots of time with them. Then just be polite.

Perhaps I was rude to Goldcrest, thought Designer while climbing down the mountain.

## A N T H R O P O L O G I S T

It was getting warmer. Designer entered a dense forest where the air was damp in the shade of the giant trees. Butterflies fluttered between vines and a large green snake slithered across the path.

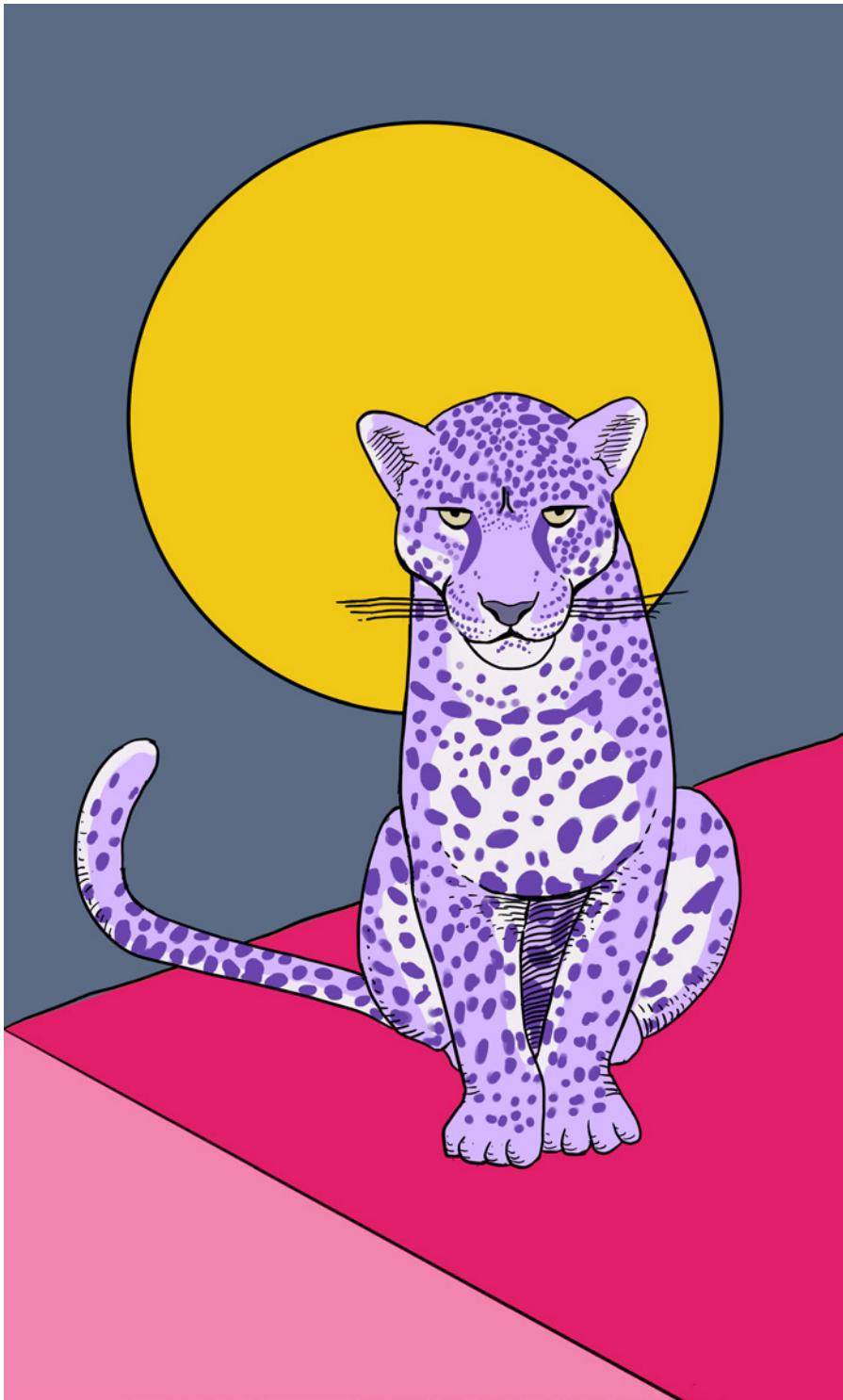
Listen! Can you hear it?

Designer turned. In a clearing was Anthropologist, squatting. Anthropologist scribbled in a worn notebook while talking to Designer: You can almost hear the trees think.

Designer listened hard. Perhaps that creaking sound was Mahogany deciding to start a new branch?

My friends who live here become jaguars in their sleep, said Anthropologist. In their dreams they roam the animal spirit world. Perhaps you could too?

That night Designer dreamt about fresh bagels with cucumber, and decided to head for the city.



## A B O L I T I O N I S T

In the square was a rowdy crowd. Many were waving placards with Save the Animals and None Are Free Until All Are Free printed in bold letters. Several policemen were standing in the way of the crowd.

Designer walked up to the front of the crowd and said, Hi! Can you help me? I want to design with birds.

What? Abolitionist turned to face Designer. The animals have been our slaves long enough. We humans kill them, eat their flesh, and make shoes from their skin. Even though we don't have to.

But no, Designer interrupted. I don't want to eat the birds. I want to work with them.

Just leave them be! They don't want anything to do with us, said Abolitionist and turned away.

But Birdhouse will make a big difference for birds, thought Designer. For good and bad. And Pigeon and Crow seem to like to live close to humans.





## BIRD WATCHER

Abolitionist's words made Designer remember a dinner party the week before. Birdwatcher had invited everyone that was working on Birdhouse over for an evening meal.

Birdwatcher knew many things about birds. That their great-great-great-grandparents were dinosaurs. How they find their way around the world.

I'm not like Hunter. I hunt with my eyes, Birdwatcher had said.

Birdwatcher spent a lot of time saving Stork and Eagle. He showed Designer how he had made a raft where Pied Avocet could nest, safe from Fox and Ferret.

Dinner was served. Everyone was hungry from all the stories and helped themselves to roast Chicken with mashed potatoes and gravy.

The food had been tasty and comforting. It was only now that Designer found it strange that Birdwatcher could talk about saving Stork while chewing on Chicken. I guess Birdhouse is different from Henhouse, thought Designer.

## Z O O P O L I T I C I A N

Back in the city square, after Abolitionist had marched away, Designer was approached by another protester who had been standing further back in the crowd.

Abolitionist wants to liberate the animals. But they won't just disappear, you know, said Zoopolitician. I have a plan for a new kingdom, Zoopolis, where all of the animals will be citizens.

Designer listened carefully and asked: What would Goldcrest do in this kingdom?

It depends. Dog, Cat and some birds live close to humans. They can go to school and help make important decisions for Zoopolis. Other birds are wild like Pike and Wolf. They can stay in their own villages outside Zoopolis. We won't disturb them.

There must be lots to design in Zoopolis, said Designer. Courtrooms for Cockatoo. Schools for Bream. Hospitals for Hedgehog. I wonder what Birdhouse would be like in Zoopolis?

You should talk to Artist about that, said Zoopolitician.



## A R T I S T

Designer walked into a large white gallery. One corner was furnished with dark wooden furniture. It looked like a courtroom.

Your honor, we have a verdict. In the case of State versus Hunter the defendant is found guilty of the murder of Wolf and is sentenced to life imprisonment.

