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Animals on the fringe of society

2018



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Research work in design

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DSAA 2017-2018

Eco-design specializing in product design.

School Raymond Loewy,

La Souterraine.

— FOREWORD

As a designer, I place myself as an observer. It becomes necessary to notice the presence of urban animals in cities because they are on the territory. The organisation of the city and society has to take users, animals and urban ecosystems into account. These urban animals are simultaneously close to humans and remote. There are no virtuous links between urban animals and city dwellers. The designer appears as the ideal mediator in order to propose a harmonious coexistence between animals and humans beings.

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— INTRODUCTION

My diploma thesis is about liminal animals and more precisely about interactions between liminal animals and human beings in urban areas. Liminal animals are all these non-domesticated animals that live around and amongst us in our urban areas like pigeons, rats, seagulls,... Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka¹ named those animals, liminal animals, in their book *Zoopolis, a political theory of animal rights*². They call them liminal animals to indicate their in-between status. They were the first to take an interest in this category of animals which are not considered in the binary distinction of animals. Indeed, they are neither wild animals nor domesticated animals.

Nowadays, liminal animals are considered as invaders, trespassers in our urban areas in France. In the collective unconscious, liminal animals are considered as pests that's why they are rejected in urban areas. They have adapted to humans because our urban areas provide them with food, shelters and protection.

¹- Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka are two philosophy teachers at Kingston University in Canada. Sue Donaldson is an independent researcher and Will Kymlicka is known for his work on multiculturalism.

²- *Zoopolis, a political theory of animal rights* was written in 2011 and translated in French in 2016. *Zoopolis* offers a new vision on animal rights, more political.

As a designer, I choose to work on this category of animals because I can see in them some potentialities. Indeed, they are already members of the community because they contribute to the well-being of our cities. It will be interesting to make it rewarding for humans to keep liminal animals in urban areas, so how can they be useful in cities? How can we take liminal animals into consideration and create interaction between them and human beings in urban areas?

1 - Evolution of
relationships between
humans and animals

Relationships between human beings and animals have evolved through domestication, farming,...
Liminal animals are in our urban territory mostly because humans have introduced them for their pleasure. How have interactions between humans and animals evolved? Why have humans always wanted to interact with animals?

— FROM THE FIRST ANIMAL EXPLOITATION TO INTENSIVE FARMING

Jocelyne Porcher is a sociologist and research director at the French National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA). She explains that there is an evolution from breeding to industrial animal production. Indeed, because of progress, the modernisation of societies and the population growth, the food animal industry has to face the increasing consumption demand, in particular for meat. That's why, the industry chooses to increase production without taking the animal welfare into account. She explains also that farming is a neolithic relationship between nature and animals which has changed. Nowadays, farming has become a question of profitability. Indeed, Catherine Larrère³ explains that in the industrial farming, animals are treated like producing machines whose energy efficiency is supposed to increase.

³ - Catherine Larrère is a French philosopher and philosophy teacher.

Furthermore, Dominique Lestel⁴ explains that we live with animals and we constitute mixed communities together. Indeed, humans allow animals and farming in their territory in order to provide food. He defines a mixed community as an association of humans and animals in a given culture.

Nowadays, we can see rising interest about animals' living conditions especially in the farming. Some associations defending animal welfare have revealed the hidden face of the animal food industry. For example, L214, a French association for animal rights, have made shocking videos showing the reality in the food animal industry where profitability prevails.

⁴ - Dominique Lestel is a French philosopher.



Hundreds of people manifesting in Paris in 2016 for the slaughterhouse closure.
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Intensive chicken farming, rigorous
selection of chicks
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Intensive chicken farming, rigorous selection of chicks
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The documentary *Empathy*, directed by Ed Antoja in 2017 and winner of the Greenpeace Film Festival, questions the habits of society regarding nutrition. This film talks about our relationships with animals and shows how anyone can make their own opinion about food animal industry. It reveals animals are abused and aims to make people react about the fact they eat meat everyday. Because of all the latest information about how animals are treated in the industry, a lot of people question their eating habits nowadays. The idea is not to change totally the way we eat but to think differently about how much meat we eat.

