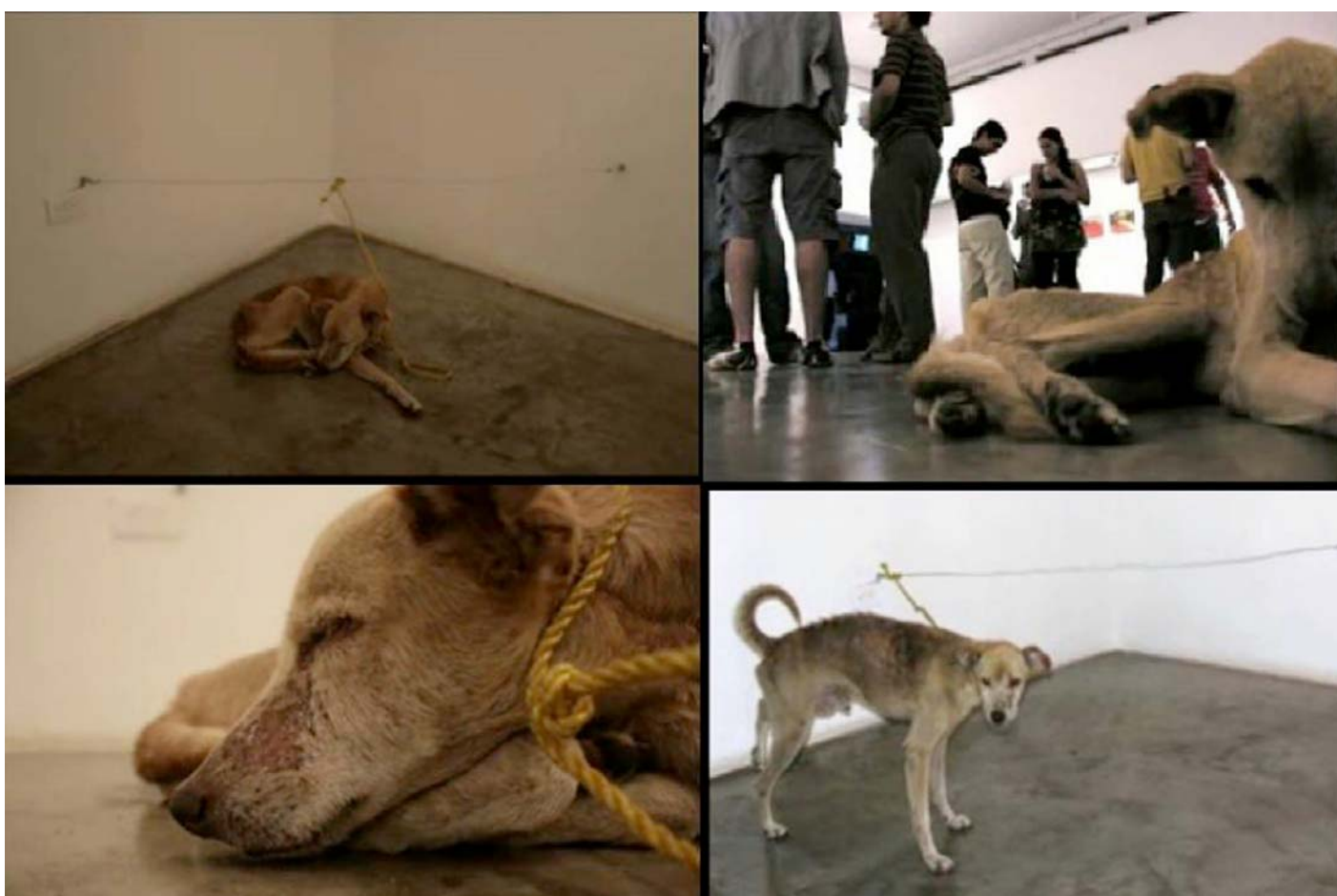


HEARTBURN: INDIGESTION, CONTENTION AND ANIMALS IN CONTEMPORARY ART

One of the questions on the global table is whether animals should be used as human food. This essay seeks to locate that question and related ones in several recent contemporary artworks spawning a great deal of global media attention, as well as community controversy. Three artists, their works and surrounding media disputes will serve as moments of investigation: the viral and internationally web based denouncements of Guillermo Vargas Jiménez, and his piece Eres Lo Que Lees (You Are What You Read), which included an emaciated dog tied to a wall by a length of rope; the closing of the entire Adel Abdessemed Don't Trust Me exhibit at the San Francisco Art Institute Gallery in 2008; and the closing of Huang Yong Ping's exhibit Theatre of the World at the Vancouver Art Gallery in Canada (2007).

Text by **Carol Gigliotti**



Guillermo Vargas

'Exhibit 1', details, as exhibited at Galleria Codice on August 16, 2007 © Vargas

Starving an animal, in Vargas' exhibition, animals eating each other, in Ping's piece, and animals being killed for food for humans, in the case of the offending Abdessemed's videos, comprise the "actual" situations set up by the artists in order to communicate various themes.

What caused the outside world to impinge on the "sacredness" of the gallery space, resulting in public outcries in all three cases for discontinuing the particular pieces, or the entire exhibit, in which they were seen? What might we learn from looking more closely at the parties involved: the artists, the curators, the public, the media, and, of course, the animals themselves? Is it possible that a growing awareness of animal consciousness and agency, coupled with increasing environmental concerns, is causing global signs of indigestion?