Stop, Artist said, holding up her hand. Remember yesterday we decided to change the verdict of the trial to eight years imprisonment? And let's try using the word slaughter instead of murder. Let's take it again from the beginning.

After the rehearsal Designer told Artist: This is like a scene from the Zoopolis that Zoopolitician was sketching.

Yes. In order to make Zoopolis real we must first be able to imagine it. If we can't think it, we can't do it. In this trial, we can try out a world that otherwise seems impossible.

Leaving the courtroom, Designer thought: This was beautiful. But Birdhouse has to be real, not a prop or a movie. And where was Wolf?



## P O S T H U M A N I S T

...and we humans have to stop acting like the world is our smorgasbord to feast on anytime we're a bit hungry!

Outside the gallery, in a corner of the square, Designer saw a small group of people listening to a woman with a booming voice. She was standing on top of a wooden crate. On the side, in white chalk, were scribbled the words Posthuman Pastries.

We humans like to think of the world as a wedding cake, Posthumanist declared, and we are the happy couple at the top. The animals, plants, and rocks sit below us like... erhm... creamy servants. The crowd nodded, and Designer's mouth watered. But! Posthumanist went on, the sugar of life sweetens all things. That same sugar makes up the mosquito, the cow, the octopus, the bacteria, and all of you. We are not on top of the cake – there is no cake! We are in the middle of a sprawling mess of bodies and forces. Let's rejoice in the beauty of this mess!

How can I cook something tasty with Goldcrest and Client? thought Designer. And I think Goldcrest prefers insects.





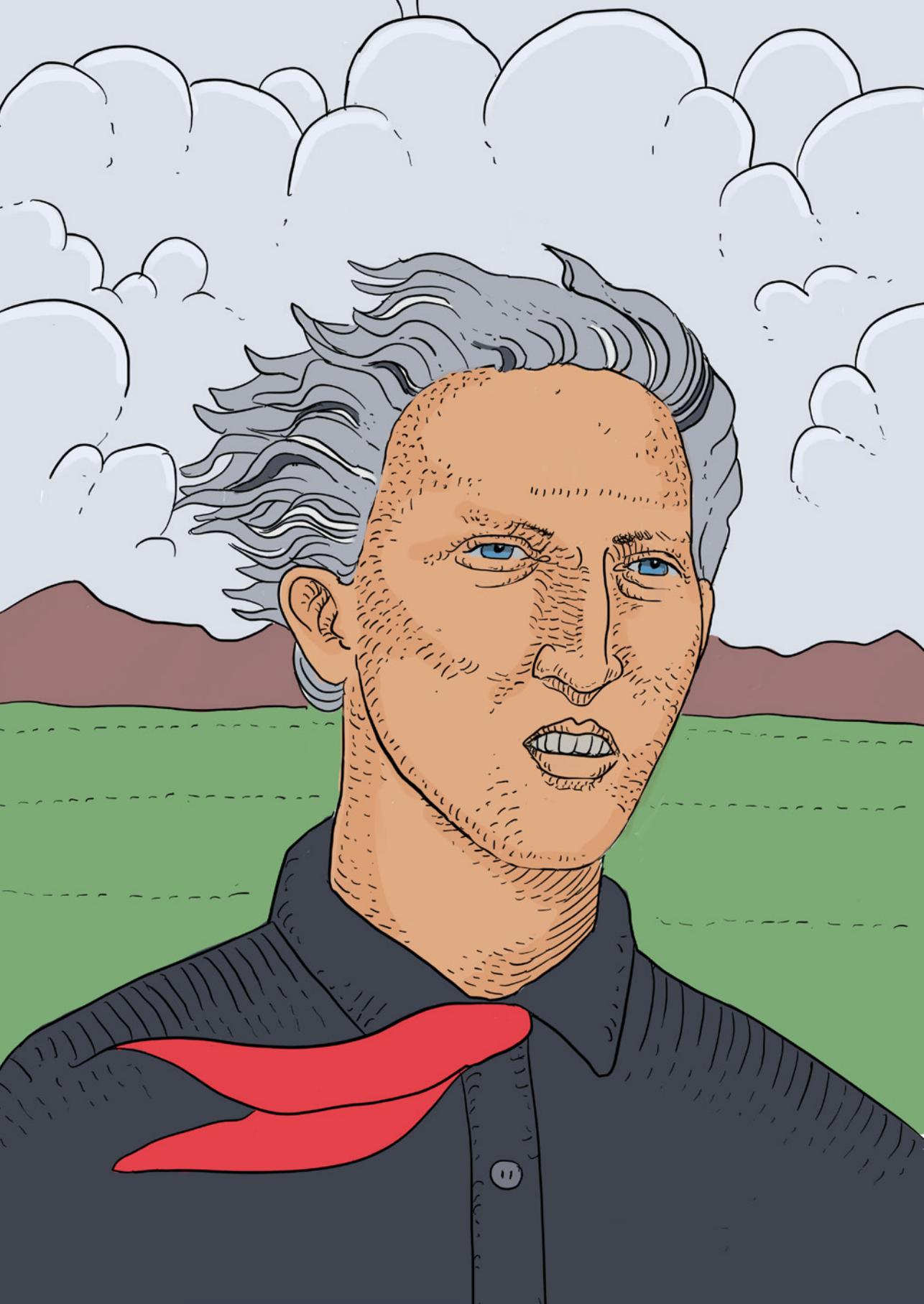
## E C O M O D E R N I S T

Still hungry from Posthumanist's lecture, Designer sat down to rest on a bench in a quiet corner of a nearby park. Dove cooed and Red Squirrel leaped between the trees. Next to Designer sat a man reading a pink newspaper.

I love parks. They heal my soul, said Ecomodernist without looking up from his paper. But nothing beats real nature. There is a wilderness reserve just outside the city. You look tired, you should go there sometime.

Designer told Ecomodernist about Birdhouse. Ecomodernist listened carefully, then smiled and said: No, you don't need to design with birds. Abolitionist was right. You should leave the birds alone. Think of them as actors in a movie. We go to the nature reserve like we go to the cinema. A bright kid like yourself should work on nuclear power plants to save the planet, instead of talking to birds.

But I promised to build Birdhouse, Designer thought. Perhaps it should have windows like movie screens? Client really wants panoramic windows. Designer stepped onto a bus heading out of the city. Perhaps in the countryside there would be people who worked with animals?



## S L A U G H T E R H O U S E D E S I G N E R

Designer got off the bus at a stop marked Humane Abbatoir and approached a tall woman standing outside a bland concrete building. Do you design with animals?

You could say that, said Slaughterhousedesigner. In my work I really need to understand how the animals think. She showed Designer into the building. There was a cold smell of raw meat.

Look over there. Pigs are afraid to walk on that path, but if we put another pig on the far end of the path the others will go there without hesitation.

Suddenly the metal floor disappeared under the pigs, leaving them hanging on hooks, slowly conveying them into the next room.

Thanks to my designs the animals don't need to be scared in their final moments, Slaughterhousedesigner said proudly. It's about respect.

Designer was impressed with Slaughterhousedesigner's work, but the smells and screams from the next room were nauseating. Designer was trained to focus on the user. But the school projects never ended with killing the user.