Relationships between humans and animals are varied. Animals can be in our plates, houses, streets or in the wild. For my research in design, only the animals in our streets matter to me. But it is necessary to study other approaches to understand why liminal animals are where they are and what they are.



Screenshot of the trailer of the film
Empathy, 2018.

— HUMANS AS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF LIMINAL ANIMALS

Humans have introduced some animals in their home, in their cities for their pleasure or for their food. Liminal animals are the result of this introduction. They have adapted themselves to humans and stayed on the territory which has become theirs.

For example, in the XVIth Century, humans introduced pigeons in cities because they enabled to humans to deliver messages and to have food. Pigeons and people have co-existed, but nowadays humans don't want pigeons anymore and consider them as intruders, as pests.

Michel Pastoureau⁵ explains that, during the Middle Ages, pigs wandered in the street. They were garbage collectors in cities because at that time people threw their waste away outside, feeding pigs by the same occasion. That's why, at that time, they could be seen everywhere in the streets, in the gardens,... It shows the coexistence between animals and human beings is possible when animals are useful to humans.

⁵ - Michel Pastoureau is a French Medieval historian. He is specialized on the emblem, colors and heraldic symbolics.

Nowadays, rats have replaced pigs and they have become very important for cities because they eat a lot of waste produced by humans. Indeed, in Paris they consume 9 tonnes of garbage per year.

Rose-ringed parakeet is considered as an invasive species in Netherlands. They were imported from Asia by humans. It is a domesticated species which escaped and became liminal species. Rose-ringed parakeets were introduced by humans. Nowadays, there are 15,000 free rose-ringed parakeets in Dutch cities. Without predators, parakeets have proliferated. But now, they are too numerous and cause noise nuisances. Moreover, it is naturally forbidden to feed them in order to avoid proliferation. We can see the same phenomenon in London with 30,000 parakeets in the city.



Rose-ringed Parakeet
©Susanne Winter



Rose-ringed Parakeet, Zed The Dragon on Flickr ©All rights reserved.

If humans are responsible for the introduction of wild animals in urban areas, they have to accept them in cities. Human beings have to face to the consequences of their acts : liminal animals are now in cities. Why can't humans see their potentialities?

— LIMINAL ANIMALS' IDENTITY

Liminal animals are considered as intruders in urban areas, on the fringe of society. They are underestimated by humans. City dwellers avoid them because they think that cities are their own.

Urban areas have become the home of liminal animals even though they were not supposed to. That's why they try to survive around and amongst humans beings. Liminal animals succeed in adapting themselves to human settlement but still stay invisible and are considered as intruders. Humans try to get rid of them by exterminating, mass trapping or relocating them because they don't want to live with this type of animals. Liminal animals suffer and endure injustices and abuses because their rights are not recognized so humans don't have any duty as regards them. This is a problem because every animals needs rights and protection.

Humans don't want to share their territory with liminal animals. We can observe different temporalities of occupation. Indeed, liminal animals show up at lunch time in order to get some food and they walk

outside more surreptitiously during the night. Furthermore, liminal animals are useful in cities. Liminal animals have a function in our urban areas. They participate in the cleaning of cities because they eat waste and they contribute to the well-being of city dwellers for example.

Liminal animals eat waste. They contribute to reduce the amount of waste. They are like garbage collectors in our urban areas. This relationship with animals is functional because humans beings need them in urban areas.

In the collective unconscious, they have a negative image. Indeed, liminal animals are considered as pests because they are associated with this idea of dirt and disgust. Moreover, stray animals generate repulsion because we don't know what behaviors they may adopt. Furthermore, liminal animals cause nuisances which can be a problem for citizens. For example, too many animals in cities, close to houses, can generate

noise nuisances. It becomes difficult for humans to coexist with liminal animals. Thus, pigeon droppings can also be a problem because their acidity cause the corrosion of buildings.

Sometimes, liminal animals make their nests in the corners, in ledges, in windowsills,... Citizens are upset about that because liminal animals install themselves in humans' housing. Furthermore, liminal animals are numerous in cities because they are no longer afraid of humans. For example, pigeons in Paris are always in the streets looking for food. Liminal animals can be considered as invasive species by humans. How can the designer deal with such nuisances? How can he find solutions to avoid these nuisances?

