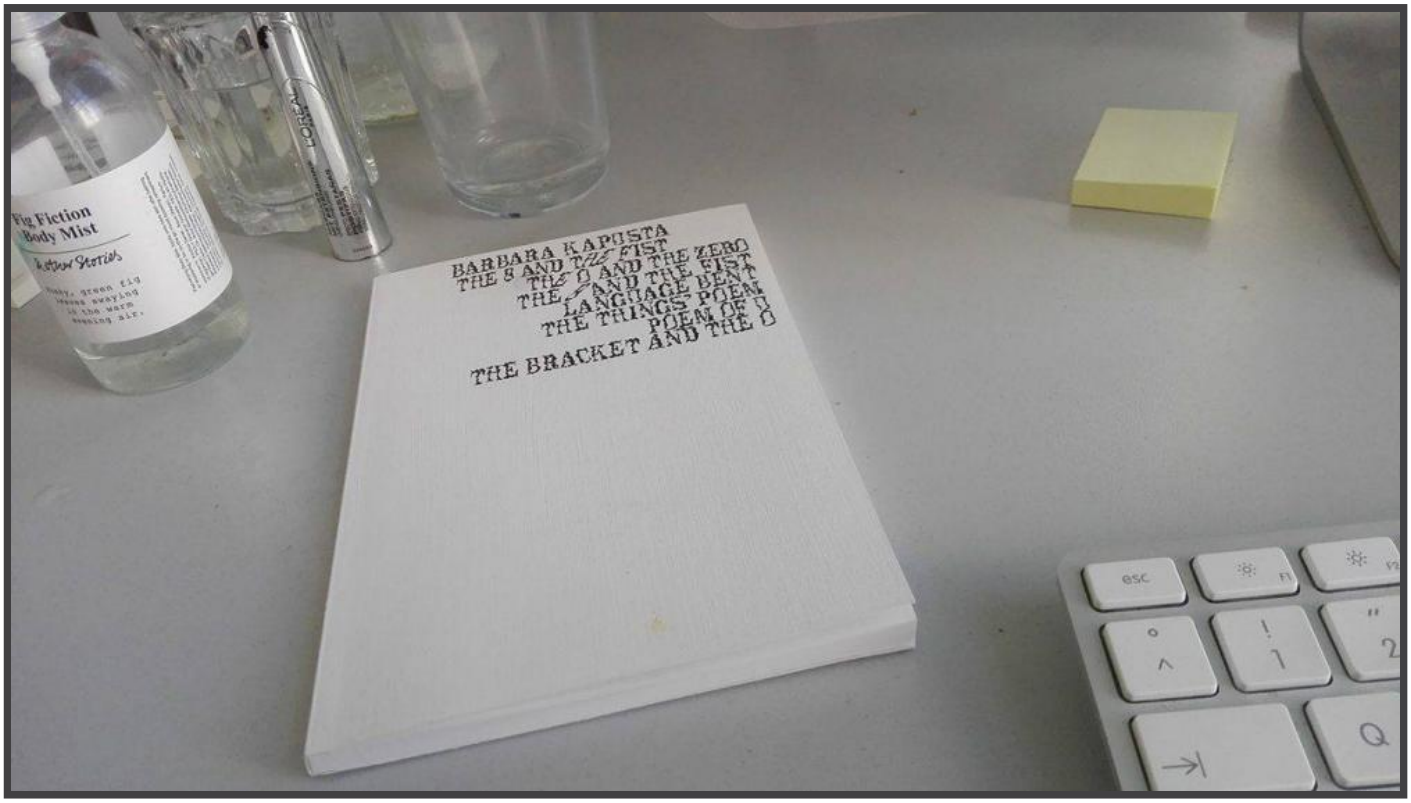
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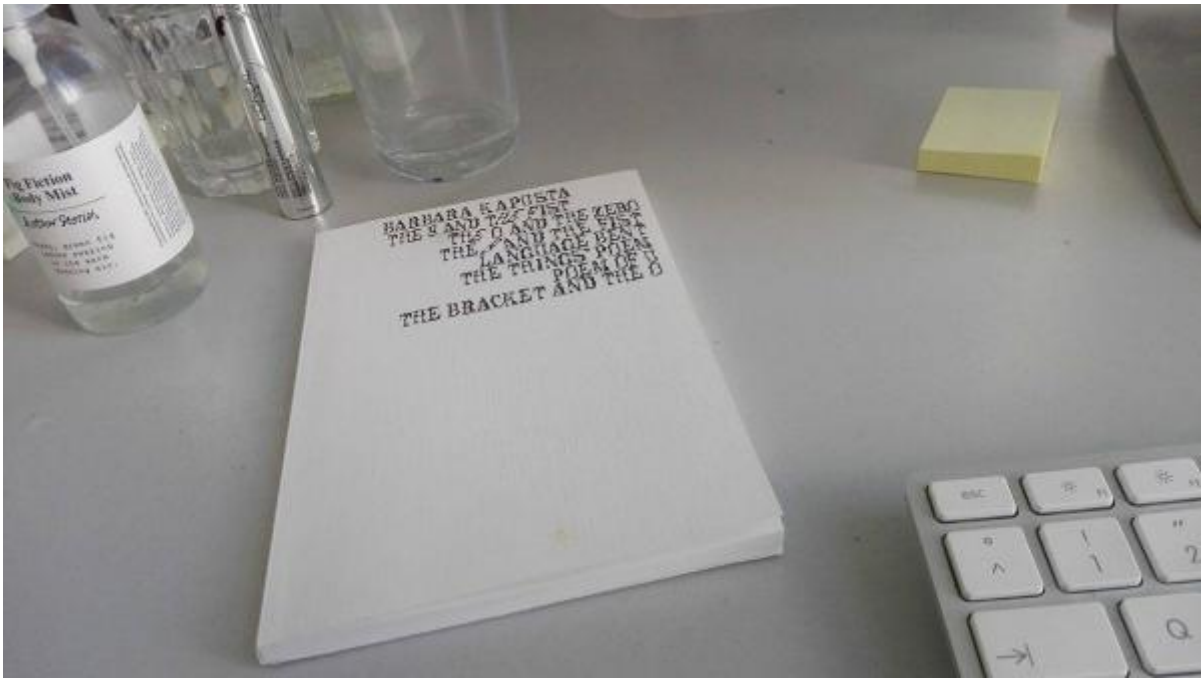
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Reading THE 8 AND THE FIST together