The links between the human habit of eating the meat of other animals and human digestive health has been a topic of great interest and disagreement throughout much of Western history. Influenced by Pythagoras to view animals as sentient beings, Plutarch (2nd century/1957) says in the first of two essays on meat eating in *Moralia*, "...No, for the sake of a little flesh we deprive them of sun, of light, of the duration of life to which they are entitled by birth and being" (551). He speaks directly about its affect on our digestion when he says: "...the meats affect us with dreadful pains and malignant forms of indigestion (553-555)."

Plutarch, like Pythagoras, sees the dyspepsia resulting from the habit of eating meat as not solely reliant on health concerns or the desire of humans to be free of pain. Both consider the violent injustice of killing animals for food to be an important contributor not only to the resulting bodily reactions that fall under the term indigestion, but also to ailments of the soul.

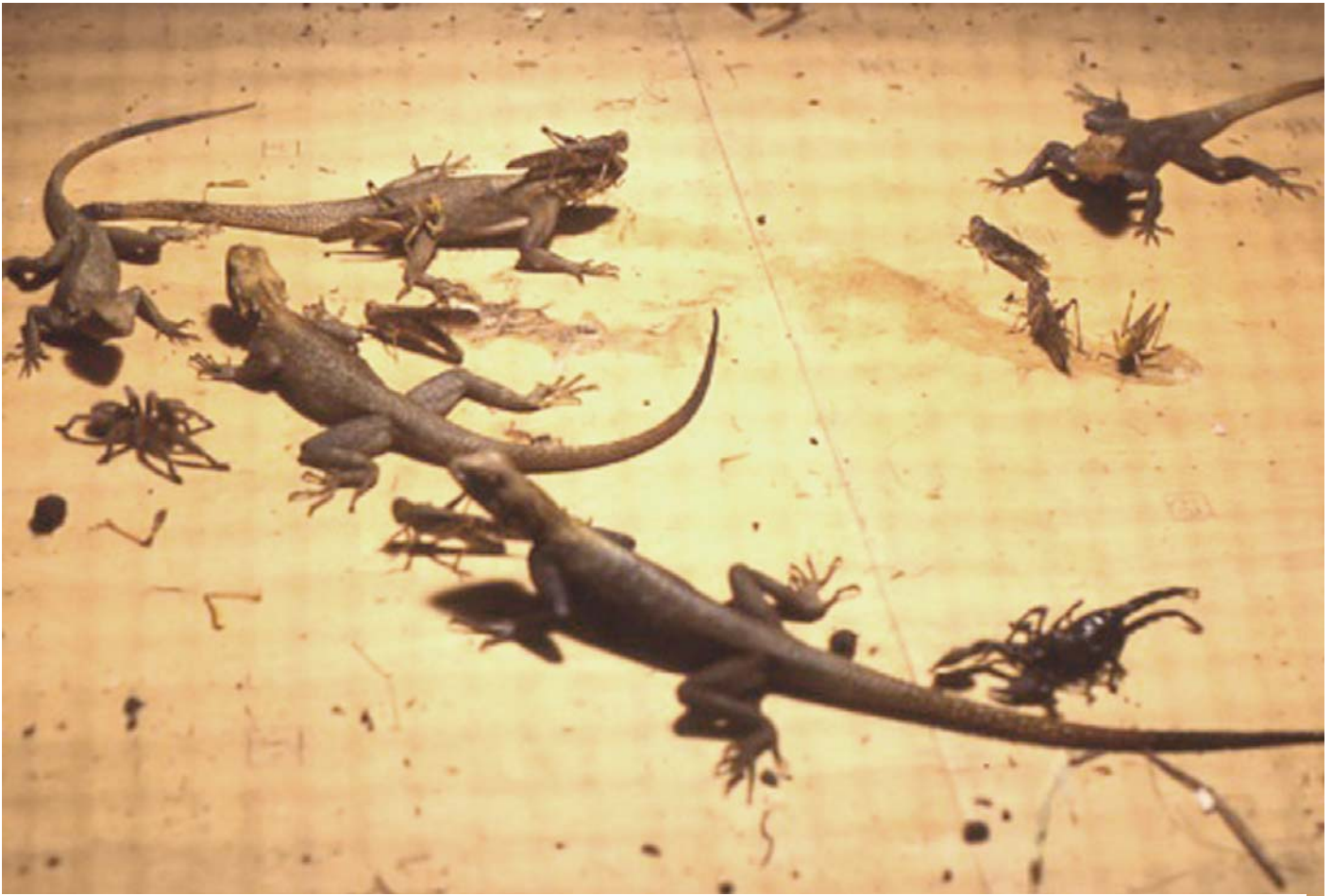
Some 2000 years later, we appear to be having the same discussions. Now, however, the symptoms of indigestion are spread throughout the natural world as well. The spread of industrial meat production throughout the world is credited with causing a number of concerns for people and the planet, including land degradation, climate change and air pollution, water shortage and water pollution, and loss of biodiversity. Earlier reportsⁱ put the meat industry among the top two contributors to global warming and climate change. More recently, a report sponsored by the Worldwatch Institute, an independent research organization, pushed the percentage of annual worldwide GHG emissions to fifty one percent due to omissions or undercounting in the earlier reports, such as the use of old data, not including "livestock-related deforestation from, for example, Argentina," and omitting farmed fish from its definition of livestock (Goodland 14-15).