## S A N C T U A R I S T

Back outside, the cold air cleared Designer's nose and mind. Voices and moos could be heard from a barn not far away. Peering in, Designer was surprised to see a motley crowd of people and animals.

Our sanctuary is growing, said Sanctuarist. She had to shout to be heard in the cacophony of moos, barks, and grunts. Every day we are joined by new friends – pigs, cows, humans, geese – in search of a place safe from harm. We need to build a new house to fit all of us. In this meeting, we are going to decide what kind of house to build and where it should be.

The humans took turns talking about what the house could look like and where it should be built. The cows mooed occasionally and the geese honked.

Was this what Zoopolitician meant?

Designer tried to picture Client, Designer, Birdwatcher, and Goldcrest in the woods outside Birdhouse reasoning about the layout of the Birdhouse balcony.



## H U N T E R

Boom!

Designer jumped. A shot?

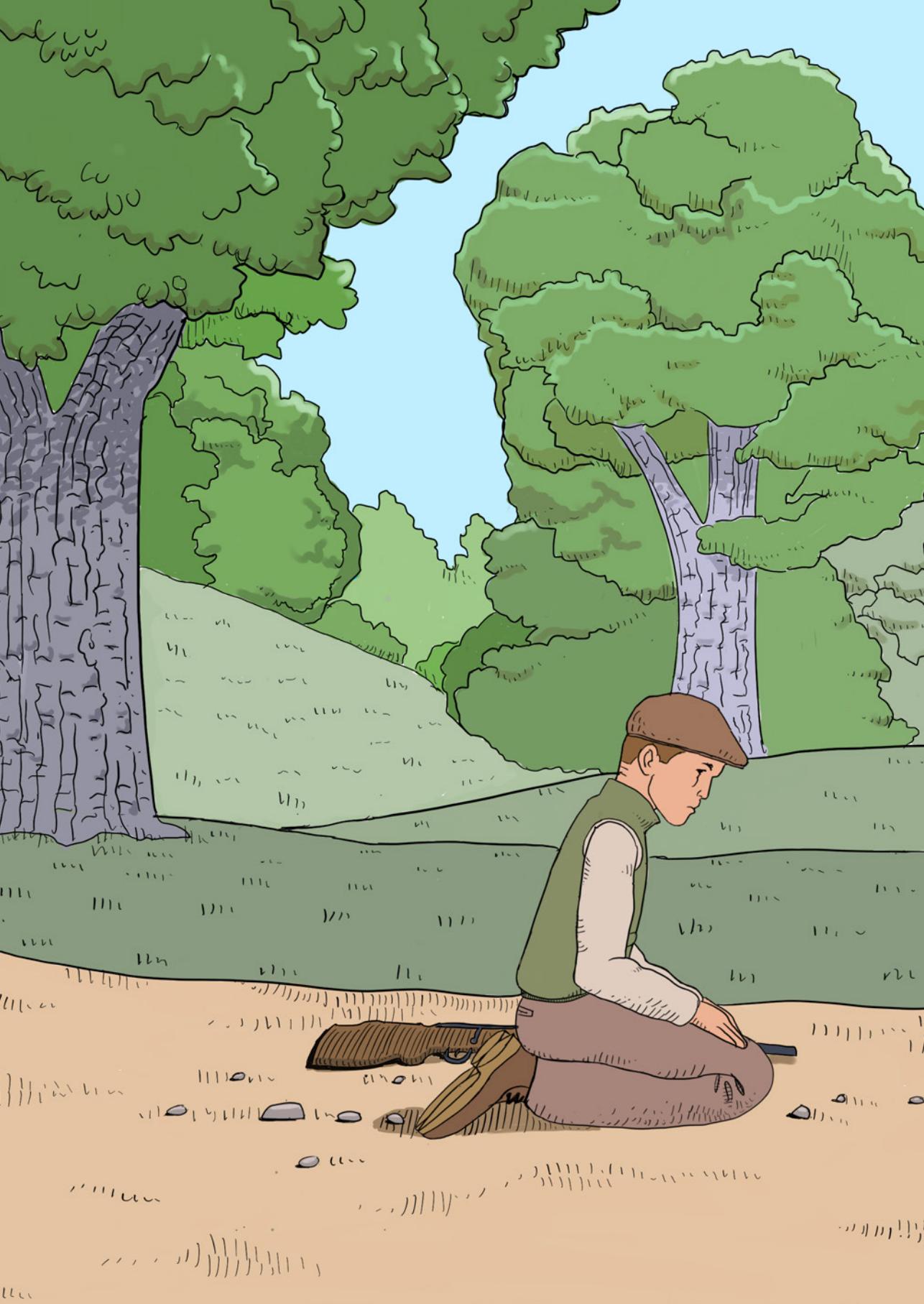
Designer ran towards the sound and found Hunter on his knees next to the fallen deer. A faint mist rose from the dead animal. It was still warm. Hunter looked like he was praying.

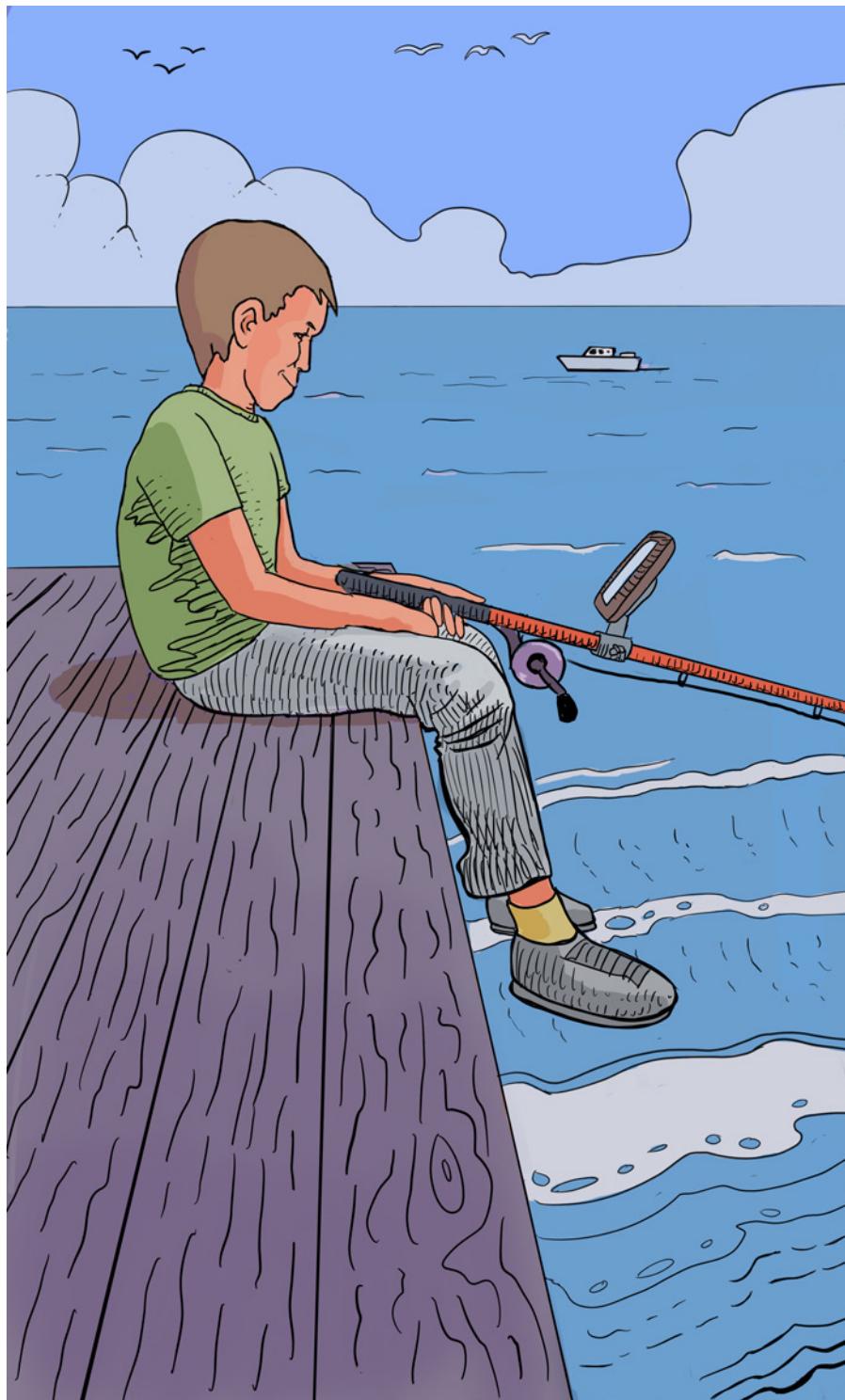
What are you doing? asked Designer.

