Hosting the animal: the art of Kathy High

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Abstract

This article considers the question of “hosting the animal” through the artwork of contemporary artist Kathy High. I show how High’s art project “Embracing Animals” challenges us to think about aesthetics of hospitality as far as the animal is concerned. I will argue that Kathy High’s work, when read through the lens of the concept of hospitality, provides us with an opportunity to interrogate what hosting the animal in art might be and the limits and limitations of such hosting.

Keywords: bio-art; aesthetics of hospitality; human–animal relation; Derrida; relationality; responsibility; aesthetics

INTRODUCTION

Let us say yes to who or what turns up, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any identification, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female.¹

This paper asks two questions and ponders them through the artwork of Kathy High. First,
what does it mean to say ‘yes’ to the animal? In other words, how does one host the animal unconditionally? The second is raised as a warning: should we say ‘yes’? I will argue that the art project, “Embracing Animals” by Kathy High demonstrates that saying “yes” to hosting the animal requires us to critically evaluate the concept of hospitality by revealing the anthropological foundations and, thus, limits of that concept and of our current practices of welcoming and hosting the animal. This paper, thus, is an attempt to aesthetically think through and critically reevaluate contemporary notions of hospitality with reference to the animal.2

High’s art work that involves hosting and caring for laboratory rats in her home (and subsequently in exhibition spaces) presents us with an opportunity to test and reveal some of the philosophical assumptions of hospitality when enacted toward the animal while also enabling us to appreciate the limits and limitations of such hospitality. As more artists engage with the concept of hospitality and/or enact acts of hosting “others” in their works, it is important to systematically think through what an “aesthetics of hospitality” offers to our critical discourses about relating to others, human and non-human animal alike.3 The question of hosting the animal, in many ways, provides a useful (even if not exemplary) platform to engage larger ethical and aesthetic questions raised in the so-called bio-arts, or art that uses living beings and living matter as its primary media and material of production.3 This paper will initially present the principal concepts in the notion of “hosting the animal” drawing mainly on the works of Jacques Derrida on hospitality and on the animal as well as on some secondary texts that have elaborated more specifically on Derrida’s works including those of Leonard Lawlor and Kelly Oliver. In the second part of the paper, I will present an exegesis of Kathy High’s “Embracing Animal” art project with a view to test and critically reevaluate the philosophical assumptions underlying the notion of “hosting the animal.”4

**THE ANIMAL, ANIMALS, AND HOSPITALITY**

The notion of “hosting the animal” has, for a while now, figured as a “radical possibility” within philosophical ruminations on the animal and hospitality. Derrida5 discussed the questions of the animal and hospitality mostly in parallel, bringing attention to various ways in which appropriative violence operates in discourse and in practice. Hospitality, though related to hostility and violence, is one concept that Derrida privileged as a site of resistance and hope. David Clark in his famous essay “On Being ‘the Last Kantian in Nazi Germany’: Dwelling With Animals After Levinas” claims that “(R)adical possibilities can be opened up when the reach of the ethical question who is my neighbour? is widened to include non-human acquaintances.”6 Many authors agree with him, that we need to expand the ethics of and as hospitality to the animal as an extension and extrapolation of Levinas’s and Derrida’s concepts of “excessive” responsibility and “radical” hospitality to the other. However, it is Derrida himself, who rightly warned us against this seemingly “logical” inclusion. His warning issues from the recognition that animals are welcomed not only on our own terms, but also on what we consider to be our property (be it a house, a farm, a nature reserve, or a country) and, therefore, by our conventions of propriety.

For Derrida, the definition of hospitality, whether conditional or unconditional, is based on the question of “place (house, hotel, hospice, family, city, nation, language, etc.)” and its oikonomia, “the law of the household.”7 Unconditionally, hospitality is to “give the new arrival all of one’s home and oneself, to give him or her one’s own, our own, without asking a name, a compensation, or the fulfillment of event the smallest condition.”8 However, the challenge is in identifying who and how decides what is “one’s own” and “our own.” Derrida’s point here is to clearly underline the inherent connection between the very definition of hospitality and the question of right and, therefore, of duty and responsibility. Who has the right and duty to give and it is especially critical here to note that the “who” is a (human) subject. Derrida notes,