This report places meat eating as the largest contributor to global warming. Transportation and building are in a distant second and third place. If, as a number of medical professionals contend, stress and anxiety are significant contributors to symptoms of indigestion, the idea of a global dyspepsia caused by

considering the results of continuing to eat meat is not so far fetched as one might think. Looking squarely into the barrel of a gun while attempting to enjoy a meal is an experience very few people would admit to relishing, and yet, that is the predicted situation with which people across the globe will have to contend if meat consumption continues to double by mid century as predicted (Steinfeld). By 2050, 120 billion animals worldwide would be used for food, taking up more than all the arable land on the planet (Elam 5-6). As one watches the evidence mount, many people are beginning to make the connection between meat eating and environmental and health issues. The evidence, both statistical and experienced, however, may turn out to be crucial turning points in humanity's increasing coming to terms with its morally unjustified habit of eating other beings.

Public dissatisfaction with the way animals are treated, including their use as food, has been growing more vocal in the media, on the net, in activism, and in many recent instances, the use of living animals in art. In the past few decades the public reaction to artists using live animals in their work has been largely negative, due to a number of factors. As Massimiliano Gioni (2008) notes, in his recent helpful, but misguided overview, "the ethical struggle between animal rights and artists' entitlement to free expression is not new...Joseph Beuys, the St. Francis of contemporary art, had his share of controversy and abuse." And certainly, many of today's artists share Beuys' contradictory practices and rhetoric involving living and dead animals. Many well known, and not so well known artists, from Salvador Dali, and his 1938 installation *The Rainy Taxi* which involved live snails, to Damien Hirst and his animal corpses, to Eduardo Kac and his fluorescent green transgenic GFP Bunnyⁱⁱ, have used living or dead animals in their work. But this decade has seen the number of works involving the use of animals rise visibly while critics, curators, the public, and the artists themselves offer myriad explanations ranging across the issues of the day. Museum of Modern Art curator, Robert Storr, suggests that the use of animals has followed a general "shift to literalism" (qtd. in Boxer 2). Steve Baker (2006) has long made an influential argument for seeing at least some of "this art – not least when it appears to take liberties with the animal form ...as constituting a kind of fluid sub-ethical practice" (75). Gioni (2008) describes current artists working with animals as sharing both an interest in a "hyper-artificial kingdom of possibilities" (n.p.) in their fascination with scientific debates as well as now seeming to keep alive "an irrational belief in ancient rituals and rural traditions" (n.p.).

Except for Steve Baker, these writers miss the rather obvious possibility that this growth in art, with and about animals, might be occurring because of the rising tide of general interest and concern for actual animals. An earlier issue of *Antennae* took on the subject of the killing of animals in art and the editor, Giovanni Alois, asked the questions, "Do works of art involving the killing of animals speak about animality or



Huang Yong Ping

Theatre of the World, as exhibited at the Vancouver Gallery, Canada, 2007 © Yong Ping

more about the artist who stages the killing? Where do we draw a line?" (Aloi, 2008). There are many instances of artists focusing on animals and their lives in today's world who have not incurred the wrath of public protest but whose work concerning animals is taken seriously both ethically and aesthetically. The works by early artists with this interest, such as Rachel Rosenthal, Bonne Sherk, and Sue Coe, and contemporary artists, such as Angela Singer, Julie Andreyev, Lisa Jevbratt, Karolle Wall, and Yvette Watt, among others, are far from the work discussed in this essay, in both content and motive. The three pieces, and surrounding responses, discussed in this essay offer a snapshot of the political and ethical contexts in which contemporary artists using living animals find themselves, and with which they must contend. More importantly, the essay offers insights into global shifts in human awareness of other possible relationships with animals besides the dominant ones of misuse (and abuse) today.

In August of 2007, Guillermo "Habacuc" Vargas included an emaciated street dog as part of a display exhibited at the Códice Gallery in Managua, Nicaragua. During the display, the dog, dubbed "Natividad", was tied up without water or food while the Sandinista anthem was played backwards and pieces of crack cocaine were set alight in a large incense burner.

A slogan made from dog biscuits, "Eres Lo Que Lees" ("You Are What You Read"), also formed part of the display. That much has been substantiated by the artist, local news reports, the gallery, and images of the exhibit.

Widespread reports on the internet insisted the dog starved to death during the exhibit and the photos of the dog during the exhibit posted on several blogs and websites served as evidence of the obviously malnourished and weakened state of the dog. In the images, the tethered dog is surrounded by gallery goers, all seemingly ignoring his plight. The outrage and international condemnation from the public and animal organizations was immense. People weighed in on the blogs, websites and petition sites organized around the situation, as well as on the myriad of re-postings of the exhibit photos on blogs around the world. In a story in the Costa Rican newspaper, *La Nación*, the editor of the Nicaraguan paper, *La Prensa*, confirmed that the dog died after the first day of the show and implied the death was due to starvation ("Contretemps" 2008 n.p.).