Killing an animal is a serious thing, Hunter whispered. After a kill I always spend a minute in silence to think about the deer and its family. In a way, I love all the animals that I kill.

Why do you kill them then?

To eat them, of course. We humans need to kill to eat. By getting out into the woods and killing the animal with my own hands I am closer to what I eat. I take responsibility for what I am and what I do. I respect the animals. I'm not like Bully over there.





## B U L L Y

At the end of short wooden pier sat a young man, legs in the air, fishing rod in hand. Bully seemed excited, pointing and talking to a small screen attached to the rod: Haha! Stupid, stupid Fish! Fooled you again. Who's got a fully developed cerebral cortex now!

What did you catch? asked Designer.

Catch? With a hook, you mean? Bully sounded irritated. Are you crazy? That could kill the fish!

Designer didn't know what to say.

Look. I don't catch the fish. I trick them, and I film them. Bully wound up his line. Instead of a hook it ended in a blunt metal stud. Above it Designer saw a black tube.

That's the camera. I can see everything the little buggers are up to down there on this screen. Bully put a piece of corn on the stud and cast back into the river.

Perhaps I shouldn't worry so much about being polite?  
thought Designer.

## D E S I G N E R

Exhausted from the long journey, Designer realised it was time to get back to the design studio. Tomorrow was another meeting with Client. Designer needed something to show Client.

My mind is troubled and my hands are clean, thought Designer. I have been talking a lot but not building anything.

This time I didn't get to meet Farmer, Architect, Treesearcher, Ecologist, Dogkisser, Ecofeminist, or Biohacker, thought Designer. Still, I have traveled far. Further than most designers would have. I wonder if Client will pay for my trip?

Hidden inside a pocket on the side of Designer's backpack was Goldcrest, listening.













# *Designer and Goldcrest*

THE NOTES

Welcome to The Notes. I hope you enjoyed The Story. You can read The Story without consulting The Notes, but The Notes will not make sense without The Story. Here you will find behind-the-scenes commentary, reflections, and references that informed the encounters in The Story.

I hope Designer's journey, together with these backstories, questions, and pointers can assist you in moving towards a less anthropocentric design practice.

## C L I E N T

What about the birds?

The question sucked the air out of the meeting room. The client sat silent and we didn't push the issue further.

In 2014 I was working on designing *naturum Falsterbo* together with my colleagues at Unsworn Industries – the interaction design and innovation studio I had co-founded eight years earlier. This new visitor centre should sport a welcoming interactive exhibition and tell engaging stories to spark curiosity about the local ecology, the nearby beaches, and the dramatic naval conditions. The main focus was birds and their migration. Falsterbo is the south-westernmost point of Sweden and the last resting place before south-bound migrating birds use thermal lift to gain altitude for the long flight across the brackish waters of the Öresund.

In October we had set up a meeting with our client, the Head of Tourism of the municipality. The agenda was to map and prioritise target groups for the visitor centre. Our bucket list looked like this:

- The general interested public of all ages
- Schoolchildren and teachers
- Preschool groups
- Beach-goers and sunbathers
- Birdwatchers, ornithologists, bird-nerds
- Birds

The last one was added off-the-cuff by us and we presented it half-jokingly. In a house about birds, surely the birds themselves were also some kind of stakeholders? We glanced at the client to see his reaction. Silence. Blank gaze. We felt awkward and went back to shuffling human stakeholders on the post-it wall.

In graduate school, while I was pursuing my masters in interaction

design, one of my professors taught me to “hold on to the friction” of uncomfortable design situations. Friction equals uncertainty and potential conflict as well as an opportunity to learn. So why did we shy away from exploring the possibility of avian stakeholders? Why weren’t we interested or confident enough to hold on to the awkwardness? What tools and mindsets could have helped us to act more confidently in considering and perhaps eventually working with the birds as players in the project?

What about the birds? The question is silly and profound. It’s silly because we intuitively know that stakeholders are human. It’s profound because venturing beyond and perhaps even decentering the human rocks the foundations of the design discipline and also calls for reconfigured, less heroic designer-subjects. A tiny ontological crack opens up, through which we can peer towards the uncanny *open* beyond the human.

This bewilderment and inability to hold on to the friction is one motivation for creating this book. Hopefully Designer’s journey has given you some silly and profound pointers where to look and act next.

**SANDELIN, E. & TORSTENSSON, M.**, *Unsworn: naturum Falsterbo*. Available at:  
<http://www.unsworn.org/work/naturum-falsterbo>

#### G O L D C R E S T

A sunny September Tuesday the naturum design team was in Falsterbo conducting full-scale cardboard prototyping to try out different interior configurations of the exhibition. Outside the large panorama windows several goldcrests fluttered, exhausted, to the balcony floor. Some of them bounced quietly off the glass windows before tumbling to the ground.

It was a surreal experience, almost like an omen. It was also another invitation, literally knocking on our windows, not responded to. What or who were the goldcrests to us? Users? Stakeholders? Co-designers? Material? Neither. They were curious objects of interest but they were not part of the project ecology.

But they could become problematic actors if they got too close. At one point we were discussing what type of fencing to use on the birdwatching platform to be built on top of the naturum house. The elegant transparent glass barrier was rejected in favour of a netted handrail. We imagined the headlines of the local newspaper: “Hundreds of Birds Dead After Crashing

Into New Naturum". We couldn't have that!

When the building caretaker urged us to wash our hands after touching the goldcrest it amplified the sense of a boundary between us and them, subject and object, inside and outside, culture and nature.

## G O A T M A N

In *Goatman – How I took a Holiday from Being Human*, the designer "of a more speculative sort" Thomas Thwaites asserts that people worry a lot and that animals don't. It must be a relief, he writes, to become an animal, at least for a while. Thwaites talks to prosthetics makers, ethologists, neuroscientists, and a shaman in his attempts to learn about goats, intending to ultimately become one himself. He crafts bodily extensions that will aid in his temporary transformation into a pseudo-goat. Extended front legs enable a quadrupedal gait. An artificial rumen digests grass.