[I]t is a human right, this right to hospitality—and for us it already broaches an important question, that of the anthropological dimension of hospitality or the right to hospitality: what can be said of, indeed can one speak of, hospitality toward the non-human, the divine, for example, or the animal or vegetable;
does one owe hospitality, and is that the right word when it is a question of welcoming—or being made welcome by—the other or the stranger [l’étranger] as god, animal or plant, to use those conventional categories?9

In considering the question of hosting the animal, Derrida points to the need to reevaluate the very notion of hosting in its “anthropological dimension” in order to accommodate an otherness that is non-human.10 How and if can we imagine a less anthropomorphic and anthropologic concept of hospitality?

Two interpreters of Derrida’s works on hospitality and the animal are instructive here. In his thought provoking book This Is Not Sufficient: An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida, Leonard Lawlor proposes that animals must be received by us, unconditionally even if now, they remain the “food” of hospitality, both divine and secular. Lawlor argues, after Derrida, that “[I]t is necessary that sacrifice itself be sacrificed. Instead of the substitution that defines sacrifice, there must be a kind of saving by means of replacement or even by means of misplacement. In the space that there is (which is neither the world of forms nor the sensible world), we must receive the animals.”11 Oscillating between hospitality as “not capturing” (the least that we can ask for in acts of hosting the animal) and hospitality as “giving the animal all of one’s home and oneself” (the most that we can ask for), Lawlor calls for a “receptivity” to animals today as a radical departure from the current practice of capturing animals for food, clothing, experimentation, entertainment, and other forms of appropriation.

For Kelly Oliver, Derrida’s concept of hospitality as transposed to animals requires an enquiry into what constitutes “animal ethics.” She argues that we must be able to think of animal ethics through a notion of animal kinship, where the focus is not on what makes animals different or the same as humans. After all, Oliver stresses, we are different and not different at the same time. What interests Oliver is the “relationship between the human and the animal, humans and animals.”12 In her strategic articulation of humans and animals in the plural, Oliver seeks to multiply differences and make it impossible to have these universal categories stand in opposition to each other in their singularity. Oliver calls for an ethics of “relationality and responsivity” based on an emerging awareness of the interdependence and living together of animals and humans: “Once we recognize that kinship is an impossible ideal, and a violent bloody ideal at that, we may be open to the possibility of ‘strange kinship’ based not on blood or generation but on a shared embodiment and the gestures of love and friendship among living creatures made possible by bodies coexisting in a world on which we all depend.”13 The recognition of this “strange kinship” with animals, Oliver sees as the basis for a questioning the “purity” of our conventional ethics toward the animal enabling us to redefine it not as a question of pure intention but, rather, as a call for unconditional hospitality; a notion related to Derrida’s own call for the “unconditional hospitality,” of saying “yes” even before we know who or what might arrive. Oliver sees this, what she calls “sustainable ethics,” where we must share and be generous unconditionally as central in our response to the “environmental urgency” of our times.14 What does Oliver’s “sustainable ethics” based on recognizing the “strange kinship” with animals look like? Can one say “yes” unconditionally in hospitality to the animal without anthropomorphizing or simply restricting the animal to the anthropological dimensions of our welcome? In the following discussion, I will present Kathy High’s work as both demonstrative and critical of the anthropological dimension of hospitality. I will show how her work helps us navigate the ethical, conceptual, and aesthetic issues related to hosting the animal.

LIVING WITH RATS: FROM REFUGE TO PARADISE (2004–ONGOING)

Kathy High is an American artist living and working in Troy, New York and New York City. While she has worked in a range of media including video and installations, over the years, High is recognized as an important and pioneering exemplar of bio-art, the genre of art making that uses living substances and beings as materials and media including those that use recent biotechnologies, such as cloning, genetic manipulation, and tissue engineering. My discussion here will focus on Kathy High’s bio-art work “Embracing Animals” (2004–2005) that involved the artist “res-
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...a number of laboratory rats from experimentation to live with her in her home and then later in an exhibition space. I will refer to her other works where relevant to contextualize this work. The discussion of this work will be presented in three sections: the context and artistic intent of the work; a description of various iterations of the work; and finally, a discussion of this work in relation to the question of hosting the animal.

