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Questions of Diversity: Animal Life in Video Art from Turkey
Çeşitlilik Tartışmaları: Türkiye'den Video İşlerinde Hayvan Yaşamı

Abstract

This article considers a selection of video work made in the last quarter century by artists from Turkey, working in and beyond its various geographies, that engages significantly with what can be called forms of animal life. It considers work by established and emergent artists, Ayşe Erkmen, Hale Tenger, Şener Özmen, Erkan Özgen, Ali M. Demirel, İnci Eviner, Aykan Safoğlu and Mehmet Ali Boran, in the light of problematics of ecological disaster and damage, in particular to biodiversity, brought about by global warming and agrochemical-dominated farming. Setting this work against the slow development of a National Action Plan and the poor performance of Turkey in relation to the protection of biodiversity, the article argues that the inventiveness and power of this video work also emerges out of an understanding of historic cultural differences and an attentiveness to ethnographical issues that need to be acknowledged in animal studies. It embeds this in relation to work by important scholars in the field, including Donna Haraway and Cary Wolfe, pointing to a blockage of consideration of issues of ethnographics in their texts, showing how this is key to understanding the range of modes of figuring and citation of animal life in the video work under consideration, as well as its engagement with issues of cultural and biological diversity.

Öz

Bu makale, geçtiğimiz çeyrek yüzyıldır Türkiye'nin çeşitli coğrafyalarını katederek ve ötesine geçerek video işleri üreten sanatçıların, özellikle hayvansal yaşam formlarını konu alan çalışmalarını ele almaktadır. Ayşe Erkmen, Hale Tenger, Şener Özmen, Erkan Özgen, Ali M. Demirel, İnci Eviner, Aykan Safoğlu ve Mehmet Ali Boran gibi usta ve yeni nesil sanatçıların işleri, küresel ısınma ve agrokimyasal tarımın özellikle bioçeşitlilikte sebep oldukları ekolojik hasar ve felaket sorunsalları ışığında incelenmektedir. Makale, Ulusal Eylem Planı'nın yavaş ilerleyişi ve Türkiye'nin bioçeşitliliğin korunması konusundaki zayıf performansı ile ilişkide düşünüldüğünde bu işlerin yaratıcılığını ve gücünü hayvan çalışmaları alanında ihtiyaç duyulan, tarihsel ve kültürel farklara dair yerinde bir kavrayış ve etnografik konulara gösterilen özenden aldığını iddia etmektedir. İddiasını alanın önemli kuramcılarından Donna Haraway ve Cary Wolfe'un yazılarında bu konuda karşımıza çıkan bir tür tutuklukla ilişkide ortaya koyan makale, söz konusu video çalışmalarında hayvansal yaşamın görünüş ve atıflarını ve bunların kültürel ve biyolojik çeşitlilik konularıyla ilişkisini anlamada etnografik konuların önemine dikkat çekmektedir.

Keywords
Turkey, video, biodiversity, ethnographics, biopolitics

Anahtar kelimeler
Türkiye, video, biyoçeşitlilik, etnografya, biyopolitika

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Introduction: Ecological Crises, Biodiversity and Cultural Difference

What a series of analyses of animal life in video work by artists from Turkey of the last quarter century might accomplish in respect of the gathering pervasiveness of the inter-related ecological crises that confront human cultures, societies and governments, concerning global warming, agro-chemical farming and over-production, and the ongoing and potentially catastrophic loss of biodiversity may well seem minor and insignificant, if not futile. Perhaps, though, with the tales being told or, more often, being interrupted and replaced or displaced, provoked for re-imagining, often by means of anti-narrative tactics or techniques, through these artists' work, there is something of an alert to the interrelatedness of what is at stake in these crises that may serve to illuminate this nexus of ecological concerns. It ought not to be news, however, that climate change and the widespread use of agro-chemical pollutants, along with the introduction of pathogens and species, are key factors in dangerously destructive effects on biodiversity. Such effects may be difficult to observe or inspect, but they are, if allowed to continue on current trends, are predicted, for instance, to result in the annihilation of insect life on Earth within a century (Carrington, 2019; Sanchez-Boya & Wyckhuys, 2000, p. 8; Milman, 2022; Goulson, 2022).

It ought not to be news, though, in other ways, too. Perhaps it is the scale of the problem that cannot be easily understood, though this prospect of annihilation ought to be already better known. Worldwide insect populations are estimated to be in decline by around 2.5% per annum, with terrestrial insects such as Lepidoptera (moths and butterflies), Hymenoptera (bees, wasps and ants, among others that sting) and Coleoptera (dung-beetles) seriously threatened, as well as (so-called) freshwater aquatic dwellers, among them Plecoptera (stoneflies) and Trichoptera (caddisfles) also under threat of extinction through the pollution of lakes, rivers and other water-courses. Perhaps, news as it may be, as the apparent acceleration of destructive forces continues, it ought not to be news if news is something that can be framed as having taken place or, at least, to be reaching an end. The end of life on earth, however, threatens the end of its witnessing, too. This may offer a clue to a criteriology of communication about this aspect of ecology, the disaster—being separated from the stars, as Blanchot recalled of 'désastre', the related French term (Blanchot, 1986, p. 2)—of the ecological, the ecological as disaster. All around, yet obscure, the ecological as disaster would thus involve the most pervasive of ecologically destructive effects brought about by socially-sanctioned human activities coexisting with cultures, including visual cultures, apparently dedicated to the celebration of animal life, substituting for the stars.

It ought not to be news, then, that there is an interrelation of global warming and chemical experimentation with increasing agricultural yields with a potentially catastrophic loss of the diversity of insect life across the globe for what I will propose is another reason. This relates to a key aspect of the dominant of the cultural representation of animal life, emerging from if not only repeated from within Western cultures, which the work of these Turkish

artists serves to bring into question. Relating not simply but thematically, and not without uncanniness, to this issue of biodiversity, I shall refer to this as the preoccupation with the animal as other. Staging the question of the communication of human and animal in a way that may be thought of as dyadic, as with all dyadic relations—or so psychoanalysis seeks to instruct us—these are in need of something of an exteriority to the echoing and mirroring of dyadic duos to enable the formation of healthy relations with others *as others* (Laplanche, 1976, p. 70). Working across a zone of equivocation between the animal as other and the animal other, in which traits of the animal as other become potentially exemplary of all animals, the work of these Turkish artists provokes such identifications, while also enabling animal participants before the camera, or stand-ins thereof, to vehicle an understanding of their existence in excess of their relations with their human audiences.

Thus, this small history of animal life in video art by practitioners from Turkey will be examined in relation to a wider history of ecological damage and the threat of catastrophe, but also in relation to conceptualisations of animal existences in their intersection with that of the human, as developed in some influential texts in animal studies. While the question of the psychoanalysis of the animal will, of course, remain moot, questions of the others of such other, non-human animals will necessarily rekindle issues of the ethnographics of animal life in excess of any particular species, issues which a recurrent biologistic discourse in animal studies will be demonstrated to have tended to neglect. In this exploration of uses of video, a series of technological means of recording that have necessarily been implicated in notions of the live, these showings of modes of animal life, sometimes as if beyond survival, will be understood to demonstrate a powerful witnessing of the intersection of the prospects of the recovery or maintenance of biodiversity with a responsiveness to a sense of cultural diversity through difference.

Animal Life up against Cultural Norms, Turkish and Western

The communication of a sense of relations between nonhuman animals and other such nonhumans does not require an explicit mise-en-scène dedicated to such relations. Indeed, and as a matter of some necessity, given the identity of authorship here, what seems to be a dyad of human and animal is not infrequently, for some duration, apparently at the heart of things. It might be further noted, indeed, that as a series of technologies of the simultaneous recording of sound and image, video is all-but necessarily drawn into modes of operation in relations between or among word and image, and not only if the work involves the recording of speech. The most recent, Mehmet Ali Boran's *The Quests of an Anatolian Leopard in Disquiet*, finished just this year, is indicative of this, as if by counter-example, with its human voice-over claiming to be the speech of the eponymous animal (Boran, 2022). Initially, a shot of a fast-flowing and sonorous river, the image-track cuts to and pans up wooded mountain slopes to blue skies, accompanied by a chorus of bird calls, moving back down to the river

valley where an outsize inflatable figure of a leopard lashed to ropes floats, more and less full, above ground. Before instructing us in the plight of its species and the causes of this in a history of its isolation through the 'coming of man', driving it to endangered species status, the voice offers its credentials, claiming as much knowledge of 'what goes on above and below ground as any of my relatives', in the forests, the canyons and the rivers, along with knowledge of 'the predatory birds'. Offering us a view from on high looking along a rocky but verdant valley, the video's sound and image tracks solicit identification with the dominion of this animal, which had been thought no longer to be found in the Republic of Turkey.

Courageous as the voiced animal, despite its endangered status, claims to be, the video plays on a series of uncertainties concerning the continued existence of the Anatolian leopard, including this identification with its dominion, given that, 'accepting its name', it goes on to narrate the bombing of the Dersim district '83 years ago' and the killing of many Kurdish residents in what has been called the defining 'ethocide' of now longstanding Turkish-Kurdish conflicts. With the camera now panning over ruined structures in scarred valleys below, the narrating voice tells of the fleeing of their kin, those she, he or it was 'never to know', but also of the 'humming sound still trapped in the heart of the mountains'. With predecessors driven from the land by the enforcers of an ethno-national monoculture, however, the voice nevertheless still responds to the 'humming' of this destruction, remotivating the sonorities of the piece, including those of the 'predatory birds' and the fast-flowing rivers, insisting thereby on the sharing of the landscape with others.

Listed on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's red list as endangered, *Panthera pardus tulliana* exists, provided for in law, in protected areas, in a number of countries across the Caucasus, including Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and into Afghanistan and Kazakhstan, though the largest population is in reservations in Iran. Cooperation with conservators in Iraq has also been initiated, whence it is likely some of the animals have crossed into Turkey in the region of Şırnak, with at least one shot there in 2013 (International Union for Conservation of Nature, 2022). Despite the hunting of the Anatolian, Caucasian or Persian leopard across Turkey, as narrated in Boran's piece, from the 1950s into the 1970s, in particular by a hunter famous across the Turkish Republic, Hasan Efendi, with the last shot by him near Ankara in 1974, the subspecies likely continues to exist in the Republic, somewhat out of sight, though, with Turkish scientists apparently keeping quiet about its likely whereabouts, given the preciousness of its pelt.

The representation in video of this endangered creature is, though, by no means simply a celebration of its survival, moot as that would have to be. With the schematic feline inflatable sometimes veering off, almost to comic effect, the piece withholds certitudes about the endangered species. Rather, it pulls its audience into a series of relations with the animal that, hiding out in Turkey, has been schooled in extreme cautiousness. Coming back through its relations, with those predatory birds, poisonous insects or snakes, if chiefly through the damages incurred in its encounters with men, this return becomes a haunting, when, as informed

by the hyper-fictional voice-over, we learn that this Anatolian leopard has been shot and killed by two men. Floating above the 'Hevsel Bahçeler', the green gardens cultivated around Diyarbakır, the windsock inflatable, with the hole in its head now zoomed in on, becomes a quasi-auto-monument, pushing the fiction of its speech to a limit of under-statement, noting how telling her, his or its story 'is not easy'. Figure of an animal haunting, uncannily both more and less dead than a human ghost, Boran's leopard signals the critical importance of the topic of others and their others, and not simply in representation or even in culture, but in the ways that these may percolate into spaces beyond, in the environments in which they exist.

Tracing the strands of the communication of this issue of animal others and their others in video art by Turkish practitioners thus involves a review of a range of key issues in the history and theory of the moving image as well as in a comparative criticism of cultural forms, in and beyond the Turkish. If this issue of animal others and their others, according to my hypothesis, intersects with ecologically vital notions of biodiversity—that measure of species diversity in any particular ecosystem or biome, a diversity beyond mere abundance involving conditions of interdependent coexistence—then how might the relations that obtain between artistic work by Turkish practitioners and ecological realities in Turkey be understood? Sad to relate, therefore, that it seems that these relations require to be conceived as marked largely by negations, of conditions, forces and attitudes, in or through which actual biodiversity is seriously threatened.

Thus, while Turkey has had a National Biodiversity Action Plan since 2007, which was renewed for 2018 to 2028, if somewhat late, in 2019, it is only in this recent plan, as reported by the Convention on Biological Diversity, the international body coordinating national responses to this agreement, that there are now national targets concerning:

> biodiversity pressures and threats; biodiversity components and conservation approaches; biodiversity conservation in agricultural, forestry and fishing areas; awareness of ecosystem services by the public and administrators and sustainable management; ecosystem rehabilitation and restoration and the filling of related legislative gaps (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2022).

The report delivered in 2019 also outlined as a priority 'the development of high value-added products aligned with the principles of conservation and sustainable use', though Turkey remains outside the Nagoya Protocol, which provides for the 'access to genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their utilisation' or ABS, designed in particular to protect the interests of regional minorities in national polities in line with that of biodiversity. Promises of 'preparation of national ABS legislation and establishment of required technical infrastructure' appear indicative of delays in this vital area in which, according to the 2022 results of the Environmental Performance Index, a statistical measure provided by a collaborating group of scientists working out of Yale and Columbia Universities in collaboration with the World Economic Forum and the European Commission collating data from across the globe

on environmental protection, Turkey ranks 172nd out of 180 reporting countries. Using forty indicators in eleven categories, the EPI is a flexible measure. Sadly, Turkey does badly in just those categories that the responsiveness of its artists would bring to notice, concerning sustaining a diversity of living and communicational conditions (given that the communicational is a physical as well as semantic matter): it is 176th in Ecosystem Vitality and 178th in Biodiversity and Habitat (Environmental Performance Index, 2022).

This paper will not be able to address all the ways in which the work of artists working on animal issues in, or in relation to, Turkey relates to the failures of environmental protection or policy, let alone the reasons for these failures themselves. The historical aims of this paper, however, are not simply to locate a selection of works in a chronology, a framework of dates, that provide the predominant and key condition for their comprehension. If dating Ayşe Erkmen's fifteen-second long loop video piece *Chambal* to 1999 excludes later causative relations having conditioned the production of the work, this does not prevent it from continuing to participate in the production of causative effects. The exhibition history of the work suggests, indeed, that it continues to relate generatively to several different contexts of understanding, hospitable to a changing series of issues concerning animal life. The satirical may seem to predominate, with the subtly awkward montage of shots of the close-up of the roaring lion suggesting comparison with Leo the Lion and predecessors in his performance as the moving logo-figure for MGM productions. Noted by Bettina Schaschke, who also suggests a more autobiographical reading, with the artist an astrological Leo, the satirical of interrupting the lion's being for its audience is stressed in the more European curatorial projects, such as René Block's 'Looking at You: Art, Provocation, Entertainment, Video' at the Kunsthalle Fridericianum in Kassel, Germany in 2001 and Schaschke's own 'Weggefahrten' or Companions exhibition at the National Galerie at Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin in 2008-9.

Other more extensive issues of site and geography have been stressed, though, as with notable Turkish curator Fulya Erdemci's 'Kişisel Coğrafyaları: Küresel Harıtalar' or Personal Geographies: Global Maps in Nişantaşı, Istanbul in 2002. The possibility that this roaring lion, though filmed in a zoo, calls up through his eponymous name the legendary river, famous in its role in the *Mahabharata* as being formed from a mass sacrifice of animals seeking entrance to heaven, makes of him a sad witness to questions of the lives of animals and questions of the fate of their habitats. Ironically enough, though consistent with its legendary reputation, the river is one of the cleanest and biodiverse in India. Such meanings deriving from Asian contexts may well have been more to the fore in Japan, where it was shown in Osaka soon after its initial exhibition in Tokyo in 1999. What might seem to be divergent meanings, then, need to be taken together, with both the site of the zoo and—in contrast to MGM's heroic figure, now, since 2015, a digitally altered animation—the disturbed and disturbing if not neurotic frustratedness of the lion's on-camera roar leading to a sense of more wide-ranging issues of the spaces of coexistence implicated in this brief, but repeating citation of the animal in captivity (Gültekin, 2019, pp. 395-396).

It is a notable artistic ability to cite with such intertextual resonance, but in this case it emerges from within a particular framework of a Western political and cultural dominant that, echoing the Cold War as well as the longer history of Orientalism, overdetermined many aspects of artistic work in Turkey in the latter phases of the twentieth century, if also, in reaction, since. The role of the animal, though, cannot be restricted to a contestation of Hollywood pre-eminence even while, in both form and content, Erkmen's gallery video piece can be understood to satirise the norms of narrative action cinema. The variety of Erkmen's work with animals can only be mentioned here, as with the two live tigers in the *Ketty and Assam* installation of 2002, and the several taxidermied specimens from a natural history collection set moving on rails in *Cuckoo* of 2003, not to mention further work with popular or commercial representations of animals. If animal studies has shifted, as Erica Fudge puts it, from treating animals as 'blank pages onto which humans wrote meanings' towards acknowledging the interdependence of humans and animals (Fudge, 2006), then as Cary Wolfe claims, citing Cora Diamond on this persistent problematic of the human articulation of biological differences in 'their practices, their art, their literature, their religion', is the issue how to circumvent 'the thoroughgoing ethnocentrism that such a realization invites' (Wolfe, 2009, p.566)? Calling into question the limitations of any human culture's perspective or positionality on animal life or existence, Wolfe here can be understood to move too quickly to acknowledge the efficacy of considerations of animal existence that relate to ethnographical frameworks.

Outlining how Derrida's questioning of the roles assigned to 'the animal' in Western philosophy leads beyond issues of the granting of rights to animals, engaging instead with a challenge to issues of the power of models of subjectivity, Wolfe provides for an understanding of animal life that brings into view, if not fully into question, its cultural articulation in a radical way. If Derrida's account of the challenge of the gaze of the animal other—his cat seeing him naked, the precipitating 'primal scene' of his text *The Animal That Therefore I Am*—leads him to question 'the structure of the "auto-" (as autonomy, as agency, as authority over one's autobiography) of humanist subjectivity by riveting our attention on the embodied finitude that we share with nonhuman animals', then, as Wolfe goes on to claim, 'there are *two* kinds of finitude here':

> the first type (physical vulnerability, embodiment, and eventually mortality) is paradoxically made unavailable to us… by the very thing that makes it available and appropriable… which is the finitude we experience in our subjection to the radically ahuman technicity and mechanicity of language (understood in the broadest sense of a semiotic system through which creatures "respond" to each other) (Wolfe, 2009, p. 570-571).

If the 'ahuman technicity' of sequences of moving images can be acknowledged and their role in vehicling meanings and effects that recall shared predicaments linked to finitude, then Wolfe's model of effective creature-to-creature communication (between humans, it may be

stressed) may be in principle fulfilled—even while the figures of language and semiotic system need to be switched around here.

However, before any celebration of the powers of the image to exceed the frameworks of language in this modelling of creature-to-creature communication, the issue of the ethnographical as it can occur in such processes of communication needs to be more fully acknowledged. If John Berger, in his widely-read 'Why Look at Animals?', argued that modern culture has displaced and marginalised an experience of human-animal relations that was once central to human societies, it is zoos that, for him, perform this sort of marginalisation most dramatically, with animals becoming 'the living monument to their own disappearance.' (Berger, 1991, p. 26). Admitting that zoos developed as part of a modern culture of spectacle affirmative of Western colonial powers, Berger proposed that the role of the animal in the zoo for the spectator was as sample model of proliferating animal representations, in particular in the cultural paraphernalia of childhood. For Berger, the animal in the zoo is typically, if not always, a failure to live up to imagined animal power, as Erkmen's piece so economically suggested, with 'that look between animal and man, which may have played a crucial role in the development of human society, and with which, in any case, all men had always lived' now 'extinguished' (Berger, 1991, p. 28). Imagining an originating society of equality, grounded in the relation to the animal other, 'both like and unlike man', Berger's humanism tends to put aside the terms of the ethnographics of colonial power, among other power relations, that his account of the emergence of the spaces and infrastructure of the zoo from 'private royal menageries', among other 'demonstrations of an emperor's or king's power and wealth', invited him to acknowledge (Berger, 1991, p. 21). Erkmen's work, in its intertextual power, serves, among other contexts of meaning, to recall something of this.

Animal Life, Ethnographics and Cultural Hierarchies

In contradistinction to Berger's pessimistic synthesis, therefore, relations between the image, animal life and human spectating can be disentangled, analysed and better understood. As provoked by the work considered here, the look may be led to explore not simply those 'secrets whose existence man recognised as soon as he intercepted the animal's look' (Berger, 1991, p. 6), but rather the range of living or, better, life conditions of particular animals and their others, actual or virtual. A key work in this regard would be Hale Tenger's five-channel video installation *Circulation* dating to 2000 (Galeri Nev, 2022). Shot at a performance in Istanbul by a travelling circus from the Balkans, with a sound track of insistent dance rhythms from the 1989 hit song of French-Brazilian group Kaoma 'Lambada', the five looped videos put back on show the circus' performing bears and a dog. Muzzled and led in a dance on a leash by a man in a red drape jacket, this bear also appears on the next monitor with the same trainer leading him, or her, on a scooter. The fifth and last monitor shows the bear, still muzzled and on its leash, on a raised platform, balancing adeptly on a smaller, see-sawing board, while, as in the

first two videos, two other bears move rhythmically from side to side in time to the music, while in the fourth a colourful human performer tosses his golden juggling pins up in front of three very bored-looking attendants. Remarkable, in turn, for the pathos and the cruelty of what is shown, it is perhaps the third video in the middle that tips the scales towards recognition of the latter, with the ascent up the last few steps of a high ladder, above and beyond the watching trainers, of a skinny white poodle or terrier cross, wearing another colourful circus jacket, followed by its leap to the ground. As it leaps, Tenger's piece slows the image-track, inviting us to inspect more closely the way in which the dog swerves out into space, despite having done this, doubtless, many times before, with its ears, limbs and torso subtly spreading out as if to catch itself on the air.

Playing on the mezzanine of the Historisches Museum in Hannover, the upbeat repetitions of the music help to pull the look in, while also encouraging a sadness at witnessing this spectacle, despite the sweet tones of the female lead. Appropriately enough, the song is about failed love and tears (though perhaps not quite sincerely so, given that the song was pirated from a Bolivian group). Affecting the register of the viewing of the earlier pictorial art and artefacts nearby, the living conditions—or perhaps, to catch a stronger sense of the circumstances of being kept in dependence and working for their keep, the life conditions—of these animals flood out into a space designed to house and care for the accoutrements of the conditions of human life. Thus, Tenger's piece enacts its own, quiet, multispecies ethnographic enquiry into the meaning-effects of these performances encouraged by this institution of the circus, a human-animal culture of natures. Impressively, the piece manages to expose the predicament of particular figures, if not characters, with the dog perhaps claiming the lead, while nonetheless keeping a discreet sense of distance from these exploited animals. In this, it circumvents the drive towards a transformatory drama of identification centred on a particular animal, something that can be found stressed in Donna Haraway's often pathbreaking 2003 text, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Echoing the erotic intimacy of her closest United States artist predecessor, Carolee Schneemann, whose pieces with her several cats typically called Kitsh such as *Infinity Kisses* (*no. 1*, a photo panel piece of 1981-7 and the second, *The Movie*, a video of 2008) are perhaps even more shocking than her famous *Meat Joy* (1964) or *Interior Scroll* (1975) performance pieces, Haraway gives voice, with salvationist overtones, to strands that knit together an overly optimistic and progressivist history of human and companion species relations:

> We have had forbidden conversation; we have had oral intercourse; we are bound in telling story upon story with nothing but the facts. We are training each other in acts of communication we barely understand. We are, constitutively, companion species. We make each other up, in the flesh (Haraway, 2016, p. 94).

The claim to constitutive companionability risks a blindness to the misconstruals and failures of communication that cannot be excluded from what has just been acknowledged at being at stake in acts of human-animal communication. Guarantees of sincerity following on from physical intimacy may repeat desires or demands that seem foundational for humans. These would guarantee the history proposed here, by the human participant in the drama of those apparently 'significantly other to each other, in specific difference', but this is a difference measured out from a human standard, a love that is a 'historical aberration and a naturalcultural legacy' (Haraway, 2016, p. 95).

As her claim to legacy implies, Haraway stresses that her work needs to be understood to be exploring multi-species socio-agricultures in the colonisation of the modern United States, in which dogs and their human companions along with breed societies have played leading roles. It proposes consequent alterations in cultures of the pet, for instance, that are more responsive to this history, inherited as legacy. The coinage of the 'naturalcultural' invites an evaluation, however, here and elsewhere in Haraway's work. While the neologism is sometimes appropriately employed to acknowledge a sense of embodied finitude, it can also accompany a premature closure to an analytics of the cultural. Thus, while her work indeed brings forward many traits of animal life among humans for reevaluation, it is also caught up in the particularities of an account of US culture that, committed to a phrasing or rephrasing of resistance to a particular dominant, allows for aspects of this culture of resistance to be grounded, as if guaranteed in its effectivities. Caught up in contestation of an extensive dominant of techno-scientific and economic rationalities, the biological provides for a ground of difference, supporting that 'specific difference' of human and canine above. By contrast, contestations of the dominant in video work of the artists from the Republic of Turkey considered here more clearly solicit a rethinking of the cultural in their re-framings of the natural, exploring the ethnographics of animal life so that what belongs to the human or to the animal is destabilised, caused to wander or stray, no longer contained by human cultures, dominant, emergent or otherwise.

Perhaps somewhat notorious among this work, the importance of animal life in the video performance piece *The Road to Tate Modern* (2004) by Şener Özmen and Erkan Özgen might be overlooked. Playing parts that echo those of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, the contemporary, yet thrown-back cultural heroes of the predominantly Kurdish southeast of Turkey also appear with their equine supporting players. Invoking this much-cited anti-heroic prose fiction, from what is usually periodised as early modern Europe, the significance of boundaries between reality, illusion and delusion are economically invoked by the performers who, having paused to take water with their mounts, faced with a steep incline stop to ask a man they pass the way to the Tate Modern. Suggestive of an unlikely degree of familiarity with the best route across Turkey and Europe beyond, this fiction invites such a judgment only to render such decisions about illusion, delusion and reality moot. Calling on the audience to rethink the value of such a quest and its potential costs and benefits, to the art and culture

of the region in particular, it brings into view the subjection of the equine companions as instruments in this arduous journey. Given the errancy of the original Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, the citation of Cervantes' fiction tends to render the value of the suggested quest for institutional artistic recognition of questionable value. In so doing, it offers up a mise-en-scène of the culture of the southeast in which part of its traditional human-equine hierarchy, echoing Cervantes' era, comes to life on the hither side of imaginary speculations on futures for human cultures and their arts.

In a later piece, Şener Özmen has returned to this issue of the roles of the animal in the hierarchies of human arts and cultures. His 2015 piece *How to Tell of Peace to a Living Dove?* brilliantly provokes curiosity concerning the reality-effects of high definition video which has the artist sitting all-but stationary to the rear with a bright white Barbary dove flying in, walking and fluttering, in the foreground. With the exception of two shots, in which the bird perches on his darkly-clothed arm and then hands, the video encourages a sense of segregated spaces, with the artist's impassive demeanour along with the bird's occasional pausing or flying off as if determined by an invisible barrier keeping them apart. This echoes the predominant theme of the voice-over, read by a child, about the artifice of this staging, acknowledging the 'evil frame of this video' and the sadness of not having met before now, outdoors, amid the showers, sunshine and white clouds, something which an ongoing confusion between war and peace has now rendered impossible. Called upon to symbolise the latter, the actuality of the life of the bird is held even further off, though it is also the occasion of the narrator imagining a life not dictated by conflicts of 'language-led identities'. Apologising for detaining the bird, the narrator announces it will be released, and, in a final twist that redistributes the symbolics of the piece, claims to be unable to talk about peace anyway, living as they do in a land of doves (ArteEast, 2015).

The failures of communication braided together in this work, the confinement of the dove, the silent impassiveness of the figure of the artist and the speech of the young narrator, recall those insisted upon by the dominance of one human culture over another, be that of Turkish over Kurdish or Western over Non-western. Acknowledging the confinement of the bird in a space of visibility that also lacks markers of that confinement, the piece also points as if off-camera, to another ethnographics of animal life beyond human capture. Sourced by a Diyarbakır dealer, I do not know whether the bird was released after the shooting, as the image-track suggests and the voice-over argues for, like those famously set free from the market in Florence by Leonardo (Vasari, 1977, p. 257). Uses of figures of the animal by practitioners Turkish and Kurdo-Turkish, however, are not infrequently marked by indirection. The video of Aykan Safoğlu's delegated performance piece *Çile Bülbülüm* staged at the Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin in 2014 is something of a limit case here (Institut für Raumexperimente, 2014). Unlike Özmen's studio piece, or the beautiful and painstaking live-action footage of Ali M. Demirel's *The Pit* (2017) or *The Plant* (2018) from his compelling *Post-apocalyptic Utopias* series, taking us up-close to and as if intimate with insect re-colonisation of abandoned human

structures (Demirel, 2022) or even İnci Eviner's spectacular and powerful mixing of looped human with occasional animal figures in movement in her complex video animations (Eviner, 2022), Safoğlu's animal does not appear. With the artist inviting the audience to 'close your eyes and acknowledge our suffering all together' before a chorus of people of Turkish inheritance living in Berlin performing the popular song, well-known in Turkey, 'Çile Bülbülüm', or My Sorrow Nightingale, the animal—if also the 'all together'—is rather to be imagined.

Depending on a complex series of shifts in a citation of a 1974 performance piece by German artist Ulay that involved stealing the painting *Der arme Poet*, The Poor Poet, from the Nationalgalerie and hanging it in the house of a Turkish migrant family, Safoğlu's delegated performance piece also relocates. However, rather than taking something from its assigned place and moving it to somewhere unsanctioned, it locates the performance of a popular musical work somewhere sanctioned for the showing of other kinds of art and culture. Asking the audience, twice, to close their eyes, first, to imagine the painting in the household of the Turkish family in 1970s Berlin and, second, 'all the suffering that took place in post-war, post-migration Germany', the non-appearance of the bird in Safoğlu's piece, is somewhat stressed. In being compared to the poet in Spitzweg's nineteenth-century Romantic genre piece, the nightingale of the song is the nightingale of imagination and, as with the song, not obviously separable from being imagined. Displacing the ocularcentrism of painting as inspectable model object as art, rehearsed in the invitation to imagine Ulay's transgressive piece, Safoğlu's work provokes the re-imagining of localities, from those of migrant life of 1970s Berlin as well as those of the performers of the song, but also, and perhaps more radically, to the ur-scene of the lyric, the musician-poet and the nightingale, sharing space in and through sonic experience.

The song ends optimistically, remarking the passing of Winter and the coming of Spring, addressing this to 'My Sorrow Nightingale', the compound noun the referent of which slides across the realistic and unrealistic, the actual and the imagined, with the precise occasion of that sorrow never specified. Nowhere does the work say or even suggest that it would be the nightingale itself that is the exclusive cause of the sorrow. Rather the reverse, it seems. In the context of the other figurings—not to say representations or even figurations, in some acknowledgement of the importance of the displacement of ocularcentric, realist norms in connection with camera-images—of animal life considered here, it may come to be more clearly understood how the ethnographics of animal life that accompanies this innovative series of works in video has to implicate that of human animal life, too. These acts of authorship share in suggesting—when they do not explicitly claim—comparison between the life conditions of humans and other animals, with the reversibility implied in this further suggestive of particularities indicative of ethnocultural variation. If ethnography is conventionally the study of ways in which particular human groups or societies live, then the abbreviation of ethnographics is used here to suggest not simply the variability of such ways of living, even among the same or similar groups, with a homogeneity of conformity to norms being always open in principle to variation. More radically, it also stands for a potential sharing across limits of

group identities, implicating a diversity of species and their ways of living, in spaces of co-dependent coexistence.

This theorisation is offered as an alternative to groundings in the biological that have tended to come along with even the most sophisticated discourses concerning human and animal coexistence. The articulation of 'cross-species alliances' (Haraway, 2016, p.259), begging questions of assent, if not necessarily of interest, is urgent in relation to the many abuses of animal life, across powerful institutions of production and research in the USA as well as across the globe where models of the production for consumption of animals or the development of drugs, other therapies, and cosmetics, have been established and continue to operate—indeed, not excluding Turkey. However, the hiatus between survival and the potential for suffering, on the one hand, and the sharing of effects in communication, on the other, remains. Drawn into this aporetic space, the video work considered here, working on the boundaries of lifelike images of the living and its others and the language used to describe these, has powerfully suggested issues of coexistence, among humans, in their variable groupings, as well as between them and other animals, emerging from within cultures in Turkey in which histories of oppression have been so strongly felt. Perhaps it has been the search, shared for instance by notable theorists such as Haraway and Wolfe, for what she calls, and he echoes as, 'an affirmative biopolitics' (Haraway, 2016, pp. 226-8), which may mislead in being premature, too quickly non-negative. It is difficult, it seems to me, quite to follow the discursive affirmation of 'ecosystem assemblages' as '*the* name of the game of life on Earth' (Haraway, 2016, p. 249; my emphasis). While it may be agreed that 'there are no individuals plus environments', and that 'ecosystem assemblages' better articulates the existence of differing existents in multispecies 'becoming-with' (Haraway, 2016, p. 221), in particular in pointing towards their dependence on ecological systems of support, a premature affirmative biopolitics as normative discursive positivity can overdetermine and restrict analytical and, in consequence, critical and political efficacy.

Encouraging a complex discourse of cultural analysis that insists on tracking the ethnographics, those elements taken up in and defined in ways of living, there is also something of a protective humour to the staging of survival and the coexistence of life-forms and their forms of life in the video art considered here. Where the graphics of race is not obvious, for instance, practices of ethnographic responsiveness can enable questions of diversity, ecological and cultural, to be incisively posed and decisively answered. In the conversation between Haraway and Wolfe, race emerges as an issue following a discussion of the work of Roberto Esposito and his re-use of the phenomenological notion of flesh and its relation to corporeal existence understood as 'being-in-common'. For Haraway, this means 'making the shared tissues of race and species patent', which Wolfe then glosses as implying that 'you can't talk about race without talking about species' (Haraway, 2016, p.260). The lesson of some of the video work considered here, made in and out of relation to cultures in Turkey, would suggest that this hierarchy of discourses dependent on the biological, while aiming towards a guarantee of a sense of something held in common, can in so doing obscure issues of ethnicity. Echoing some

of the concerns of Şener Özmen, Erkan Özgen and Mehmet Ali Boran, Safoğlu's work plays with hierarchies of culture through a novel de- and re-territorialization of a cultural practice to address issues of ethnic coexistence. In his address to the audience for the performance in the Nationalgalerie, the artist mentions the desire for justice in the cases of a series of murders of ethnic Turks across Germany between 2000 and 2007, with the trial of the last surviving member of the group responsible, the National Socialist Underground—long delayed, partly because of police complicity with the racist and xenophobic organisation, if also to a blindness or censorship of these issues in German society more widely—finally underway from mid-2013.

In Conclusion: Biopolitics, Biodiversity and Spaces of Coexistence

As this selection of video work gives us to think, therefore, attending with care to how lives are lived, to the ethnographics argued for here, also involves attention to where they are lived. Haraway's work has long promoted consideration of embodiedness and locality, though it may be argued that the question of where existences coexist tends to come around latterly, despite the rhetoric around composting as an alternative to posthumanism, or the claim that 'etymologically, the human is rooted in *humus*' (Haraway, 2016, p. 261). 'A creature of the mud', she argues inventively for a cognate notion of 'muddling along', something 'quite other than' not thinking (Haraway, 2016, pp. 272 & 280). This connection, though, depends on an account of meaning and communication in which a Christian and Catholic notion of 'the word made flesh', while staged not in the beyond, but in the here-and-now, as she admits, is brought into play to account for how understanding, including cross-species, is, at bottom, possible. Rather than taking the earth as a common destination, as monotheistic religions of the book have indeed encouraged us to do, this paper proposes that the ethnographics of its spaces, in particular its shared spaces, be acknowledged as in need of critical attention, implicating as they do critical questions of a diversity that links the cultural with survival and with biological life.

Perhaps, in this connection, and as a coda to this piece, it is not a coincidence that questions of the legacy of the work of notable German artist and member of the European Parliament for the German Green Party, Joseph Beuys, have already insinuated themselves. It is not only the work of Şener Özmen that cites this important predecessor. *How to Tell of Peace to a Living Dove?* echoes the German artist's notorious performance piece of 1965 *How to Explain Paintings to a Dead Hare,* in which Beuys, with his head covered in honey and gold leaf and with a heavy iron sole and magnet on one foot, limped around from painting to painting on the walls of Galerie Schmela in Düsseldorf, apparently addressing the dead hare he was carrying. For Cary Wolfe, this disabled performance joins with Beuys' biopolitlcal preoccupation with the wound as 'an allegory of embodied finitude we share with the other living creatures' (Wolfe, 2020, p.841). Özmen's work suggests, however, that this tends to miss the question of the locality of the communication of animal and human—resonant with

each halting step of Beuys around the gallery, weighed down with a particular extract of the earth vital in human culture, a figure of an impossible return—if also, as the video piece insists in conclusion, one human group and another. In this, Özmen's piece echoes Beuys faithfully too, with the earlier artist preoccupied with a sense of the failure of human communication, claiming with this piece to be promoting the 'powers of intuition' of even 'a dead animal' over the 'stubborn rationality' of 'some human beings' (Antliff, 2014, p. 62).

Among the most striking of İnci Eviner's performance video animations is *Beuys Underground*, a prize-winning piece at the Sharjah Biennial of 2017. Animal life is apparently more observable in Eviner's earlier graphic and pictorial work, in the two *Wounded Animal* paintings of 1989, the body parts, human and/or animal, of the mixed media series *Geography* (1993) and *Body Geography* (1995) or the digital photographic series *Terra Incognita* (1998) with its montaging of dead fish heads, and deserves a separate study across the range of this artist's work (Madra, 1998, pp. 15-16; 30-57; 86-87). Such a study could not ignore the violence which accompanies forms of life of many animals in Turkey, from those farmed or caught and killed for their flesh, with practices varying widely, from small holdings to factory production lines, a form of the latter even having been recently instituted for the killing of the sacrificial animal for the Islamic festival of Kurban Bayramı, or Eid Al-Adha, to sanitise city spaces of the ritual killing. As if in acknowledgment of the importance of the symbolism of monotheological realities, down in one corner of *Beuys Underground* stands a horned ram staring out, as if more persistently present than the one that was given to Abraham in place of his son for sacrifice. Deploying the powers of digital technologies to bring together 'live' action with computer-generated imagery, Eviner's composites of performance and animation manage to insinuate senses of life caught up in unlikely repetition, with characteristics of the human and the animal infecting one another, as in the earlier, non-digital work. With *Beuys Underground*, the limitation of figurings of the animal to the ram accompanies human life burrowing under the *humus*, as if taking on the once fugitive characteristics of Beuys' hare, brought back to life in a haunting of human life by absent animal species, trying to reinvent art and communication, now severely censored and restricted in the polity above ground, in a dystopia of elemental life below the surface.

Circumventing the coming of such a dystopia requires critical analysis responsive to ethnographics of animal life, and consequential articulations of political desire to recover spaces for the coexistence of a diversity of forms of life.

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