2 - How are liminal animals considered in other countries ?

Liminal animals are differently considered according to cultures. Indeed, in France, they are considered as harmful intruders. Nevertheless, in other countries, they can be accepted or at least tolerated. It will be interesting for the designer to examine how liminal animals are considered in other countries in order to find some inspiration. Indeed, getting inspiration from other countries will help me find new options and imagine new directions for my diploma project.

— SOME ANIMALS CAN BE CONSIDERED SACRED

• sacred rats in the Karni Mata Temple in India

The Karni Mata Rat Temple is an important Hindu site based in Rajasthan in India. According to one of the legends, rats would be the reincarnation of musicians, the Charan, who belonged to Karni Mata, the incarnation of goddess Durga (Ganesh's mother and Shiva's wife). She asked Yama, the god of death, to restore her son's life. He refused so she reincarnated all the deceased storytellers into rats in order to deprive Yama of their souls.

Rats are sacred in the Karni Mata Temple. They are well treated and seen as protectors. People see in them a religious protection because they consider that rats are the reincarnation of poets and storytellers. More than 30,000 rats live in the Karni Mata Temple. There are a lot of holes and tunnels in the Temple in order to facilitate the rats' movements. Moreover, bowls of milk and water are placed in the Temple for feeding rats. The rats are called *kabbas*. Pilgrims come to bring them the *prasad* which is

an offering for divinities, composed of seeds, milk, coconut and sweets. The Pilgrims think that rats are their ancestors. Moreover, there has never been a plague epidemic in the Temple. However, some rats die because of an excess of food, they become diabetics. Everywhere in the world, rats are hunted and injured. In this Temple, they are safe and well fed.

Why are rats so well treated in this Temple? How is the coexistence between rats and human beings going on? How can the designer be inspired by this type of coexistence? What can the designer learn from this coexistence?

As rats are considered sacred, people respect them and accept to share the Temple with them. The rats are no longer seen as animals but as reincarnated humans. The animals' identity has changed. Moreover, the coexistence is possible because humans consider the Temple as the rats' territory and not as the humans' territory. The humans are here the rats' guests.



The Karni Mata Temple in Rajasthan in India
©Nicolas Economou, 2015.



The entrance of the Karni Mata Temple in Rajasthan in India
©Nicolas Economou, 2015.



The Karni Mata Temple in Rajasthan in India
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The Karni Mata Temple in Rajasthan in India
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Screenshot of the documentary RATS
in Netflix speaking about the Karni Mata
Temple in Rajasthan in India
©Manon Alves



Screenshot of the documentary RATS
in Netflix speaking about the Karni Mata
Temple in Rajasthan in India
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Offerings for rats in the Karni Mata Temple
in Rajasthan in India
©Nicolas Economou, 2015.

The people who come to the Temple, except tourists, come in order to pray for blessings. They pray for health and money.

The designer can imagine a new type of coexistence where animals like rats are tolerated and where the territory belongs to both, humans and animals and not only to one species. How much can people accept about such animals to share living spaces with them?

Morgan Spurlock, in his documentary *RATS*, explains our different interactions with rats in cities and takes the example of the Karni Mata Temple. He shows also the rat population in New York City which is very large. People are disgusted by these animals especially when they are too numerous on the streets.

– ACCEPTING LIMINAL ANIMALS AND COEXISTING WITH THEM

• the squirrels in Central Park

In 1850, New York became the most largest city in the United States. Inhabitants asked for green spaces in the city dedicated to entertainment. During the XIXth Century, Central Park was built. Squirrels were introduced in the park and are free there. A lot of people came especially to see some squirrels in the park and it became famous for that. Central Park is a huge green space in Manhattan in New York with an area of 341 hectares. The park includes a protected area for wildlife. The urban park is home to many species of birds and mammals such as rabbits, raccoons and especially squirrels. Originally, squirrels had disappeared from the urban territory because of the deforestation and urbanisation. Indeed, squirrels were reintroduced in urban areas by humans at the end of the XIXth Century for their pleasure in order to distract walkers.

The city provides them with food and shelter to enable them to survive during winter in particular.