In *Being a Beast*, veterinarian and writer Charles Foster takes on a similar experiential approach, but focuses more on mental than somatic prosthetics to experience life as a badger, an otter, a fox, a red deer, and a swift. Foster notes that it's only a blink of an eye in the history of the Earth since humans and badgers shared a common ancestor. The becoming-animal of Foster is not a shamanistic dissolution of self. It is a Cambridge-educated, jovial, white, male human that muses about human-animal similarities and disconnections. But, writes Foster, we still need to keep trying. We need to try to become intimate with "the natural world". "The method, then, is simply to go as close to the frontier [of humans/nature] as possible and peer over it with whatever instruments are available." Foster dons a wetsuit and dives into cold Exmoor rivers as a hungry otter. He burrows and bites into juicy earthworms as a badger. He is hunted by bloodhounds to feel something of the fear, the prey-ness, that he considers the core characteristic of the Umwelt of the red deer.

We interface the more-than-human through our bodies. When "things are in contact with the body, it is as if they themselves acquired a heart, leading them back to the center of our lives", writes Roberto Esposito. In my own work with Unsworn we have used "experiential interventionist prototyping" as an approach to engage with and reflect on embodied technologies and new relationalities. In an early project, members of the Power Pilgrims order wear robes held together by electro-magnets that require

frequent recharging as they travel the world to pay reverence to and express their trust in the Great Electrical Systems. The pilgrims rely on the kindness of strangers – strangers who allow them access to power outlets – in order to prevent their robes falling open, which would leave them ashamed and vulnerable. Wearing the Amber Robe makes the pilgrims intimately aware of the power outlet geography of their surroundings. It produces a strong feeling of interdependence and adds a tinge of fragility to our digitally mediated everyday.

For 17th century philosopher Baruch Spinoza the mind is the idea of the body. The mind is embodied and the body is enbrained. We do not yet know what a body can do. What can the human body become in experiential more-than-human design?

**DELEUZE, G.** (1988) *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. San Francisco: City Lights Books

**ESPOSITO, R.** (2015) *Persons and Things*. Cambridge: Polity

**FOSTER, C.** (2016) *Being a Beast*. London: Profile Books

**THWAITES, T.** (2016) *GoatMan: How I Took a Holiday from Being Human*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press

**VON UEXKÜLL, J.**, (2010) *A Foray Into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

#### P R I M A T O L O G I S T

Thomas Thwaites and Charles Foster tweak their minds and bodies to explore “animal” aspects of experiencing the world. They parachute into existing flocks and ecosystems but their encounters, if any, with members of the other species are brief. They quickly eject to the pub (Foster) and the design studio (Thwaites). What can we learn about ourselves and other animals from such fleeting sessions in the field?

In *When Species Meet* Donna Haraway urges us, via bioanthropologist Barbara Smuts, to acknowledge that humans and nonhumans become-together in a “dance of relating”. That’s how we learn about each other. For several years in the 1970s Smuts studied baboons in a remote area of Kenya. Despite being trained in the tradition of objective natural science Smuts soon abandoned the fly-on-the-wall researcher role, the idea that the researcher

can stand outside what she is observing: “I soon learned that ignoring the proximity of another baboon is rarely a neutral act, something that should have been obvious to me from my experience among humans.”

Smuts had learned to talk about her approaching the baboons in terms of *habituation*, implying that the baboons would slowly change and gradually become accustomed to the visiting human researcher while she herself would remain unchanged. However, Smuts noticed that the opposite was taking place. “The baboons remained themselves, doing what they always did in the world they had always lived in. I, on the other hand, in the process of gaining their trust, changed almost everything about me, including the way I walked and sat, the way I held my body, and the way I used my eyes and voice. I was learning a whole new way of being in the world – the way of the baboon.”

Why isn’t Smuts dressing up as a baboon, like Thwaites? Smuts is not trying to become-animal by discarding or enhancing her anthropomorphic frame. She is trying to become-with the baboons. By relating, she herself is changed.

**HARAWAY, D. J.** (2008) *When species meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

**RADIOLAB** *The Shy Baboon*. Available at: <http://www.radiolab.org/story/91942-the-shy-baboon>

**SMUTS, B.** (2001) “Encounters with Animal Minds” in *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 8(5-7), pp. 293-309

#### A N T H R O P O L O G I S T

Though Designer’s sylvan thinking never took off, it is worth exploring Eduardo Kohn’s beautiful *How Forests Think* for an anthropology that opens up beyond the human. Life, to Kohn, is a sign process. Thoughts are alive. Since thought extends beyond the human we are able to think beyond the human, towards a self that can be aggregations of other selves. “If thoughts are alive and that which lives thinks, then perhaps the living world is enchanted. What I mean is that the world beyond the human is not a meaningless one made meaningful by humans.”

**KOHN, E.** (2013) *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press

## A B O L I T I O N I S T

Critical Animal Studies is an academic field that is committed to the abolition of animal exploitation and promotes veganism as the main tool for political action. Veganism is abolitionist in its anti-speciesist disavowal of using animal products for food or clothing. Abolitionist activist and legal scholar Gary Francione insists that all animals should have the right to not be treated as property. According to Francione welfarist models of animal rights, where animals are granted some minimal protection against “unnecessary suffering” and “humane” living standards, have failed. Animal welfare laws ultimately fail to protect animals while serving to prolong the use of animals by legitimising the animal-industrial complex. Welfarist Slaughterhouse designer (see note below) means well but is designing the thing right, not designing the right thing. A total abolition of animals as human property is urgently needed, argues Francione.

Philosopher Patricia MacCormack brings the abolitionist standpoint to one extreme and unsentimental conclusion. Drawing on Michel Serres, she states that we should stop worrying so much about nonhuman animals when it is us humans that are the problem. We caused this mess, and the responsible act would be to stop procreating and eventually retreat from the planet. Unlike Goatman and many others we should stop “thinking the animal” (a violent act in itself) and concern ourselves more with Homo Sapiens’ graceful withdrawal from the planetary scene. Earth needs ahumanism, not post-humanism or a more animalistic humanism, according to MacCormack.

Appropriating tools from gender studies, postcolonialism, and moral philosophy Critical Animal Studies has developed convincing counter-arguments to carnism and meat-eating. It remains rare, though, to find future scenarios – snapshots from potential futures and alternative presents where human-animal relations are imaginatively reconfigured. What happens after Abolition? We need more stories and vivid scenarios from post-speciesist futures.

In Hartmut Kievert’s paintings a revolution has just taken place in the painted urban landscape. Animals that used to be called livestock roam the streets. Healthy cows graze in the concrete cracks of the ruins of meat processing plants. Convivial city dwellers share their picnic blankets with friendly sheep. It seems to have been a non-violent revolution. We don’t see any signs of fighting. Nor do we see any cow dung or sheep poo on the lawns or pavements. There are a few cracks in the roads but that is probably

because they are not used as heavily anymore. There are less cars now. It's a mild post-apocalypse.