The gallery director, Juanita Bermudez, however, insisted in a later story, in the *Guardian UK*, that the dog was fed, did not die while on display, and escaped on the morning of the fourth day, the day after the three-day exhibit. She said: "[i]t was untied all the time except for the three hours the exhibition lasted

and it was fed regularly with dog food Habacuc himself brought in." (Cousens 2008 n.p.). This came after the overwhelming outflow of condemnation from the public. The artist himself refused to clarify the details of what happened to the dog. His comments, little as they were, changed over the time of the denouncements after the show. In an interview published on Yahoo and then removed, Habacuc states that his inspiration for the exhibit came from a news story of a Nicaraguan immigrant named Natividad who was killed by two dogs after he entered an auto shop property guarded by the dogs. Footage of the incident vidoetaped by a news team was shown on TV generating a public reaction of disgust. According to a translation of the interview, Habacuc viewed this disgust as hypocritical and therefore wanted to create a similar public reaction with his exhibition (Christensen 2009 n.p.). In addition, a petition was started to stop Habacuc's entrance in to the Bienal Centroamericana Honduras. 1,530,721 signatures were collected on just one petition (Sancho 2007) to demand his being banned from the festival.iii

The reality of animals starving, of real starvation in general, appearing almost as a side issue in this piece, was highlighted by the public reaction. This particular dog was starving, as are many animals and humans all over this planet. "It is just a dog," or a pig, or a cow, or a deer, or a child," is not an answer that is acceptable any longer. Individual starving dogs matter, as do individual humans, no matter in what part of the world they live. The artist's and gallery's specious misuse of the dog's plight to prove a point can be seen as particularly unhelpful, if not downright mean-spirited, especially if one maps the situation onto the global table. Because meat eating takes up so much of the world's arable land and use of edible food, as well as land upon which animals once were able to feed on their own, people and animals starve. The 4.8 pounds of grain fed to cattle, who then are slaughtered to produce one pound of meat, is wasteful of food and land in a world with 1.02 billion hungry people (FAO 2009). I could not find statistics on animal hunger, but we know we have the ability to feed the world, at least as many people as there are in it today. But we choose not to when we eat meat. It is as complex and as simple as that.

I was involved in the media outcry preceding the closing of Huang Yong Ping's *Theatre of the World* exhibit at the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG) in 2007. Seen as "one of China's most influential artists," ("Huang Yong Ping" 94), Ping left China in 1989 and now resides in Paris. Philippe Vergne (2005), co-curator of the internationally traveling retrospective of Ping's work, which originated at the Walker Art Center, House of Oracles, says of Ping's work:

He is acting as an artist in time of crisis, an artist who transcends the issues of the day, who takes the opportunity to transcend conventional wisdom and orthodoxy in order to reach beyond and to escape what is handed down by

the status quo and the media (31).

Ping is known for his performative and sometimes quite mammoth installations whose interrelated themes span many issues, including the relationship of humans and nature. This last area has garnered Ping's work the most press and some of the most positive reviews by art critics. Hou Hanru (2005) says of Ping's inclusion of animals in his work of the last decade:

Huang Yong Ping has created a completely original zoological realm, using both live animals and reproduction of animals from both the real world and the imagination... The transgression of the boundaries between humankind and nature also puts Huang Yong Ping himself in a totally original position. He is now at once an artist, magician, fortune-teller, alchemist, healer, teacher, philosopher, and writer (16-17).

Against this backdrop of awe accorded the artist, the Vancouver Art Gallery received a notice from the Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals that a complaint had been made about one of the pieces in the exhibit, *Theatre of the World*. Consisting of a screened enclosure in the shape of a tortoise shell, it held, in an undivided space, tarantulas, cockroaches, millipedes, scorpions, lizards, snakes, and toads. Suspended above it, a wooden python, called *Theatre of the World- Bridge*, completed the work. The didactic on the wall corresponding to this piece read:

This work functions as a metaphor for the conflicts among different peoples and culture – in short, human existence itself.

Upon an investigation conducted in cooperation with the gallery, the SPCA found the animals with very little heat and light coming from only one central hanging lamp, no water or food (at least during gallery hours), and no places where animals might rest undisturbed or retreat. The gallery and Ping, communicating from Paris, at first complied with the SPCA's ordered changes for more heat and water. During a second inspection, the outside vet called in by SPCA for a legally binding order, found the situation for the animals "abysmal" and called for the removal of the tarantulas and scorpions which he determined were in distress.

At this point, Ping, who has written about his participation in an art exhibit as a form of talking and "subject to constant change" (2005 86) and of "how art can get away from power without becoming another power itself" (86), decided he had enough of public input and had all the animals removed from the piece. He angrily called the order from the SPCA an example

of censorship and a violation of his freedom of expression, demanding the empty structure remain as a sign of protest. In a statement from Paris, Ping described the concerns of the SPCA in this way:

To avoid further conflict, the Vancouver Art Gallery and I made numerous efforts to improve the living conditions of insects and reptiles as requested by the SPCA, including additional water dishes and soil, changing the lighting, etc...They completely ignored the concept and ideology behind this particular art work, citing instead the doctrines of so-called "animal rights" that violently interfere with the rights of an art work to be freely exhibited in an art museum (Vancouver Art Gallery 3).