Etienne Benson⁶, in his article *The Urbanization of the Eastern Gray Squirrel in the United States*, published in the New York Magazine, written on 26th of January 2014, explains that squirrels are linked to an ideology that nature in urban areas is essential to the well-being of the city dwellers. Squirrels have an educational role in particular for children because, according to Etienne Benson, by feeding squirrels people behave in a more sensitive and sympathetic way. The population of squirrels has increased since the XXth Century. A lot of inhabitants have become upset about the presence of squirrels in the city because they start to install themselves in houses and attics. Moreover, nowadays it's forbidden to feed wild animals in urban areas because they won't leave if they know that they have food. Some inhabitants of New York City think that squirrels embellish the city and participate in the fauna and biodiversity preservation.

⁶ - Etienne Benson is a historian of science, technology, and environment in the Department of History and Sociology of Science at the University of Pennsylvania.

The coexistence between liminal animals and humans participate in the idea of communities in the city. Indeed, humans and squirrels share the same area in Central Park. This idea of a community between citizens and liminal animals supports an ecological perspective that matters for cities. Thus, accepting liminal animals in urban areas makes citizens aware of the importance of the biodiversity in cities. The highly visible presence of squirrels in Central Park is the result of an intentional and sustained human will to put some nature in New York City during the XIXth Century. The introduction of squirrels in urban areas was intended by humans. Indeed, in a city full of skyscrapers, they wanted to bring some nature and some animals. This introduction is the early stage of an acceptance of nature in cities. With this in mind, how can the designer offer a prosperous coexistence with liminal animals in urban areas?



Walkers feeding squirrels in Central Park in New York



Walkers feeding squirrels in Central Park in New York



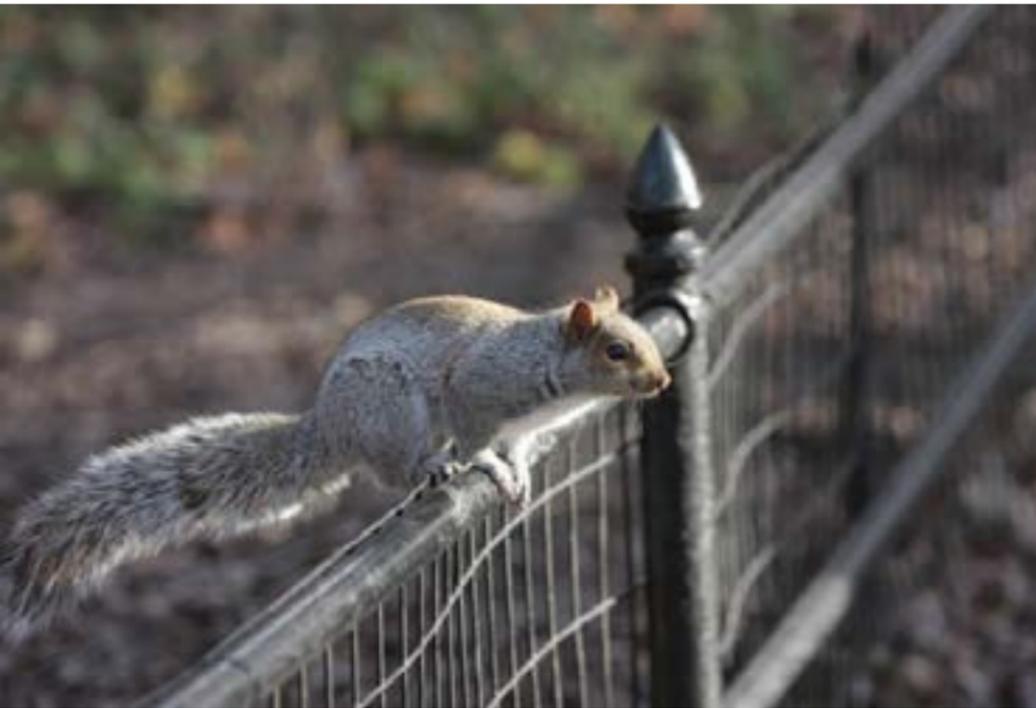
Squirrels in Central Park in New York
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Central Park in New York
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Squirrels in Central Park eating humans food
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Squirrels in Central Park
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– HOW THE DESIGNER CAN BE INSPIRED BY INITIATIVES IN OTHER COUNTRIES?