Barbara Kapusta, Cathrin Mayer

A conversation between Barbara Kapusta and Cathrin Mayer on collective reading, companionship and science fiction. The publication THE 8 AND THE FIST includes texts and poems by Barbara Kapusta. It was published in connection to the installation of the same name which was shown at Gianni Manhattan in Vienna in 2017.





Cathrin Mayer

I just started to read THE 8 AND THE FIST again. The figures in T8ATF meet in a scenario afterwards. After what exactly is not clear, neither is what will follow. This might not be so important, because it is a about a new chapter.

Barbara Kapusta

I am describing a point in time after the collapse of a system, which corresponds to our future, and our past, in which borders have been raised again and again, and we witnessed the exploitation of human-animal, vegetable and mineral resources. This "afterwards" is really the result of the real environment, the real political situation and the developments we are witnessing.

C. M.

The scenario is, however, none that directly adjoins our lifespan, I find. The apocalypse has happened, and now the figures – 8, O, (, Fist – try to get together and become independent.

B. K.

I agree. They really are there by chance, in the same place. The Fist, the 8, the O and all the others ... They are all affected and stranded bodies. They have nowhere they could retreat to, no hiding places.

C. M.

… and they are looking for accomplices.

B. K.

They remember collapse, bodies in distress. And they remember the disappearance of solidarity and empathy. They have to explain themselves, their attitudes and their responsibilities, if they want to start a dialogue with each other.

That sounds quite exhausting now. But at the same time there is a lot of closeness, gentleness and tenderness. Moreover it triggers a notion of nonlinearity, simultaneity and a new understanding of the relationships of the body on the basis of their different bodies, surfaces and materials, their sounds and their successive voices.

Speech Sounds – Octavia E. Butler [http://future-lives.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/speech_sounds.pdf]

C. M.

Some of the objects or «characters» that you are currently further developing in a new video piece have already appeared in some of your previous works. In your performance *Companions Forms*, shown in February 2017 at Forum Stadtpark in Graz and afterwards in March at KW Berlin, objects were put together that refer to older work. Rings and chains made of nickel-plated or blackened metal met white porcelain brackets, black pigmented porcelain 8s, vinyl letters and silk – O and 8, Fist and ().