The accompanying press release produced by the VAG announcing the withdrawal of the animals insisted that "[a] program for the care of the insects and reptiles in the artwork was also developed in consultation with experts to ensure a high level of comfort" (2). I saw the exhibit immediately after the first complaint, and found no water sources, no vegetation, and the animals seemed slow and dormant from the cold temperatures in the gallery and lack of any light, except for the one hanging lamp being monopolized by the largest lizard. In addition, the press release asserted the exhibit had not been "modified" at the Walker Art Center or Mass MOCA, its two previous sites, during their durations. What the press release did not say was that the exact same piece had been discontinued by the staff at the Pompidou Center in Paris, where it was originally shown in 1993, and the Walker Art Center blog on the show had received a great number of complaints. Though the Walker blog has recently been overhauled and the copious number of complaints about the piece when it showed there are no longer available, there is one blog entry left that summarizes many of the blog entries I saw while the show was in Vancouver.^{iv} The exhibit catalogue itself, originating at the Walker Art Center, and available for purchase at the VAG, called these criticisms of earlier installations of the show "new forms of censorship, which may be characterized as liberal humanist and (if veiled) racist-culturalist" (99).

Between the time of the first SPCA visit and the withdrawal of the animals and subsequent panel discussion held at the VAG, the story was covered with great interest in various local, national and international radio shows, online blogs and news websites. I was interviewed on the CBC local radio show, *On the Coast*, and on the CBC national radio program *QUE*, as well as by the various local and international news organizations. Most questions focused on why the

SPCA and others found the use of animals in the exhibition problematic "...since captive animals are fed to others every day in pet shops." ("Gigliotti") or how does the manipulation of an artist's work sit with other artists? The audience reaction at the panel discussion held by the VAG, at which I was invited to speak, was loud and clear: both other artists and various members of the public attending the discussion felt that the welfare of animals, including insects, not only trumped the freedom of artistic expression, but raised the question, as artist Kelly Phillips (2008) suggests, in her article in *Fuse* magazine about the controversy surrounding the exhibit, "...do animals remain the Colonial Other for the Empire of Man?" (15)

The Theatre of the World, according to Ping's (2005) notes in the exhibit catalog, is an open question. He says:

Is *The Theatre of the World* an insect zoo?
A test site where various species of the natural world devour one another?
A space for observing the activity of "insects"? An architectural form as a closed system? A cross between a panopticon and the shamanistic practice of keeping insects? A metaphor for the conflicts among different peoples and cultures? Or, rather a modern representation of the ancient Chinese character of *gu*? (34).

In this quote, Ping seems to favor the influence of *gu*. *Gu* is the name of two specific entities. The first is a specific kind of poison said to have been produced in South China and prepared by combining five venomous creatures in one pot and leaving them to devour each other, similar to Ping's choice of animals in *Theatre of the World*. The final corpse was said to possess a powerful magical potion. *Gu* also is the name for a Chinese character denoting an insect repeated three times over a second character denoting a dish or plate. This character also is the eighteenth hexagram and chapter in the *I Ching*, and is interpreted there, and in the catalog, as

"decay...It has come about because the gentle indifference of the lower trigram has come together with rigid inertia of the upper, and the result is stagnation. Since this implies guilt, the conditions imply a demand for the removal of the cause. Hence the meaning of the hexagram is not simply 'what has been spoiled' but 'work on what has been spoiled' (Chong 103).

I have included the *I Ching* interpretation quoted, though not cited, in the *House of Oracles* catalog to stay as close to what Ping may have used.



Abdel Abdessemed

Don't Trust Me, 2008, video still, Abdel Abdessemed and David Zwirner Gallery © Abdessemed

The reference to “guilt” and “a demand for removal of the cause” literally jumped out of the page when I saw it. While Ping might have seen the interpretation of this hexagram as a comment on the rightness of his actions of removing *The Theatre of the World* exhibit during the Vancouver run of the show, the combination of “guilt,” and “stagnation,” and “removing the cause,” point, at least for me, to interpretations that seem to resonate with the

arguments in this essay. Granted, for some, the I Ching may not count as adding any rational support to these arguments, but coming from one of the oldest classical texts still used in contemporary Asia and parts of the West, these particular words in this interpretation of this hexagram offer an eerie and prescient mirroring of the circumstances of the closing.

Much of the negative public reaction on blogs focused on keeping a number of notably disparate

species in one enclosure with nowhere to hide, though the VAG and Ping insisted their basic needs were being met. One of Ping's goals was to offer gallery goers the chance to witness potential conflict and the eating of one species by another for, according to him, the purpose of demonstrating the metaphor of similar human action in war and cultural conflict. The more obvious similarities, however, are not only to those animals bred and kept for fighting, such as dogs and roosters, but also to animals in factory farms. Modern meat production animals, though usually of the same species, are kept tightly packed together without concern for their particular natural needs and fed same species meat, diseased meat, feathers, hair, skin, hooves, blood, manure, plastics drugs and chemicals as well as unhealthy amounts of grains (664).

Close confinement is among the reasons for the rise in meat borne illnesses, such as E. Coli, Salmonella, and Campylobacter. In fact, according to the US Centers for Disease and Control and Prevention (CDC) the use of antimicrobial drugs for nontherapeutic uses has risen 50 percent since 1985 (Motavalli n.p.). The reason for that growth is due in large part to factory farm use and threatens to wipe out the effectiveness of a category of antimicrobial drugs upon which we have come to rely, antibiotics. Coincidentally, these same antibiotics are one of the few cures for some classes of meat borne illnesses. (UCCSEH n.p.) Additionally, meat eating is suspect in heart disease, hypertension and colon and other cancers.