The abolitionist revolution must have been recent. The cows and pigs are spick and span – as if they were just cleaned for slaughter when the new times swept over the city. Otherwise, the existing city infrastructure must cater well to its new inhabitants. I don't see any physical changes, no custom cow-crossings or sheep lanes. Is it business as usual – with sheep? I think designers, artists, and authors would do well to elaborate on the murkier, idiosyncratic aspects of post-abolitionist everyday life to envision credible, livable multispecies cohabitations.

**FRANCIONE, G.L.** (2010) "Animal Welfare and the Moral Value of Nonhuman Animals" in *Law, Culture and the Humanities*. 6(1), pp.24–36

**KIEWERT, H.** *utopia*. Available at: <https://hartmutkiewert.de/malerei1/bilder>

**MACCORMACK, P.** ed. (2014) *The Animal Catalyst: Towards Ahuman Theory*. London: Bloomsbury Academic

**NOCELLA, A.J., II ET AL.** (2014) *Defining Critical Animal Studies: An Intersectional Social Justice Approach for Liberation*. New York: Peter Lang

**SERRES, M.** (1995). *The Natural Contract*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press

## B I R D W A T C H E R

Based on a true story.

**TWINE, R.** (2014) "Vegan Killjoys at the Table – Contesting Happiness and Negotiating Relationships with Food Practices" in *Societies*, 4(4), pp.623–639

## Z O O P O L I T I C I A N

Abolitionist says we should end all relations with domesticated animals. But there is no quick fix to right the profound wrongs committed by humans in domesticating and selectively breeding dogs, cats, cows and other animals to become dependent on us. Should we mercifully put an end to the lives

of these “unnatural” creatures? In their book *Zoopolis* Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka critiques this “extinctionist” stream of animal rights theory for being tactically disastrous and morally perverse. We can’t turn back the clock and wish these species away even if we wanted to. The perspective that we should simply eliminate out of existence livestock and pets rests on “two problematic assumptions widely found in the animal rights field, namely a) that there’s something unnatural about human-animal relations and b) there’s something intrinsically undignified and artificial about animal dependency on humans.” Ongoing interaction is inevitable. Echoing Donna Haraway, Donaldson and Kymlicka emphasises the need to start envisioning positive relational multispecies duties, moving beyond the universal negative rights of animals that have been the focus of the animal rights movement so far.

Donaldson and Kymlicka draw on disability studies and citizenship theory to start sketching how animal-human relationships could be rethought and regulated in a multispecies democratic society. In *Zoopolis* domesticated social animals are given the status of citizens. The “truly wild animals” that avoid contact with humans form sovereign communities. Liminal animals (mallard ducks, squirrels, rabbits, and countless others) that gravitate towards human settlements but will not be socialized into citizenship could be denizens.

Posthumanist may lament *Zoopolis* as a desperate attempt to maintaining species integrity and the consistent liberal individual subject – a construct unworthy of our bio-geo-techno-hybridised times that calls for a deindividualised ecological person with simultaneous access to psychological, social, and ecological registers. Still, as Designer realises, moving from the realm of critical theory and moral philosophy towards one of politics, law and administration generates multiple tangible sites and opportunities for designerly intervention.

**DONALDSON, S. & KYMLICKA, W.** (2011) *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

**GUATTARI, F.** (2008) *The Three Ecologies*. London: Continuum

## A R T I S T

Can an animal commit a crime? E. P. Evans' *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals* chronicles numerous animal defendants in medieval European courtrooms, from infanticidal pigs to crop-destroying locust. These cases are considered strange curiosities in legal history. In a few decades, though, it might not be considered an anomaly that "the whole machinery of justice was put in motion" in order to pursue a just trial for accused nonhuman animals endowed with legal standing. In Evans' book we learn of French jurist Bartholomew Chassenée who in early 16th century represented a group of rats who was put on trial for having "feloniously eaten up and wantonly destroyed" the local barley crop. When his rodent clients failed to show up in court he ingeniously pleaded to excuse the rats due to their perilous journey, with numerous cats preventing safe passage to the courthouse. In later cases Chassenée referred to his animal trials when representing marginalised (human) others in heresy cases, pleading for a fair hearing since "even animals should be heard".

In artist Terike Haapoja's participatory performance *The Trial*, an artistic staging of the Finnish court case "State versus Perho Hunters", the wolves similarly have acquired legal standing. Here the humans stand accused – of murder. An alternate reality is manifested, a tangible scenario from a world not unlike the one that could result from the political underpinnings described in Donaldson and Kymlicka's *Zoopolis*. Haapoja subverts well-known societal institutions and action spaces to present plausible stages for acting out alternative values and novel human–nonhuman relations. We are invited to take part in rehearsing a future, thereby making that future more possible.

**DEMOS, T.J.**, *Animal Cosmopolitics: The Art of Terike Haapoja*. Available at:  
<http://creativeecologies.ucsc.edu/demos-haapoja>

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## P O S T H U M A N I S T

One of the most pervasive ideas in Western culture is that of the Great Chain of Being, an ontological and moral hierarchy of all things. The Chain starts

from God and progresses downward to angels, demons, stars, kings, men, wild animals, domesticated animals, trees, other plants, and minerals. In this *scala naturae* everything has its place and purpose. The lower entities are less sophisticated, have less moral worth, and can be put to use by the higher creatures as they see fit.

Critical posthumanists propose a radical flattening of the chain of being. Feminist posthuman scholar Rosi Braidotti offers a materialistic vitalism, centred around the concept of *zoe*, the vital force of all life. This vitalism, inspired by the monism of Baruch Spinoza, dissolves boundaries between the kind of life (*bios*) that has been reserved for human and nonhuman animal life (*zoe*). According to Braidotti there is no species difference between different forms of life. Everything is permeated, criss-crossed by the same cosmic, transversal life force.

Despite many overlaps, such as a shared interest in unsettling the human exceptionalism that is essential for legitimising human mastery over non-human species, posthumanism and abolitionist critical animal studies (CAS) maintain an uneasy relationship. Posthumanists have argued that liberationist CAS perspectives are grounded in totalising rights discourses that derive from humanist lineages, thus being intrinsically anthropocentric.

Posthumanism, on the other hand, is often criticized by CAS activists-theorists for a lack of political vision and for not providing actionable tools. In *Defining Critical Animal Studies* Melanie Joy and Adam Weitzenfeld point to the problem of mobilising posthumanism for social change: “Posthumanism may describe a present human condition to be carefully responded, but they do not prescribe a future humankind to be militantly attained.”

In *The Trouble with Posthumanism: Bacteria Are People Too* CAS scholar Zipporah Weisberg strongly warns against uncritically conflating CAS with posthumanism: “enter bacteria, exit ethics”. She affirms the shared interest in debunking human exceptionalism, but asks why this has to be done by fetishising boundary dissolution and hybridity. So far, Weisberg claims, the posthumanist, hybrid promise has most successfully been realised by biocapitalism in the form of bioengineered and genetically modified organisms that seem to reinforce, rather than subvert, existing power structures. Weisberg claims that posthumanists too often approach the animal question as a self-indulgent intellectual exercise, rather than as a means of developing radical, transformative practices.

In a messy posthuman world, living without killing is impossible and violence is therefore intrinsic. For the vegan activist, violence is primarily

structural and extrinsic and should be vehemently opposed. I think this friction between actionable everyday practices and the messy complexities of the posthuman condition is a core concern for the activist-designer and designer-researcher looking for actionable knowledge beyond the human.