B. K.

Yes, the figures are existing objects that I wanted to stage together. I started calling them «Creatures» or «Companions», based on the term «Companion Species» and Donna Haraway's book «When Species Meet».

C. M.

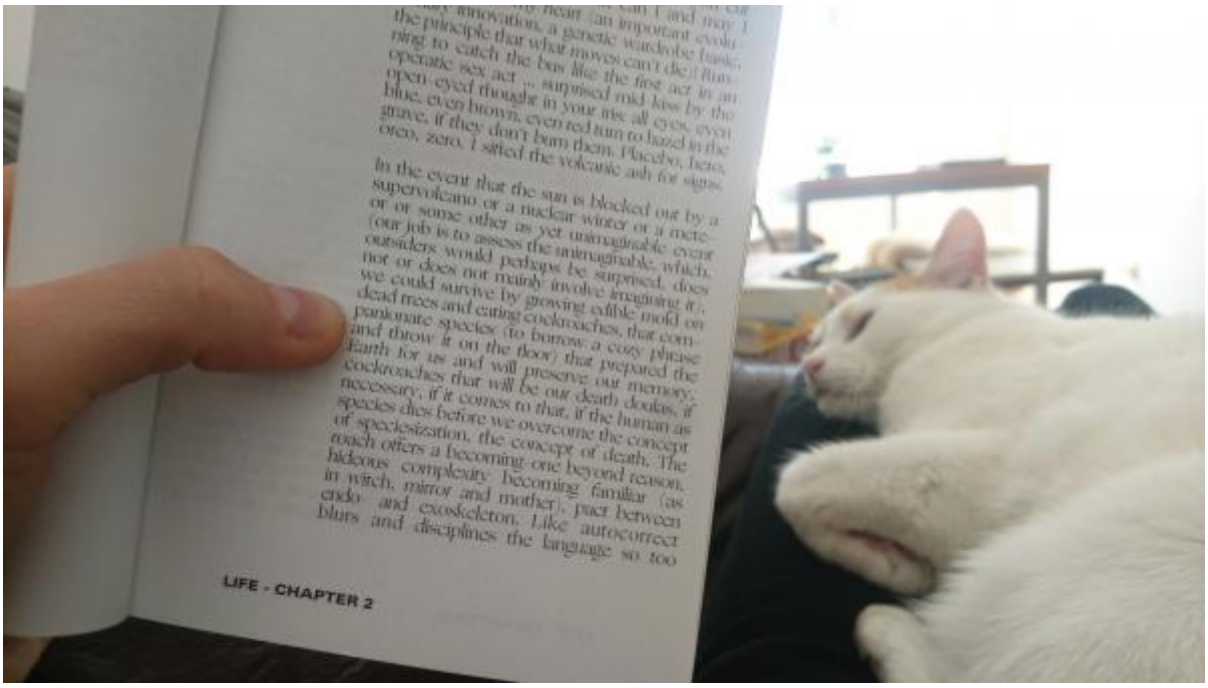
These companions play with each other, communicate, but also fight.

B. K.

Yes, it is important to me not to be too gentle and soft in my language and the forms of my objects. It is a continuous struggle. Again and again, paths which first appeared marvellously linked are separated. Faster than I can imagine, allies turn into enemies or rivals. How do we deal with that?