**CONTEXT**

High’s work with transgenic rats began in 2004 primarily inspired by two conceptual strands: Donna Haraway’s writing on the OncoMouse (especially in her presentation of the mouse as her “sister”), as well as the later work on “Companion Species,” and Deleuze and Guattari’s theories of “becoming animal.” High also credits another artist who works with transgenic animals, Adam Zaretsky, for inspiring and helping her to realize this work.

High chose to work with laboratory rats that had a modification of the B27 gene that has been associated with autoimmune diseases, especially arthritis and digestive autoimmune diseases. High's choice was based on these animals sharing her own autoimmune digestive condition, creating an empathic connection between her and the rats. In addition to this common health affliction, High enacts other strategies to become experientially connected and bonded to the rats including referring to them as her “siblings” and her “sisters” (in the spirit of Haraway) probably because she herself was rather repulsed by them:

> Why did I decide to work with these rats? I am afraid of them. And I don’t know how to relate to them. They make me nauseous and queasy. They make my skin crawl. I have never touched a rat before except accidentally when they ran over me, when they crawled over me in bed at night, when they ran by my foot in the alley or the subway. They terrify me. Plague-laden animals, low to the earth, crawlers, sneaky, creepy vermin...  

It is readily apparent from these expressions of repulsion that High was aware of the difficulties of claiming an “easy” and seamless identification with transgenic rats; a process of “becoming sisters,” rather than simply assuming some “natural” affinity from the start. “I identify with the rats and feel as though we are mirroring each other. The rats and I are all retired breeders. I feel some kind of strange kinship with them. If they ache when being touched, I understand this is from fevers.” It is a “strange,” rather than a “natural,” kinship, very much akin to that proposed by Oliver; requiring an active working at the ethical challenge of the relationality presented by the animal encounter. High has to go out of her way to identify with the rats—to overcome her disgust of their texture, their smell, sounds they make, and even the memory of their being still “creeps her out.” The artist is mindful that these are animals that she as a human can identify with also because of their transgenic constitution with human genetic material: “They are extensions, transformers, transitional combined beings that resonate with me in ways that other animals cannot—because of that small addition of human DNA.” High, keenly aware of the dangers of anthropocentrism is also particular about distinguishing between her pets and transgenic rats: “I... know they do not know how to behave as pets. They are not pets.” She acknowledges that the rats cannot be easily domesticated into the economies of the home because they are not even familiar with the conventions of such behaviors; they “do not know how to behave as pets.” These rats are always already aberrant.

High frames her artistic intention with reference to the larger question of the “human-animal encounter.” The artist has used animals in some of her earlier art works, mostly working with her own cats and dogs and even working with animal communication/telepathy specialists. High’s work with these rats, however, represented a significant departure from these previous works. In previous works with/on animals, she was investigating the anthropomorphic projections of human fantasies and anxieties (Animal Attraction, 2000) or creating a series of video works where she “collaborates” with animals on specific situations that embody the human-animal encounter (Animal Films, 2002–2003). In Embracing Animal, she makes the act of living with these laboratory rats the focus of the work and where the media and material outcomes that result from these encounters as secondary aspects of the work.
High’s work began with the genuine desire to rescue these “laboratory animals” by hosting them in her house instead—hosting here including sheltering, caring for, and feeding them. She conceived her home as a refuge for these creatures away from experimentation. Even though High anticipated their delivery from the labs (she had bought the rats for US$300 each) the moment of their arrival was still unexpected. The artist was, however, prepared to be attentive to their smallest needs, whatever they might be. High did not want to impose already fixed rules of the household on the rats, but rather approach their arrival as a collaboration: “We will be a closed system—the rats and I—reading and reacting to each other, defining our conditions. We will collaborate and make up our own rules.” When asked to clarify the nature/substance of this “collaboration,” High responded “they (rats) act; they wanted a lot of attention; they became very friendly and demanding; they would want to play; not eat certain foods; on my end, collaboration was awareness and observation; I do believe in animal telecommunication, there is a kind of communication going in-between; mindfulness in every moment; like in a love relationship; it is not verbal.”

