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ZOO

 **INTERACCESS**
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SEEING ANIMALS AT THE ZOO

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IN WESTERN CULTURE, the zoo is a technology for collecting, displaying and maintaining animals. The zoo separates animals from the world and seeks to make them available to human knowledge and human enjoyment. The zoo is, as John Berger argues, a key technology in the marginalization of animals.¹ The zoo offers animals to sight in the same moment it assures us of our separation from them. It clearly demarcates the boundary between nature and culture. In this, it is part of a generalized separation of humans and animals in Western culture. In contrast, the work collected under the name *ZOO* questions the framework of the zoo by presenting a series of cyborgs – animals that are mixtures of nature and culture.² In so doing, the work presents what Steve Baker has described as “post-modern animals.”³ Baker maintains that contemporary art is the space in Western culture in which animals can become central and represented visually.

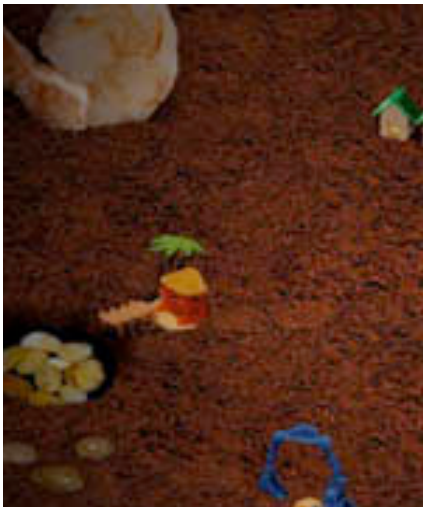
The works in *ZOO* raise the question of what happens when we encounter animals in and through the mediation of technology. Does it distance us further from them or does it provide us with a space to rethink human-animal relations? The works in the show use different strategies in their combination of animals and technology. Most technologies of animal representation make the animal transparent to knowledge and emphasize their visibility. Such representations marginalize animals and inscribe a separation between human and animals, a space of post-humanity. Baker argues that contemporary art is one of the few spaces in contemporary culture that allows access to the animal.⁴ Botched taxidermy makes the animal abrasively visible and allows us to focus on it.

Amy Youngs’ *Holodeck for House Crickets* constructs an environment that responds to the animals’ desires. House crickets are domesticated insects raised to feed reptiles. Inside a glass bowl, which the artist describes as a “safe bubble,” the house crickets are freed from their destiny as food. To comfort or entertain them in their pro-

TOP Amy Youngs, *Holodeck for House Crickets*.

MIDDLE Garnet Hertz, *Cockroach Controlled Mobile Robot #3*.

BOTTOM Ingrid Bachmann, *Digital Crustaceans v.0.3.: Homesteading on the Web*. Ingrid Bachmann would like to thank Pall Thayer for creating the programming for *Digital Crustaceans v.0.3.: Homesteading on the Web*.



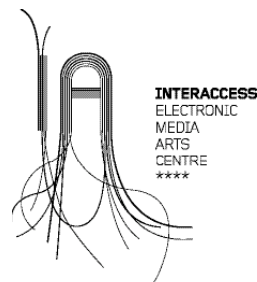
tective confinement, a video image of a cricket's-eye view of the world is projected onto the glass. The images shift in response to the crickets' chirping, giving them, in effect, a remote control for their big-screen TV. The holodeck, a concept from the *Star Trek* television series, is a space of wish fulfillment, a virtual-reality environment that conforms to the user's fantasies. Youngs' Holodeck is a fantasy of the perfect zoo. The crickets watching TV are safe and entertained. Yet it's also clear that the fantasy being fulfilled here is a human one. Youngs' crickets are technologized animals that make visible the conceptual separation that the zoo normally enacts. The crickets highlight the relation between zoo animals and domesticated animals. Their technologization reveals that the crickets, as domesticated animals, are already cyborgs – dense imbrications of nature and culture. In so doing, the work exposes the inadequacy of any response that presupposes the naturalness of the insect as a given.

Ingrid Bachmann's *Digital Crustaceans v.0.3.: Homesteading on the Web* places hermit crabs online to open up the possibility of becoming-animal. Hermit crabs are nomadic figures that adapt to the available technologies such as abandoned shells and other containers – to make themselves at home. Bachmann uses the crabs' terrarium as the basis for her exploration of the World Wide Web. The crabs' technological becoming – their inhabiting the remains of others – offers Bachmann, and us, the image of a nomadic belonging to technology. Their reuse of technology provides a model for inhabiting the Internet as a temporary home. The confines of the terrarium become a site for reimagining the World Wide Web as its hardware and cabling, and not just the imaginative spaces it opens up.

Garnet Hertz's *Cockroach Controlled Mobile Robot #3* integrates the animal, technology and display in another way. The piece uses a giant Madagascan hissing cockroach to "pilot" a robot. In performance, the insect is fixed in place over a trackball with which it

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AMY YOUNGS

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can direct the robot. LED panels provide it with a minimal sense of the environment it is navigating in an attempt to force it to avoid obstacles. Thus, the technology is configured to give the insect control, or freedom, within the parameters of the technological system. With Hertz's work, the space of ZOO morphs into that of a circus – the cockroach is a performing animal, working in the tradition of the flea circus. Its animation of the technology with an insect consciousness brings to mind Akira Lippit's arguments about the encryption of "animal being" in modern technology. Lippit suggests that technology is the space in which we mourn the loss of animals and our own animality. For Lippit, "[m]odernity can be defined by the disappearance of wildlife from humanity's habitat and by the reappearance of the same in humanity's reflections on itself: in philosophy, psychoanalysis, and technological media such as the telephone, film, and radio."⁵ For Lippit, technology operates through a series of "animetaphors" – these representations are not simply compensatory but instead mourn the animals that haunt humanity. Hertz's work, in its reinscription of the animal in technology, exposes the sense in which technology is animated by displaced animal being. It highlights the way in which all technology is the technology of the cyborg.

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1 John Berger, "Why Look at Animals?" in *About Looking* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), pp. 1-26.

2 Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," in *The Haraway Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 7-45.

3 Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000).

4 Ibid.

5 Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 2-3.