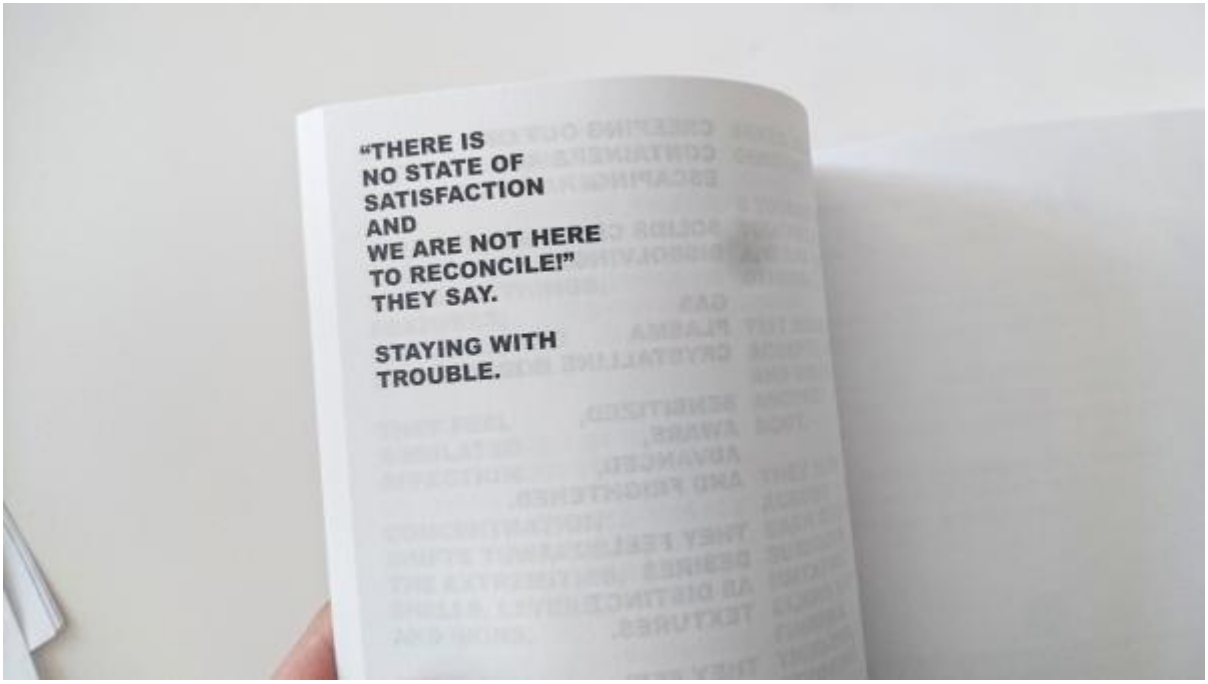
There is something conciliatory and affectionate between us now, but to take that as desired normality is perhaps a mistake. The permanent and strenuous negotiating of relations and the destruction of the hierarchies is the much more interesting and important place to consider. Therefore language must be at the same time brutal and tender.

I am on the couch, my cat companion on top of me. I am reading Hannah Black's and Juliana Huxtable's book «Life» and typing into our document on my phone.



C. M.

I´m trying to take your book with me wherever I go, so it becomes my companion species, and I take pictures for our text. :)



C. M.

I like the last sentence from THE 8 AND THE FIST: *"There is no state of satisfaction and we are not here to reconcile" they say. Staying with trouble.* I believe this sentence is very important. In the text it works like a final declaration. I've been thinking that if *the 8, the fist, the mold, the body part, the O* had only one phrase, it would be that. I'd almost say that these lines work like a mantra, so I'd like to make them my own mantra. They describe a collective, and not single subjects. A collective in an enlightened state, unforgiving and courageous at the same time. How do you think about that?

Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene – Donna Haraway
[http://www.e-flux.com/journal/75/67125/tentacular-thinking-anthropocene-capitalocene-chthulucene/][http://www.e-flux.com/journal/75/67125/tentacular-thinking-anthropocene-capitalocene-chthulucene/]

B. K.

Yes, the figures have to repeat it over and over again to themselves. The figures are not symbols for something concrete outside the text, they are not analogies, but when I speak of «their» responsibility and «their» attitudes, I think successively of «mine», «ours».

The sentence is also a quite recognizable Donna Haraway quote. I like the idea that you can practice bravery together. And that it is important not to be discouraged by trouble or arduousness. This is often what writing stands for, or I want it from my writing. One goes back to a page and remembers, ascertains: Courage!



C. M.

When you think about the 8, the Fist, the mold, the body part, the O and all the others, do you identify intuitively with one of these elements?

B. K.

No, but admittedly, the models for the emotions and physical movements of the objects are often bodies. I do not think about concrete persons, but since I also start with my experiences, when I describe others, I do speak about familiar bodies or my own.

I like the idea, that I could make the movement and emotions of your body the initial point for one of my animated objects.

Large Intestine – Anna Swir [https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/48639]

I also think about empathy and solidarity, the ability to put oneself in somebody else's position. In bodies with needs other than my own. How can an ability such as empathy be practiced? Or also: how can we deal with argument, competition and injury? It's not just about unharmed bodies, that would be wrong. What about the bodies that are in friction, hurting, injured? And how can one think about the body as multiple, something changing, collective?