It is noteworthy that the artist seems to be simultaneously fascinated with the rats being the same as her (having B27 gene mutation), recognizing their difference from her and from her pet family (as pests, parasites), as well as seeing them as a third kind: animal cyborgs, man-made transformers, born of a draconian experimental procedure (only 2–3% of transgenic pregnancies are successful). They are her strange “kin,” her guests of a new kind, neither pets nor pests. However, in addition to reckoning with this “strange kinship” with the rats, initially inspired by ideas of identification through them undergoing a similar kind of suffering as her, her work seems methodologically and philosophically committed to ensuring that the project is for, about, and by individual rats.

THE WORK

I bought [transgenic rats] to conduct research and to treat them holistically with alternative medicines, environmental enrich-

ment, good food, and play. I want to relate to them because I, too, have autoimmune problems.

The work involved two groups of rats in two distinct settings. For the first group of rats that High bought, she constructed a special shelter in her home and took care of them for about a year: “Flowers and Echo (two rats) lived in a very large cage; 2 by 2 feet and 4 feet high” (Personal Communication). She researched about their diet and behavior and tried to care for them according to this knowledge along with her own observations of their lives in this space. It is noteworthy that the house for the rats was designed with advice from a veterinarian and, in the artist’s terms, was “opulent”; it was a sculptural installation. High carefully documented how the rats “felt” and behaved, making sure that they had a “social life” and not just food and water. She also acknowledges that she changed her life considerably to accommodate them into her home and her busy schedule as artist and academic. The rats died, she recounts compassionately, “in her arms” after a year.

Later in 2004, just after the first group of rats died, High was approached by Nato Thompson, the curator of the exhibition “Becoming Animal” at Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MassMoCA) to produce the work for this exhibition. The curator recounted that the artist would recreate her work but now in an exhibition setting. High indicated (to me in a personal communication) that she is still not sure if it was the right decision to agree to continue this work in an exhibition format. However, she agreed and purchased another group of three rats—Matilda, Tara, and Star (also called “The Barbies”)—and exhibited them for 10 months in newly constructed “homes”—essentially “cages” in the gallery space. High had a veterinarian monitor and medically treat the animals. The rat’s cages had an open area, climbing structures, stones, earth, plastic kids’ toys, and a “barn.” It was intended to be, or at least simulate, a refuge, both from the public and biotechnological testing. High says: “I was subjecting them to something difficult; I needed to give them a housing that was very comfortable.” PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) did not approve of the exhibition when it first opened on account of High’s project. Eventually, however, it was ap-
proved, when PETA’s representative changed her mind after learning more about the actual conditions of the rats’ life in the gallery. After the exhibition at MassMoCA, the rats were brought back to High’s house. Star and Tara were later adopted by MassMoCA handlers Mike and Peg Wilber, who, as High says, “begged her to give them the rats” and died in their care a few months later. It is noteworthy that High’s current work in progress, as if in testimony of her own continuing quest to find a comforting and hospitable refuge for the rats, is entitled “Rat Paradise.” The work hopes to recreate a large park-like environment where rats will be free to play and run around and would be incorporating elements in the environment that are based on recent research in morphine and pain management to alleviate the pain and suffering of the rats’ caused by their autoimmune diseases.

In the documentation of the work the rats are usually shown in cages. Some photo documentation shows High interacting with the rats: playing with them, feeding them, and so on. High specifically avoided showing the rats in poses that are stereotypically reserved for or associated with “pets” (for example, posing with or holding the animal cradled in one’s arm, etc.). This is in sharp contrast with High’s previous art videos of domestic animals and with her pets where the intimacy and domesticated nature of the animals is coded prominently with the settings and poses; the animals often shown as family members and

companions. High’s careful avoidance of such domesticating strategies of documentation is grounded in the history of other artists whose works with animals have formalized such representations. For example, one well-known example of a bio-art work dealing with a transgenic animal—not incidentally with a laboratory provenance—is the GFP (Green Fluorescent Protein) Bunny created by American artist, Eduardo Kac. Kac, a pioneering bio-artist, had worked with a genetic research laboratory in France to produce a rabbit to genetically express green fluorescent protein from a jellyfish on its fur. The expressed intent of the work was for the artist to bring the rabbit home to be raised as a pet/family member. However, due to some legal complications with the participating laboratory, the artist was unable to gain possession of the rabbit and the “work” was never quite realized as intended and was only seen in a now iconic image of the artist with the rabbit cradled in his hands.27

