

MARTIN KOHOUT

JOKES MACHINES MAKE
ABOUT HUMANS: 1ST INFUSION

13. 11. 2015–9. 1. 2016

OPENING:
13. 11. 6–9 PM

IN CONVERSATION

“There are two possible methods of approach to the problem of zoo design; the first, which may be called the ‘naturalistic’ method, is typified in the Hamburg and Paris zoos, where an attempt is made, as far as possible to reproduce the natural habitat of each animal; the second approach, which, for want of a better word we may call the ‘geometric’, consists of designing architectural settings for the animals in such a way as to resent them dramatically to the public, in an atmosphere comparable to that of a circus.”¹

To transfer knowledge about the animals was not just a sport for the members of the league. It was a part of their identity. They made scientific claims quite early to give the zoo some agency. During the late 1850s they made it public, making it even more urgent to present the animals in an educational manner. However, one could see the disappointment in the eyes of the adventurers that caught the beasts. That time of bounty and bragging was over. They were now educational tools. As the zoo has gone through this reductive process it has morphed and specialized. Some into highly scientific preservationist institutions, grappling with animal extinction and becoming reproduction facilities. Other turned into leisure parks. But the Disney-type orca entertainment had run its course, and the cabinet type zoos are going out of order. Just a few last standers, like BIG architects still try to bring it. Still working on futuristic modernist projects as if the critique of that era’s architecture never occurred.



CITATIONS:

1. Berthold Lubetkin, Dudley Zoo, unpublished manuscript, ca 1938 p. 9

2. The New Penguin Pool in the Zoological Gardens, London', Architect and Building News, 1 June 1934, p. 254

3. Allan, John Berthold Lubetkin: Architecture and the tradition of progress, RIBA Publications, 1992 p. 201

4. Michel Dewilde, The Caged Gaze, www.wesleymeuris.be/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Michel-Dewilde_The-Caged-Gaze-engels.pdf, 2014, p. 2

EXHIBITED ARTWORKS:

Dear Muell, 2015
Audio recording with the impersonator Roland Meijer Drees reading an original text in the voice of Sir David Attenborough.

Fallout Original Soundtrack, 2015
Series of cages with crickets.

Bugsession, 2015
Video, no sound.

In Conversation, 2015
Text by Filip Mayer.

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graphic design: Jan Horčík

“Nature tamed – not with a fist, but with a smile.”³

All the animals gave the impression of being isolated from each other, creating a tension similar to one in an gallery space. Wall power and spatial presence makes for a successful exhibition. In this environment the spectator feels a heightened level of performance and choreography.

The architects job becomes hiding the stern directorial qualities of the frame, spectators want that “Christian the lion”-experience, not some depressing Sea World orca.



Observation and experience are the key elements of the cage. What spectators see and how that makes them feel.



“Historically speaking, the cage lies at the intersection of several customs and cultures that placed great importance on observing, collecting and then exhibiting other people and other things, meaning foreign people and animals. Human history shows us that there is only a very small gap between seeing, the ‘scientific’ observation of other people, and domination, even appropriation and exhibition.”⁴

A cage works as a barricade, separating two adversary sides. It enables them to communicate. It’s a base for conversations to take place. A cage designer creates consensus between the animal, the cage and the observer. The animal must feel happy with the cage or the equilibrium breaks. Either on behalf of the animal dying or escaping, or on the side of the human freeing it from its captors. The cage should not be constructed in a way that it lures the spectator into zootopian thinking, that will be the end of the animal. And the observer should not feel as a part of the bigger spectacle of the zoo.

Cage as a barricade — making room for novelty, communication.

The cage wall is transformed from a line between animal and human, to a space and a stage for enactment. In proportion to the subordination, the cage wall exponentially becomes a space. In the zootopia there are no walls, total subordination and no conversation.

Filip Mayer