Environmental health is compromised by the growth in meat production, as well. The statistics about meat production's contribution to global warming, discussed previously, is only one of many environmental health costs leaking from the growth in meat production worldwide. LEAD researchers also found that the global livestock industry uses dwindling supplies of freshwater, destroys forests and grasslands, and causes soil erosion, while pollution and the runoff of fertilizer and animal waste create dead zones in coastal areas and smother coral reefs.^v (Brooks, n.p.) The global meat industry can be said to cause a global indigestion so complete and overwhelming that only the complete cessation of it will allow the planet to heal in any real way.

Adel Abdessemed, like Ping, is familiar with his exhibits being closed or prohibited. Abdessemed sees himself as a "romantic criminal" (Falconer and Abdessemed 2009) and rejects the label "postcolonial artist"(84) because he is "not working on the scar and not mending anything" (Gioni 2009 n.p.). Ben Davis (2009), Associate Editor of *Artnet Magazine*, calls him "the contemporary artist that animal rights activists love to hate"(1). Previous pieces utilizing animals included a large scale video, *The Birth of Love* (2006), in which a stray cat devours a rat, and several actions unleashing animals once native to North Africa onto the streets of Paris. But it was Abdessemed's series of six videos of animals individually being bludgeoned with a hammer, entitled *Don't Trust Me*, at a solo exhibition of the artist's work at the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) gallery in

March of last year that prompted a local furor and international reaction that ended up closing the exhibit. The work was made at the request of curator Hou Hanru, interestingly enough, the same writer whose comments about Huang Yong Ping are quoted above. The videos were shot in a public market place in Mexico City and are of animals being slaughtered for food, but no clarifying or didactic information was available when the videos were being shown.

According to various news sources, upon opening, the show immediately was inundated with emails and phone calls protesting the videos. In response, the Institute planned a public panel discussion. However, within a few days, the panel was cancelled and the exhibition closed, due to threats of violence ostensibly received by the Institute. A few weeks later, the Institute held a private panel for students and faculty, to which I was invited, since I was living in San Francisco on sabbatical at the time.

John Rapko, a tenured philosophy professor at SFAI, and a well-known art critic and writer, was asked to be on the panel. He offered a pertinent, erudite and well-articulated argument about the piece and similar work's place in contemporary art. In a version of that talk published in *ArtWeek* in July of 2008, Rapko says:

[There is a] tradition in modern art of "aesthetic evil," wherein artists present and explore, without obvious moral condemnation, the psychology of evil. Still, it is hard to see that Abdessemed's piece contributes to such a project; it seems rather to exploit the permissions established by this tradition in the service of odious self-glorification. And even if one acknowledges and celebrates the achievements of the tradition of aesthetic evil, one might wonder whether there are other kinds of art more responsive to the great contemporary challenges of triumphant capitalism, the vast movements of peoples and the ongoing destruction of this earth (5).

A month before this was published, Rapko was suspended for six months from his position after a long internal battle in retaliation for his views on the exhibit. He was subsequently fired (along with eight other tenured faculty members, one of whom also spoke from the audience during this same panel on the closed Abdessemed exhibit) in February of 2009.

If one is tempted to think that Abdessemed's goals may have been pro-animal, it is crucial to note that a more recent piece, *Usine*, French for "factory", includes a snake strangling a frog, tarantulas stalking a mouse, roosters striking at each other, and dogs sinking their teeth into each others' throats. These videos were staged by the artist and also shot in Mexico. This video and *Don't Trust Me* caused the solo exhibition of



Abdel Abdessemed

Don't Trust Me, 2008, video still, Abdel Abdessemed and David Zwirner Gallery © Abdessemed

Abdessemed, in April 2009, in Turin, Italy, to be temporarily closed while a magistrate decided whether complaints from animal activists were warranted (Povoledo n.p.). The exhibit did reopen, but not without continuing complaint.

Abdessemed's images of animals being bludgeoned to death, though it might not have been clear to viewers for what reason, caused an immediate reaction of disgust and anger. In contrast, The film, *Earthlings* (Monson 2007), with its uncompromising looks at the reality of life for animals killed for food, among other uses, uses similar footage but to a decidedly different effect. It is not merely the amalgamation of videos of the daily abuse of the animals we eat, wear, use for experiments, entertainment and as pets, but a clear-eyed, focused look at the myriad ways human beings both depend on and subjugate animals. It reveals the absurd levels of cruelty in how that relationship has evolved, and points to the immense loss

we are sustaining through the continuation of that malevolence. The intense reactions to Abdessemed's videos of animals being bludgeoned to death demonstrate a growing global unease and guilt, an indigestion of the soul, in recognition of the widespread culpability in that malevolence.

Along with allegations that the general public does not understand the nuanced language of contemporary art and its use of metaphorical techniques, the claims that protests against the uses of animals in these ways is censorship, from "liberal humanist and racist-culturalist" stances, hardly help to explain the large number of people who contributed negative opinions about these works. Many identified are from within the arts, or as art supporters, and hail from countries and cultures worldwide. The broad array of negative and well-articulated reactions available for view on the net, and increasingly from within the arts, cannot be dismissed as synonymous with censorship

merely because they echo the views of animal activists. Many of these criticisms come from a vocal and technologically well-connected public, and point toward a growing radical environmentalism that sees the conditions of power and dominance among humans as rooted in the human refusal to recognize the continuing domination of animals. Even if artists such as Habacuc, Absemmed and Ping seem to be aware of the human affects of these conditions, they are blind to their roots in human power over other animals.

In the three situations above, the animals involved serve as surrogates for human characteristics that the artist is trying to critique or demonstrate. The fact that the animals themselves are individual beings, consciously witnessing their own victimization, appears to elude the three artists in these examples. Not only are the individual animals involved seen as static objects, used as metaphor, example, or analogy, but they are also treated as abstractly as words in a language or paint on canvas. It is for this reason that these artists cannot only be accused of cruelty, but also accused of the lesser charge of making bad art. They misunderstand the actual import of using a living being in their work. The agency of the living does not expire with death, since energy is subject to the law of conservation of energy. According to this law, energy can neither be created (produced) nor destroyed. It can only be transformed. These artists miss the point that attempting to fix the meaning, value, and agency of any living being, whether in an octagonal structure, tied with ropes, or in a piece of video, is a useless endeavor. The energy of every being continues to exist by transformation. And in these three situations, the energy of the living beings we call animals, no less than living human beings, could not be destroyed by artists' attempt to capture and kill, whether in reality or metaphorically.

Whether in Ping's attempt to fix the meaning of animals as useful artistic metaphors, trumping all other considerations, or Abdesmed's attempt to use the killing of animals for food for its shock value, or Habacuc's attempt to make a point about the hypocritical nature of human beings, the actual individual animal is ignored or devalued. Though these works may be considered both cruel and bad art, one need look no further for a reason why they call up such strong negative reactions than the searing and painful heartburn one feels at coming into contact with them, a heartburn made more intense by the growing awareness that what one eats, when eating the flesh of another animal, is misery.

Notes

¹ A well-publicized and often cited report by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimated that 18 percent of annual worldwide global greenhouse gas (GGH) emissions are attributable to cattle, buffalo, sheep, goats, camels, pigs, and poultry raised for food (Steinfeld 23). This statistic put the meat industry among the top two contributors to global warming and climate change

² See Gigliotti, C. (2006) "Leonardo's Choice: the ethics of artists working

with genetic technologies." In C. Gigliotti, (Ed.). (2009). *Leonardo's Choice: Genetic technologies and animals*. Dorchedt, Netherlands: Springer.

ⁱⁱⁱ As it turned out, Habacuc had been shown at the V Bienal de Artes Visuales del Istmo Centroamericano in 2006, but was not eligible for the festival in Honduras as it was only open to artists from Honduras. See Christensen 2009.

^{iv} From the Walker Art Center Blog during the House of Oracles Exhibit "If the cage is the "birdcage" above the table I'm not suprised, most tarantulas are solitary, shy creatures and prefer some type of hide space they can retreat to. Too much sound or movement stresses them out if they have nowhere to escape. The loss of the hair on the abdomen shows that the tarantula was flicking or throwing her hair (a natural irritant) which is her primary defense mechanism. I think your exhibit is cruel. If you tied a puppy to a tree and constantly threw firecrackers at it it would be about the same effect as you had on that tarantula. I wonder how many you'll go thru? Comment by George — January 10, 2006 @ 6:03 pm <http://blogs.walkerart.org/visualarts/2005/12/02/watch-your-back-betty/>

^v Livestock, Environment and Development Initiative, an international consortium of government and private agencies based at FAO head quarters in Rome.

References

- "Contretemps Over "Starving Dog Art". Artnet April 17 2008. Web. April 30 2008.
- "Huang Yong Ping." ArtAsiaPacific 2009. Web. July 2009.
- Gigliotti, Carol "Interview with Priya Ramu." On the Coast. CBC. April 11, 2007. Radio.
- "George." "Watch Your Back, Betty." [weblog] Walker Art Center, 2002.
- Aloi, Giovanni. "Editorial." *Antennae: the Journal of Nature in Visual Art* 5 (2008). 43-53. Web. 30 July 2008.
- Baker, Steve. "Animal Death in Contemporary Art." *Killing Animals*. Ed. British Animal Studies Network. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois, 2006. Print.
- Boxer, Sarah. "Animals Have Taken over Art, and Art Wonders Why; Metaphors Run Wild, but Sometimes a Cow Is Just a Cow." *The New York Times* June 24 2000. Web. July 10, 2009.
- Brooks, Cassandra. "Unintended Consequences of the Meat Industry". 2004. *Global Meat Industry*. Woods Institute for the Environment, Stanford University. Web. October 4, 2009.
- Chong, Doryun. "Huang Yong Ping: A Lexicon." *House of Oracles: A Huang Yong Ping Retrospective*. Ed. Philippe Vergne and Doryun Chung. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2005. Print.
- Christensen, Brett. M. "Protests against Starving Dog Art Exhibition". 2009.
- Hoax Slayer. Ed. Brett M. Christensen. Web. July 7 2009.
- Compassion for World Farming. *Global Warning: Climate Change & Farm Animal Welfare*. Surrey, UK: Compassion for World Farming, 2008. Web. July 5 2009.
- Cousens, Gerard. "Outrage at 'Starvation' of a Stray Dog for Art." *Guardian Observer* 2008, March 30. Web. July 15 2008.
- Davis, Ben. "Animal Spirits." Artnet April 30 2009. Web. July 5 2009. *Earthlings*. 2007. Shaun Monson. Film.
- Elam, Thomas E. *Projections of Global Meat Production*. Surrey, UK, 2009. Web. Oct. 24 2009.
- Falconer, Morgan and Abdel Abdesmed. "New Work: Adel Abdesmed." *Art World* 2009: 84-87. Print.
- Food and Agriculture Organization. "State of World Food Insecurity 2009". 2009. Web. October 25 2009. Print.
- Gigliotti, C. (2006) "Leonardo's Choice: the ethics of artists working with genetic technologies# lc:8#< ^adlii ^e: Y##l' %i #AZdcVj(dff#8] dXZ/< ZcZi X technologies and animals. Dorchedt, Netherlands: Springer. Print.
- Gioni, Massimiliano. "Where the Wild Things Are." *Tate, Etc.* November 2007. Web. July 8 2009.
- "In the Name of the Father." *FlashArtonline.com* 2009. Web. July 17 2009.
- Goodland, Robert and Jeff Anhang. "Livestock and Climate Change." *World Watch Magazine* November/December 2009: 10-19. Print.
- Hannu, Hou. "Change Is the Rule." *House of Oracles: A Huang Yong Ping Retrospective*. Ed. Philippe Vergne and Dorun Chung. Minneapolis: Walder Art Center, 2005. Print.