However, High was also particular to avoid staged representations of these animals as por-

traits of “freaks”; biological monstrosities eliciting a mix of sympathy and horror (see, for example, Catherine Chalmers’ portraits of transgenic rats, reference here). However, this was not going to be particularly easy to achieve given the larger cultural and visual references that mediate our viewing of such images of transgenic animals used in contemporary biomedical experiments. The highly immersive, extreme close-ups of the animals that were shown as part of the exhibition—partly as documentation of the artist’s interaction/collaboration with the rats and partly, I would argue, as a means to disrupt the visual economy of our gazes that constantly lapses into domesticating the animals by our anthropomorphic/anthropological frames of reference. It is noteworthy also that High was generally not very concerned with the “documentation” of her project, as the project was not intended to “represent” or “show” transgenic animals as it was to capture some of the longitudinal flux of the interactions with the animals, as I discussed earlier. In my own frustration with insufficient documentation about the “collaboration” that she claimed the work was about, I pressed High for more and other images that were more representative of the claims to collaboration. While the photo images documenting the rats that were included in High’s text of 2008 did not seem to differ significantly from other conventional representations of animals in art, they did avoid the happy domesticating gazes one has come to associate with animal representations. Choosing neither a spectacular and often “monstrating” portraiture, which emphasizes the difference nor the “family portrait” that incorporates the transgenic animal as one more, even if odd, family member, High manages to capture this “strange kinship” she professes to share with the rats. It is a strange kinship that she and Oliver evoke as a new alternative aesthetic and ethic for relating to the animal.

Another important aspect of High’s work is to highlight the ethical potential of singular acts addressing animal suffering or violence, by hosting “one rat at a time.” It might be useful to underscore this aspect of High’s work by contrasting it with the work of another bio-artist, K. D. Thornton. Thornton also worked on addressing what she saw as the need of a particular animal. Thornton describes her experience hosting a chicken that was formerly used in biomedical research surviving “two potentially lethal gas-sings,” in an essay, “The Aesthetics of Cruelty vs. the Aesthetics of Empathy.” Thornton recounts her experiences of hosting the chicken in her home, thus:

Though slightly disoriented, within a short time the surviving chicken was able to perch and appeared to recover rapidly. After a few days, I discovered that Spunky, as she came to be known, would jump on my lap if I patted my thigh: this was not training, nor was it innate behaviour. Surprisingly, she understood my ‘language’—the same signal as I used with my cats. Months later, she began laying eggs, and would cluck to me when she was ready to gain access to the living room sofa, her preferred place for nesting. Her eggs were later used in a series of static and interactive works, though I never ate even one. As I considered her ‘co author’ of these works, she was to be present at an opening, until murmurs of activist dissent affected a change of plans. Thornton became, arguably, a reluctant host of a singular chicken—Spunky—who she assessed to be in need of help and in many ways like High, came up with meaningful ethical responses even if in response to the plight of a singular animal.

When asked if she considered letting the transgenic rats go after acquiring them, High indicated that while she did consider it she was unsure as to how one could do that responsibly. Adam Zaretsky, the artist who inspired High’s own artistic investigations on animals, had explored a similar strategy of releasing the transgenic animals he worked with. High’s uncertainty about this strategy she claims stemmed from two issues: one, how and if the animals released thus will be able to survive on their own given that they were born and bred entirely in laboratory conditions and two, the dangers of genetic pollution from these species crossbreeding with other naturally occurring species and potentially affecting the latter with autoimmune diseases. While surely transgenic rats must have occasionally escaped or have been released (including by Zaretsky), High’s sense of responsibility in approaching this question is important.