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- CUDWORTH, E. & HOBDEN, S.** (2017) *The Emancipatory Project of Posthumanism*. Oxon: Routledge
- WEISBERG, Z.** (2014) “The Trouble with Posthumanism: Bacteria are People Too” in J. Sorenson, ed. *Critical Animal Studies. Thinking the Unthinkable*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, pp. 93–116
- WOLFE, C.** (2013) *Before the Law: Humans and Other Animals in a Biopolitical Frame*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

#### E C O M O D E R N I S T

If we are living in the so-called Anthropocene – the epoch where humans are becoming a geological force with lasting effects – why not make it a good Anthropocene? Let’s use our scientific and technological skills to engineer solutions to the environmental challenges of today! By designing more efficient ways of utilising ecosystem flows we can lessen the human impact on the biosphere. These are the rallying cries of the Ecomodernist Manifesto.

Ecomodernists seek to decouple humans from “nature” and save patches of “untouched” nature for “aesthetic and spiritual reasons”. This aesthetisation of pristine “nature” emphasises our inability to conceive of an ethical system that is not dependent on human existence.

Ecomodernism fits snugly with contemporary mainstream design, poised to find technological “solutions” to narrowly-defined problems without causing uncomfortable changes in the smooth operation of capitalism.

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- STEFFEN, W., CRUTZEN, J. & McNEILL, J.R.** (2007) “The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?” in *Ambio* 36(8), pp. 614–621

## S L A U G H T E R H O U S E D E S I G N E R

At Unsworn we took pride in assembling a bespoke process for each client project. We fought hard to plan at least two more or less overlapping phases in each project: *designing the right thing* and *designing the thing right*. (These phrases were inspired by a lecture by Gillian Crampton Smith at Interaction Design Institute Ivrea in 2002). Designing the thing right is the careful crafting of the shape and details of a system, artefact or environment. Designing the right thing implies taking one or more steps back and reflecting on the bigger picture: Who is benefiting? What are the potential social, environmental, and political effects of this design-act? What power relations are shifted? What other options are there? What could be the long-term consequences?

Google “slaughterhouse designer” and you arrive at Temple Grandin, professor of animal science. Grandin is famous for her “humane” take on the layout of abattoirs. She utilised her knowledge of bovine and pig behaviour and her sensibility to the ways cattle react to ranchers, objects, and light to design, for example, curved corrals intended to reduce stress in animals being led to slaughter. By evidently alleviating some suffering in a cow’s last minutes of life Grandin could be said to have designed the thing right. But did she design the right thing? If you take a few steps back the underlying speciesist ideology comes into view. If Grandin could empathise with the animals-to-be-slaughtered, why didn’t she call for an end to factory farming altogether? It’s a dilemma for a practicing designer when to stay in and when to opt out, or even call out. When to conform, bending the flows from within, and when to quit or say no?

In *Disciplining Animals: Sentience, Production, and Critique* Anna Williams shatters the welfarist dream that holds that if we can prove that nonhuman animals possess human-like capabilities and subjectivities the oppression of these animals will cease. Williams shows that not only has the animal-industrial complex acknowledged animal’s rich psychology for a long time, but actively harnessed that knowledge in maximising the efficiency of lethal production processes. An appreciation of animal sentience does not run counter to their exploitation as industrial resources. Subject status does not guarantee moral status.

From a non-speciesist designers’ vantage point Grandin’s work could be considered what design theorist Ezio Manzini would call “remedial goods”. Such products does not improve quality of life but merely “restore a degree

of acceptability to a context of life that has been degraded". Paradoxically, by designing the thing just right we may make a problematic situation more bearable, and thereby postpone the crisis required for a needed change. For example, as a designer of in-car entertainment systems that make a congested urban commute more bearable, what responsibility do I have in the system of unsustainable modes of transport that I'm perpetuating?

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**MANZINI, E.** (2003) "Scenarios of Sustainable Wellbeing" in *Design Philosophy Papers*, 1(1), pp. 5–21

**WILLIAMS, A.** (2004) "Disciplining animals: sentience, production, and critique" in *The International journal of sociology and social policy*, 24(9), pp. 45–57

#### S A N C T U A R I S T

Designer, who was trained to "listen to all voices, no matter how weak", was educated in the Scandinavian tradition of participatory design (PD). PD is about involving potential users to have say in design processes with outcomes that will affect their own situations. From the outset PD has been sensitive to asymmetric power distributions and worked to include previously unheard voices to have a stake in shaping their own future. PD has recently moved beyond workplaces and opened up for (primarily technological) nonhuman actors. Involving other nonhuman actors – animals, microbes, vegetables – in participatory design processes challenges current notions of the social and the public.

Can nonhuman animals be stakeholders in a PD process? Malmö-based researcher Michelle Westerlaken submitted a paper on designing objects for playful interactions with her dogs to the Participatory Design Conference 2016. The paper was rejected. One reviewer wrote, "who says that PD should be extended to designing for and with animals, beyond humans?". The reviewers were sceptical of referring to Westerlaken's work in terms of PD, since "one cannot get a parallel reflection from the animals".

Designer's encounter with Sanctuarist is inspired by a rare example of practically working with animals in decision making, one mentioned in an article on farmed animal sanctuaries. patrice jones of the VINE sanc-

tuary mentions an important decision moment: “We stood in the barn surrounded by sanctuary residents, as we like to do when making important decisions. [Sanctuary co-founder] Miriam and I have always believed that decisions about animals ought to be made, insofar as possible, in consultation with animals. If that’s not possible, the next best thing is to be in physical proximity to animals like those you’re thinking about, so that you don’t make the mistake of treating them as abstractions.”

We may not be able to deliberately discuss issues in the ways we’re accustomed to with nonhuman animals, but that alone should not stop us from experimenting with models of decision-making and design-setups across species boundaries and beyond human language-based reasoning.

**DONALDSON, S. & KYMLICKA, W.** (2015) “Farmed Animal Sanctuaries: The Heart of the Movement?” in *Politics and Animals*, 1(1), pp. 50–74

**JÖNSSON, L. & LENSKJOLD, T.U.** (2015) “Stakes At the Edge Of Participation: Where Words and Things are the Entirely Serious Title of a Problem” in *Proceedings of Nordes 2015*

## H U N T E R

“A responsible person must be able to kill an animal” writes journalist Helena Granström in a Swedish daily newspaper. Through this “almost ritual” act we experience hands-on that death and killing is inevitable for survival. Strict veganism, Granström continues, shies away from the realities of life.

I have caught and killed countless perch and pikes with my own hands. Does this make me a responsible person?

In *License to Kill: An Ecofeminist Critique of Hunters’ Discourse* Marti Kheel distinguishes between different hunters’ discourses. The happy hunter is a good sportsman who hunts for recreation. What he kills is literally called “game”. The holist hunter considers himself a steward of nature who culls populations through “managerial kills”. The holist hunter, untainted by the pleasure of the kill, also provides the official face for the happy hunter. For the holy hunter, hunting is a spiritual experience. Granström’s hunter proudly inserts him- or herself without blinders into the food chain, enabling a direct and sound connection to the natural world.

From the (dead) individual animal’s point of view the “thoughts and prayers” of the holy hunter is not meaningful. Writes Kheel: “Saying a prayer

before you kill an animal is no more acceptable than saying a prayer before a rape. It is our actions, more than our state of mind, that are crucial in the realm of ethical conduct.” Design is all about action. Birdwatcher and Bully may offer alternative, intermediate modes of hunting.

**GRANSTRÖM, H.** (2016) “Den ansvarsfulla människan måste klara av att döda ett djur.” in *Expressen*. Available at: <http://www.expressen.se/kultur/toppnyheter-/darfor-maste-vi-klara-av-att-doda-ett-djur>

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#### B U L L Y

When I was twelve years old I saved up for a tiny boat that I used to go fishing for pike and perch in the river near my home. Passing a group of cows that were grazing next to the river I would sometimes scoop water with the bailer and casually throw some at the cows. They would twitch and moo and I would chuckle to myself. Was I destined to grow up a serial killer?

Later in life, having recently turned vegan, I helped craft a life-size gluten E.T. to be roasted whole on a spit as part of two festive events in Sweden and Finland. The gluten E.T. was intended to cater to the needs of eaters who sought a surrogate for the sacrificial and ritual aspects of convivial, meat-based barbecues.

Bully retains a dominant position in relation to other species but his “complicated pleasures” are apparently satisfied by the lesser crime of Breach of Domiciliary Peace instead of Hunter’s Murder. Bully is neither a paragon of beyond-the-human interconnectedness nor a strict abolitionist who “gracefully lets them be”. Bully’s bar is low in a world where the bar for acceptable behaviour towards members of other species has somehow been slightly raised.

We need a wide palette of multispecies relational role-models between the angelic, pure vegan and the authoritarian carnist. I find Bully to be a tragic-yet-hopeful figure in a growing cast of characters that could play a part in the contemporary human imperative of learning to desire otherwise.

Bully’s exclamation, “who’s got a fully developed cerebral cortex now!” is a verbatim quote from a review of Strike-Cam, a miniature camera to be

attached above the bait while angling to give the fisher live video information of any activity: “There are many things to enjoy about fishing. There’s the communion with nature. The taste of something pulled right out of the water. The satisfaction of providing food for yourself from the wild. But obviously, what’s missing is the satisfaction of watching stupid, stupid fish ensuring their own demise. That’s right fish, who’s got a fully developed cerebral cortex now?”

**DUNNE, A. & RABY, F.** (2001) *Design Noir: The Secret Life of Electronic Objects*. Basel: Birkhäuser

**KELLERMAN, J.** (2014) *Watch Fish Fall for It with Strike-Cam*. Available at: <http://www.wideopenspaces.com/watch-fish-fall-strike-cam>

**PISSED JEANS** (2016) *The Bar Is Low* [CD]. Seattle: Sub Pop

**SANDELIN, E.** (2014) “Eating E.T.” in E. A. Cederholm et al., eds. *Exploring the Animal Turn: Human-animal Relations in Science, Society and Culture*. Lund: The Pufendorf Institute for Advanced Studies, pp. 47–56

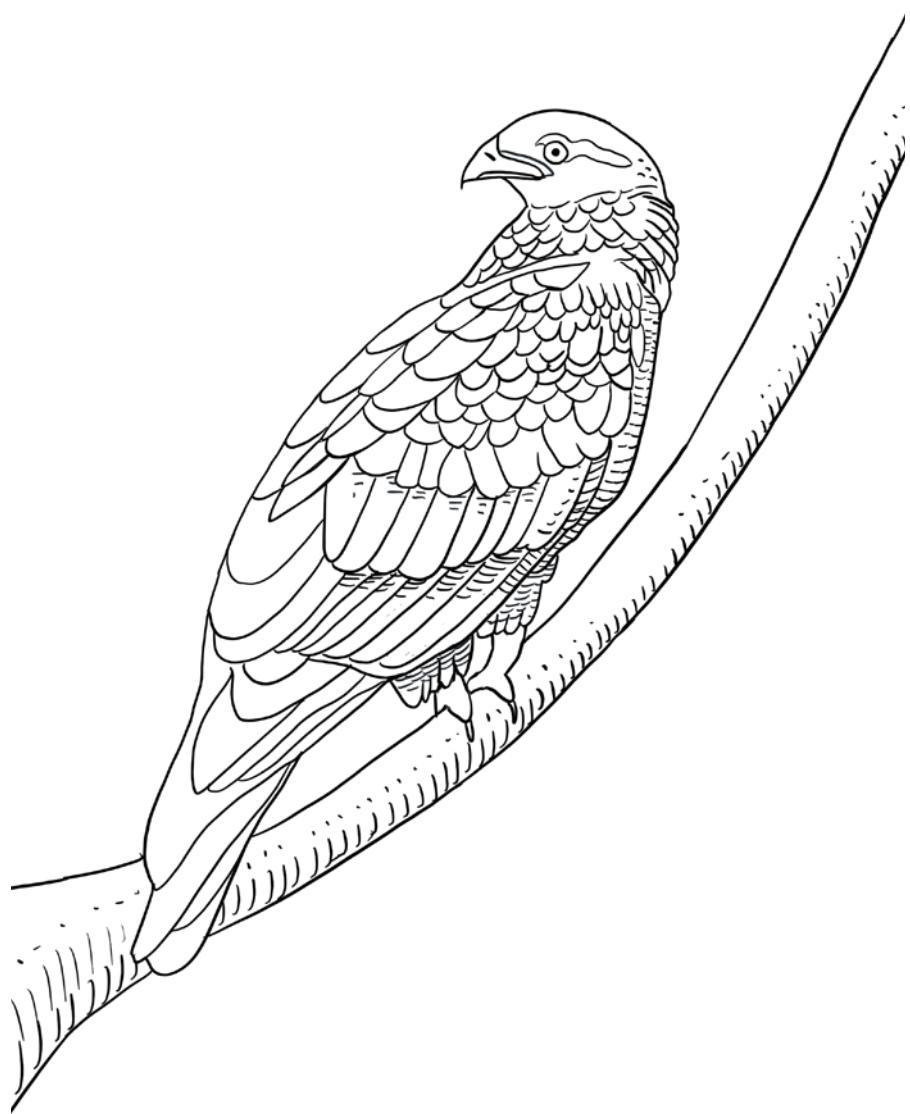
## DESIGNER

Aristotle told the story of a competition to see who should be the king of the birds. All the different birds joined in and it was decided that the crown would be awarded to the bird who could fly the highest. Soon Eagle was soaring high above all the other birds. It looked like it was going to be an easy win, but as Eagle eventually tired, a small bird that had hidden in Eagle’s tail feathers emerged to fly even higher. Goldcrest could thereby lay claim to the title and was awarded a bright yellow crest.

It’s time to get to work, but how?

**HRIBAL, J.** (2001) *Fear of the Animal Planet. The Hidden History of Animal Resistance*. Petrolia and Oakland, CA: Counterpunch and AK Press





## A U T H O R ' S   T H A N K S

Rava, for the art.

Alison Gerber, Martín Avila, Otto von Busch,  
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Konstfack University of Arts, Crafts and  
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Fine Arts Schools of Architecture, Design and  
Conservation, for the time.



Why didn't I say something? thought  
Designer. But what would I have said?  
I don't know how to design with birds.

Designer decided to head out into the  
world to ask for help.

SORGENFRI  
PRESS