- Motavalli, Jim. "The Case against Meat." E Magazine 2002: n.p. Web. September 15 2009.
- Phelps, Norm. *The Longest Struggle: Animal Advocacy from Pythagoras to PETA*. New York: Lantern Books. Print.
- Phillips, Kelly. "A Curtain Closes on Theatre of the World." FUSE Magazine Jan. 2008: 8-15. Print.
- Ping, HuangYong. "Plates with HYP Notes." *House of Oracles: A Huang Yong Ping*. Ed. Philippe Vergne and Doran Chong. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2005. Print.
- Ping, Huang Yong. "Discourse – Art – Power, ." *House of Oracles: A Huang Yong Ping Retrospective*. Ed. Philippe Vergne and Doryun Chong. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2005. Print.
- Plutarch. "Moralia." Trans. Harold Cherniss and William C. Helmbold. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1957. Vol. XII of *De esu carum*. Print.
- Povoledo, Elisabetta. "Exhibition with Disturbing Videos of Animals Leads to Protests in Italy." *New York Times* 2009, Feb. 27. Print.
- Rapko, John. "Controversy Surrounding 'Don't Trust Me' Exhibition at the San Francisco Art Institute." *Artweek* 39,6 (2008) 5. Print.
- Sancho, Jaime. "Boycott to the Presence of Guillermo Vargas 'Habacuc' At the Bienal Centroamericana Honduras 2008". 2008. PetitionOnline. July 8 2009. http://www.petitiononline.com/mod_perl/signed.cgi?ea6gk. Accessed Oct 31, 2009.
- Sapkota, A.R., L.Y. Lefferts, S. McKenzie, and P. Walker. "What Do We Feed to Food-Production Animals? A Review of Animal Feed Ingredients and Their Potential Impacts on Human Health." *Environmental Health Perspectives* 2007: 663-70. Print.
- Steinfeld, Henning, et.al. *Livestock's Long Shadow: Environmental Issues and Options*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2006. Print.
- Union of Concerned Citizens and Scientists for Environmental Solutions.. "Prescription for Trouble: Using Antibiotics to Fatten Livestock". 2009. *Impacts of Industrial Agriculture*. Web. September 29 2009.
- Vancouver Art Gallery. "Vancouver Art Gallery Forced to Remove Insects and Reptiles from Sculpture in Order to Maintain Artwork's Integrity." Vancouver, BC, April 14, 2007. Press Release. Print.
- Vergne, Philippe. "Why I Am Afraid of Huang Yong Ping?" *House of Oracles; a Hung Yong Ping Retrospective*. Ed. Philippe Vergne and Doryun Chong. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2005. Print.

Dr. Carol Gigliotti a writer, educator, and artist, is an Associate Professor in *Interactive Media and Critical and Cultural Studies* at *Emily Carr University of Art + Design* in Vancouver, B.C., Canada where she teaches *Environmental Ethics, Critical Animal Studies and Interactive Media* courses. Her edited book, *Leonardo's Choice: genetic technologies and animals which grew out of the January 2006 special issue of the Springer_Verlag journal AI and Society, "Genetic Technologies and Animals"* has recently been published by the *Bioethics/Applied Philosophy Area of Springer*. The book includes her essay, "Leonardo's choice: the ethics of artists working with genetic technologies", and essays by philosopher Steven Best, literary theorist Susan McHugh, feminist biologist Lynda Birke and a dialogue between Gigliotti and cultural theorist, Steve Baker.

2011. Heartburn: Indigestion, contention and animals in contemporary art. *Antennae: The Journal of Nature and Visual Culture*, (14). www.antennae.org.uk. Gigliotti, Carol. Grandin, Temple, and Catherine Johnson. 2005. *Animals in translation: Using the mysteries of autism to decode animal behavior*. New York: Harcourt Inc.. Print. Google Scholar. Hallowell, Alfred Irving.