I believe that what distinguishes Kathy High’s “reluctant” hosting/capturing of the transgenic rats from other art works where transgenic animals...
are released, eaten, killed, or cared for is that High seemed to have no larger project in mind or no larger a target than the mice whose condition she connected to. The suffering of those specific rats was her main concern and her artistic and (I would argue, equally) ethical response was to find a way to provide them with some relief and refuge. A question that comes to mind immediately—Did this even need to be an artwork? Here I would argue that it is and should also be an art work, to the extent that it questions itself, its aesthetic impulse, and not only the biomedical sciences that it gleans from. High decided to have some response to the specific animal's suffering she encountered. I argue that Kathy High's work practiced that specific hospitality that could only show us, if only temporarily, what hospitality is and could be; the hospitality that we “do not know” in Derrida’s terms. In addition to being an instantiation of the “impossible yes” to the animal, it also enacts an understanding of that “relationality” to the Animal as no more than to this particular animal. It is not addressed to “The Animal,” defined in counter position to Human, as reflected in Derrida’s critique. It is not even the animal that stands for all transgenic animals in some kind of aesthetic critique of biomedical sciences. It is the animals hosted in her house, Flowers and Echo, and not The Animal as an ontological category. It is an encounter that brings forth and deals with the singularity and specificity of the animals. This relationality to the singular situation of the rats is critical to High’s work and gesture and one that takes time, effort, and “mindfulness”.

HOSTING THE ANIMAL?

Haunted by the specter of the agony of animals that they find within themselves, perhaps they would say “This land that I seem to possess is not my own?” They would say, “Let’s open all the doors and destroy the walls.” Perhaps they would be a people who loved the world so much that they would want to let everyone, without exception, enter in, and to let everyone, without exception, exit out. Perhaps, we could call this people to come “the friends of passage.”

“For Derrida,” Kelly Oliver writes, “ethics is necessarily the matter of exaggeration. To be ethics or ethical, it must be extreme.” The idea of hosting and caring for laboratory rats with autoimmune diseases in one’s home in Troy smacks of such an extreme and excessive ethical response. The conventions of what constitutes the limits and parameters of a normal ethical response though emerge in societies not through cultural consensus that people lapse into but through the difficult path of contestation, debate, and dissent. The works of artists like Kathy High present us with opportunities to both become aware of what these limits and parameters are as well as to excavate and potentially renovate the philosophical and cultural assumptions these are built on. High’s Embracing Animal, I would argue, helped reveal the “anthropological dimension” as the very law of hospitality where the framing and enacting of hosting as a human right and responsibility falls short in its extension to animals. While it certainly is not a problem that this right is defined by humans, it does pose ethical problems when animals are precluded from it because it is an “anthropological” right.

The rats that High excessively extended hospitality to are in some ways twice-precluded from hospitality in that they are animals and animals that “do not know how to behave as pets.” Her work thus in enacting acts of hospitality to these animals contested and thereby revealed the anthropological and anthropomorphic logic of hosting when extended to animals. In case of the animal, hosting is difficult as it is inherently an imposition of a domestic economy, its architecture, its relations of ownership, and its norms. The various efforts High has to undertake to host the rats exemplifies, I suggest, the difficulties of navigating the appropriative aspects of hosting as such—the radical changes to her working schedule and living arrangements in her “own” house to accommodate the lives and rhythms of the rats; the constant attention to their comfort, social life, and security to ensure their survival; and her continuous efforts to understand their behavior so as to anticipate their needs in the environment she built for them. While High’s intention to enact “companionship” and “communication/collaboration” with animals is sincere and did seem to succeed in some of the interactions, High’s work also underscores the problematic nature of such claims since the interactions mostly happened on her own terms and her space; in spaces...
of her choosing. It is interesting in this light to note that High had much more hesitation and ethical uncertainties about the project when the rats were in the exhibition space that she did/could not control to the same extent as her own property.

In conclusion, while acknowledging the rich ways in which High’s work enables a radical reevaluation of the anthropological and anthropomorphic parameters of hospitality, I have also tried to point out that perhaps hosting the animal has the potential danger of the animal becoming a hostage to our desire to host. High purchased the transgenic rats because she could and her decision to host them at home was hers to make and carry through. Can we ever really host the animal without in some way imposing our own properties and property relations onto their lives, as Derrida cautioned us? Perhaps there is consolation for some in the idea that the hosting by humans might have led the animals to slightly better lives—as pets loved and pampered by their “owners”. It is noteworthy perhaps also that some “objective” measures of the quality of Matilda’s, Tara’s, and Star’s (the three rats that lived in the exhibition space) lives and deaths showed significant improvement over laboratory treatment. High carefully documented these improvements throughout her project and her writing: gaining weight; having more space that is more appropriate for rodents; being in the company of other rats; being the center of attention for what they are and not for being in the company of other rats; being the focus of attention for what they are and not for having better and more holistic medical attention such as eye treatments, massage, and a diet balanced for their autoimmune diseases; and dying in compassionate witness—“each rat was held as she passed.”

NOTES

2. This article is the result of my participation in the “Visualizing Animals Group” at the Pennsylvania State University, led by Joan Landes and supported by the Institute of the Arts and Humanities at Penn State. I am indebted to the members of the group, visiting scholars and artists, and my colleagues at the Department of Women’s Studies and the School of Visual Art for their invaluable comments and critical suggestions to the earlier versions of this article. However, I am mostly grateful to Kathy High, for her inspiring art and her kindness in answering my questions and allowing me to reproduce the images of her art work.


6. David Clark, ‘On Being “the Last Kantian in Nazi Germany: Dwelling With Animals After Levinas”, in


10. In his book Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas Derrida considers the question of "god" and hospitality in detail, following the exemplary discussions of Levinas.


13. Ibid., 228.


18. One can imagine new, rich, and detailed readings of Kathy High's work both in relation to Donna Haraway's notion of "companion species", Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "becoming animal", and feminist animal studies, that are all beyond the scope of this paper. In addition, a recent thesis on the notion of "romantic hospitality" with regards to Anna Barbauld's poem "The Mouse's Petition" points to yet another fruitful connection to High's work: Peter Melville Romantic Hospitality and the Resistance to Accommodation. (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007). This is a testimony, I believe, to the richness and significance of High's project with transgenic rats that warrants further academic attention.


20. Ibid.


23. Kathy High and Irina Aristarkhova, On-line and Telephone Correspondence, March 2010.

24. High, 'Playing with Rats', 466.


27. Steve Baker made an important point that Kac's inability to bring the rabbit home resulted in "uncomfortable irony...: had everything gone smoothly, Alba would presumably be living a more agreeable life in a Chicago household and the GFP Bunny project would be, quite simply, of less interest". (Baker, 'Kac and Derrida: Philosophy in the Wild?' in Aesthetics of Care, ed. Oron Catts, 78).


29. However, even if the images avoided “spectacularization", High's representations of the rats did not seem to provide an alternative aesthetic (on this topic, see Gunalan Nadarajan, 'Specters of the Animal: The Transgenic Work of Eduardo Kac', in The Eight Day: The Transgenic Art of Eduardo Kac, ed. Sheilah Britton and Dan Collins (Tempe: Arizona State University Press, 2003), 44–50.
Wolfe, ‘From Dead Meat’; Baker, Postmodern Animal. Indeed, High subsequently shared with me three more images, shown in a separate exhibition and a video piece (that was never exhibited) of the rats playing with the artist, and experiencing a “tail massage”. The artist wrote me privately: “I don’t… distribute this as I never really figured out how to show it…” (High and Aristarkhova, Personal Correspondence).

31. Ibid., 9–10.
32. For a text on chickens and art, see Susan Squier, Poultry Science, Chicken Culture: A Partial Alphabet (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011).
33. Zaretsky describes one such, albeit ironically framed, gesture: “We are also of the opinion that the non-native CD-1 Wild-Type Swiss mice whom have not left the lab for hundreds of generations deserved a chance on their own. It is our sincere hope that some of them make a niche for themselves in the heartland of the USA. If any of them make it, they have achieved a rodent version of the American Dream. Forcibly deported from Switzerland in the 1920’s by the Rockefellers, held as a commodity in Boston’s most biotech intensive rivulet, the Charles River, forced to be art collaborators, they now have a chance at independence in the Creek beds of the Bible belt…in the GMO wheat fields of Pop Americana…in the Breadbasket of the West”. Adam Zaretsky, ‘The Workhorse Zoo Bioethics Quiz’, in The Aesthetics of Care, ed. Catts 89.
34. See High, ‘Playing with Rats’; Playing with Rats; High and Aristarkhova, Personal Correspondence; High Rat Love Manifesto; Squier, Poultry Science, Chicken Culture.
36. Oliver, Animal Lessons, 117.