

## **'The World is Completely Alive! Or the World is Completely Dead!'**

The following essay is written by Tom Groves as a response to the video installation work by Jennet Thomas

*Animal Condensed > Animal Expanded #1* that premiered at the show

Unspeakable Freedom >> Tastes Like Chicken at Block336, London, September- October 2016.

– “What are you?” asks the folky, ancestral Authenticity Fetish.  
– “I am an effect, a casualty [...] a casualty of Animal Expanded,” replies the Chicken.  
– “How did this happen?” – “Unforgiveable, unforgiven, returned unbidden, unspeakable, unspoken, unhidden. [...] Animal Condensed, Animal Expanded, Sky was falling, now sky is landed. Fear. Tastes like Chicken, Licken, Unforgiveable, unbranded. [...] Now falls the cloud”.

Part 1 of Thomas' upcoming trilogy *Animal Condensed > Animal Expanded* stages a bite-sized philosophical encounter between what are best described as two post-anthropological agents who, in an attempt to reconcile themselves with the trauma of a mass biotechnoviolation, quiz one another on the origins and ontologies of their species.

Echoing the paranoid dialectics of the fear mongering Chicken Licken, (the feathery hysteric made popular in the well-known Ladybird book of the same name) the jumbled language of Thomas' protagonist too masks an existential truth. But unlike Chicken Licken who fears the worst before suffering a killing more cruel, Thomas' red-footed friend has already fallen foul to a fate worse than death – not departed, perished or expired, but 'condensed, expanded, extended and unbranded'. She is what Thomas describes as the 'poster-girl of the industrially ambiguously animal-ish product', something surfed and turfed out of the greedy anus of our new farming revolution.

The chicken's interlocutor is a member of the 'Expanded' field, an oddball Authenticity Fetish with a peculiar aesthetic charm. Handmade, home-grown and seemingly always on the cusp of delivering up words of life-changing insight, this ropey 'hope-puppet' in fact struggles to articulate anything at all. As he converses with the Chicken, it is relatively clear that whilst his heart is in the right place, he is a bit mixed up with other kinds of messages possibly culled from a badly constructed Google search.

Characteristic of much of her recent work, digital and material processes have been interwoven throughout this, the first of a series of new films that Thomas plans to produce over the next three years. We are somewhere between the virtual and the actual here, a place where real objects have been sweet-talked into rendering up digital outcomes, and computer effects are dumbed down and exposed for what they really are. Thomas' use of the photogrammetry 3d model generation process that intelligently sculpts an approximate distance between figure and ground here results in a sticky visual matter where chicken and henhouse jostle for significance.

At some point during their metaphysical chat, the Authenticity Fetish gives up trying to answer the bird's insistent questions and pulls from his mouth a sequence of unearthly things before portentously dropping them on the floor: a human thighbone, on which is inscribed the words “Don't wish for it, work for it”; then a toothy jaw, with “If you see something unusual, report it”. Lastly out comes a rubber Trump mask, and as if ironising the faux-illusions of her own practice, we are forewarned that “Complexity is fraud”. These coded nuggets of wisdom hatched in Thomas' brave new world are of course frighteningly familiar. Positive thinking, paranoia and boorish idiocy are after all the meat of our times, but in her hands such Capital Speak feels somehow more ambiguous, uncertain and flighty.

Following her formidable *The Unspeakable Freedom Device* commissioned by Grundy Art Gallery in 2015, *Animal Condensed > Animal Expanded #1* confronts our anxieties around transspecies existence and the formulation of farmed subjectivities and stresses the fact that whilst 'animals as we know them, no longer exist', our visual culture is struggling to catch up with what today's life on earth is really like. Far from didactic, Thomas' approach is characteristically oblique, anarchic

and playful. Through the collision of meanings and 'anti-meanings', Thomas' method constructs a mirror that candidly reflects our unstable and open-ended selves.

Previewing alongside *The Unspeakable Freedom Device* at South London's superb artist-run gallery space Block 336, *Animal Condensed >> Animal Expanded* paints a corn-fed smile on the faceless head of the primate world. Set in a virtual black and white realm where human and nonhuman identities are anything but, the overriding question here is less one of animal rights and more of how our new animal 'wrongs' might think, feel and communicate. Neither 'toys', nor 'food', Thomas' 'animal-unreliables' speak to one another in a language borne on the wings of today's eco-hypocrisy, and the fact that we can understand them almost perfectly, only makes what they have to say all the more troubling.