C. M.

In your work there is a constant changing between conditions: togetherness and discord, brutal and sensitive gestures alternate. Bodies are allied, and are then destroyed by greater forces. It is about a form of community, and then it disintegrates again. You once said in one of our conversations that there is a hint of ambiguity as to whether an act has a positive or negative connotation. I find this is characteristic of our late capitalist condition, where one cannot always interpret whether something, ideologically or materially, is good or bad.

B. K.

Yes, there is a back and forth between a positive and a negative scenario, a changing between gentleness and brutality. In the text as well as in the objects and their interaction.

The fist appears in THE 8 AND THE FIST as something that is at once a sign of protest, protection and attack. It is a symbol and real body part, brutal and challenging at the same time. It threatens or strikes and the pleasure it can generate lies close to pain. The moods of the figures can quickly change, in either direction.

C. M.

Does the impulse to deal with the condition of an in-between come from your artistic work itself? Is THE 8 AND THE FIST symbolic for your current practice? I notice that you are also in a state of reorientation ... work etc. ... I thought maybe it mirrors your current mind-set?

B. K.

In THE 8 AND THE FIST all the institutions have long since collapsed, and the question remains, what to do? Are the figures trapped in reproducing the structures they have met? What are the alternatives? Interesting that you ask for analogies to my work.

I've been teaching at the Academy in Vienna for quite some time - my focus is language and poetry, feminist theory and moving image. I like it a lot, working with students, in groups.

Working together, reading texts and looking at art together make so much sense. At the same time, I sometimes wonder whether I would like to change my place, or what form of exchange I am looking for.

We both too are reading texts together, actually together, because we hold the THE 8 AND THE FIST in our hands, or read Anna Swir's poems online. And reading is also active analytical work that we practice together when we talk about poetry and theory and explain things to each other.

C. M.

I know stress around institutional hierarchies quite well. My work at the KW differs from what you just mentioned; I am concerned with the question of how I work as a curator with artists. I am always picturing how and whether it would be possible to really work collectively, to develop a practice that involves people in and around the institution much more into creative processes, or one in which roles can be exchanged, but in which at the same time confrontations can be lived, in which one must position oneself in the group and relate to others. For I believe that it is exactly what you describe above: «They have to explain themselves, their attitudes and their responsibilities, if they want to start a dialogue with each other. »

B. K.

Karen Barad speaks of «entanglement», that is the involvement and connections of living creatures, matter and meaning, and the responsibility that results from it. She says, and I find it very beautiful, that existence is not a singular individual matter.

C. M.

We are skyping just now and discussing the text and the title. At the same time, Polen the cat jumps into the frame, everything happens at once: I write, you speak, I type, you play.

Feminist Theory Workshop Keynote – Karen Barad: Re-membering the Future, Re(con)figuring the Past: Temporality, Materiality, and Justice-to-Come at Duke Gender, Sexuality & Feminist Studies [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cS7szDFwXyg]

C. M.

When I reflect on THE 8 AND THE FIST, and the Chthulucene article by Donna Haraway, animism comes to my mind, as a kind of religious equivalent of a concept of nature without hierarchy. I myself believe in a kind of cosmic unity - this now sounds very spiritual, but I believe that the mechanism of the earth is designed so that everything that makes it is connected and involved with each other. What do you think about that?

B. K.

I really do not have such a spiritual connection to the world and things. But I also think that living together with Polen the cat changed and shaped me. Our lives are entangled because of the fact that we play together, that I am his food supporter, or that he purrs on my belly while I read or nestles up against me when I write or skype with you.

I like the article and animism as a debate because they break with paradigms: feminism, animism, feminist techno-science, science fiction, all this challenges the continuity of history, anthropocentrism and heteronormativity. It creates new spaces where we can imagine

relationships.



BARBARA KAPUSTA

Barbara Kapusta is an artist living and working in Vienna. She is the recipient of the Otto Mauer Prize 2020. Her recent immersive 3- channel video installation *The Leaking Bodies* was produced in 2020 with Gianni Manhattan Vienna.

CATHRIN MAYER

Cathrin Mayer is a curator based in Berlin, she works for the KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin.