

Justice in a More-than-Human World

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Humans' myriad and profound ways of acting into the more-than-human world have arguably brought about a new geological epoch—the anthropocene. Given our deep entanglements in worldly matters, we have a responsibility to evaluate the character of our relationships and modes of engagement with nonhuman others; the fiction of non-interaction is increasingly difficult to maintain. Frequently, humans exercise a great deal of control over the terms of these relationships, and benefit disproportionately as a result—a defining characteristic of exploitation. An alternative is to engage nonhumans in a more mutually beneficial fashion, approaching egalitarianism in our projects. In this way our material relations with the nonhuman world can take on a more collaborative character, becoming a process of constant negotiation of less anthropocentric living and working conditions. Our series aims to explore various modes of humans working with nonhumans, and the ways in which we can attune to the unique agency of the nonhuman actors with whom we are entangled as a means to foster more collaborative projects.

4 guiding questions for the series:

1. How can our projects better engage with our collaborators?
2. When it comes to human-nonhuman partnerships, is it possible to distinguish between collaboration and exploitation?
3. How do ethics, empathy & justice issues play a role in these collaborative relationships?
4. How do we determine what kinds of life we value and what kinds (if any) we are okay with using instrumentally or ending altogether?

Event Series:

1. Human / non-human collaboration across the Arts & Sciences

Hosts: Gene Felice & Sophia Magnone

As artists and scientists explore non-human relationships and discover new ways to illustrate and inspire each other's work, issues of collaboration, ethics, empathy and justice collide as these borders are crossed and new hybrid relationships emerge. This event will feature presentations of artwork and scientific research that cross pollinate each other, with a focus on human / nonhuman collaboration in the worlds of eco art, bio art, genetic engineering, molecular and marine biology.

2. Bioengineering and meat cultures

Hosts: Andy Murray & Sophia Magnone

Meat grown in a laboratory is being promoted as a response to the harmful effects of “conventional” factory-farmed meat production. Artists and scholars have identified how meat cultures are a new class of being, with their own unique characteristics. Some of these characteristics are precisely what makes lab-grown meat appealing as a food source, and some provoke what is frequently deemed “the yuck factor.” Viewing this new class of beings, along with other bioengineered critters, as custom-built collaborators, we explore the ways humans relate to and intervene in the more-than-human world to feed, clothe, house, and entertain themselves—and the way we respond when these interventions, collaborations, and cultures turn sour.

Additional event questions:

What are the assumptions and implications of building our own collaborators? How can we hope to avoid anthropocentrism in these collaborations?

Which agencies and aspects of liveliness do we value, harness, and ignore in bioengineering? How might these elements persist in designer life forms?

What is the risk of creating new collaborators, rather than sticking with existent collaborators and making an effort to read them better? When might the risks of “staying with the trouble” outweigh those of engineering new trouble?