Regarding how liminal animals are accepted in other countries, the designer can be inspired by the reintroduction of animals in urban areas. Indeed, humans are aware that they need biodiversity in cities. As we know, the introduction of animals in urban areas is the result of humans' will and decisions in order to bring some nature into cities. An urban territory is not reserved to humans. It becomes necessary to rethink territories in order to find a common ground for citizens and liminal animals. Thus, the biodiversity is essential in urban areas. Humans are part of it and they have to accept liminal animals' presence in urban areas for the benefit of ecosystems.

Urban territories are urban ecosystems where living beings belong. It becomes primordial to change our way of thinking and to accept liminal animals in urban areas. It would be interesting to have the same type of coexistence with liminal animals as in Central Park. Perhaps, we could do it if we simply had more green spaces in urban areas, which are indeed too aseptic

and composed of concrete surfaces. Liminal animals are simultaneously close and remotely from humans because they shared the same territory but human beings reject liminal animals.

If design takes liminal animals into account, it can set up a new society system, a new organisation based on the importance of biodiversity in urban areas.

In France, liminal animals are seen as insalubrity markers and rejected by society. There are coexistence problems due to cultural, spatial and health issues.

Liminal animals suffer and endure injustices and abuses because their rights are not recognized so we don't owe them anything. This is a problem that we have to resolve because every animal needs rights and protection.

« Liminal animals are subject to a wide range of abuses and injustices, and a persistent failure to recognize our distinctive relational obligations to them. »

p.211 - Zoopolis

Acting in design would be an opportunity to see liminal animals differently and to accept that they are animals like the others.

Philippe Descola⁷ says that one of the most important challenges in the XXIth Century will be to find ways to give animals some forms of representation in accordance with their place in our urban areas. Following this way of thinking, it is necessary for the designer to accept the importance of animals in cities in order to give them the place that they deserve.

Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka explain that liminal animals should be seen as residents in our societies because they live with us. The authors would like to highlight the presence of animals in cities in order to offer a new society based on human analogies. Indeed, they defined a zoopolis as a mixed community constituted of humans beings and animals. Liminal animals endure direct and indirect consequences of human acts.

⁷ - Philippe Descola is a French anthropologist known for his anthropology works.

– CONCLUSION

To conclude, in order to propose a design project adapted to liminal animals and humans, the designer has to be aware of what is happening in other countries.

For my diploma project, I would like to propose several devices to integrate liminal animals in our collective and public uses. If the designer conceives a coexistence with benefits, it will be easier for city dwellers to accept liminal animals.

Furthermore, the designer has to understand what concessions city dwellers and users are ready to make about coexisting with liminal animals in order to propose a completely adapted project.

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— ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Catherine Pradeau, my english teacher who supervised the elaboration of this abstract, for her advices and attention.

I also would like to thank my research supervisors Laurence Pache and Julien Borie who mentored me along these two years for my research in design.

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Writing : Manon Alves

Research supervisors : Laurence Pache and Julien Borie

Graphic Design : Manon Alves

Fonts : Brandon Grotesque Light, Light Oblique, Regular, Regular oblique, Bold

Paper : Amber 90g, Rives Sensation Gloss 270g

Printer : School Raymond Loewy, La Souterraine

*« How can we coexist with urban animals
in a harmonious way and with benefits? »*

Urban animals are considered as intruders, as trespassers by humans in the urban territory. They don't match to the binary distinction that we make about animals. In the common unconscious, urban animals are attached to the idea of dirty, they have a negative image that's why they are not accepted in urban territories. Urban animals have adapted themselves to cities in order to prosper. The introduction of animals in urban areas is the result of humans' will and decisions in order to have some nature into cities. It is necessary to accept the importance of animals in cities in order to give them the place that they deserve. Urban animals are differently considered according to cultures. The designer has to examine how they are considered in other countries in order to propose a harmonious coexistence between city dwellers and urban animals. Indeed, urban animals have potentialities which the designer has to highlight and take into account if he wants to propose a common ground for both.

