

## Eel Proposal CNAP 15000

project from research to production  
another country  
specific technology

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A Constructed World propose two performative events in Camargue in France and Comacchio in Italy to take place on suitable boats (péniche, chaland) where five chosen speakers will address the eels, (which are plentiful in these regions) through a new purpose built speaking device. ACW propose these two iterations as the final conclusion (made by the artists themselves) of *Parler aux Anguilles*, (*explaining contemporary art to live eels*) which began in 2004. There have been more than twenty major events, performances and numerous side projects dedicated to conversation-with-eels during this period, with hundreds of interlocutors all over France and in Italy, Spain, Romania, Belgium, the United States, Hong Kong, Alaska and Australia.

Since 2004 A Constructed World have been directing art works and speech towards live eels. More than 400 people including researchers, oceanographers, architects, artists, philosophers, leaders in business, scientists, biologists, students and passers-by have given prepared and spontaneous talks to eels in aquatic installations in museums and art centers. A community group calling themselves *The Shaken*, from the 93<sup>rd</sup> district, Seine-Saint-Denis, worked specifically with eels for more than six months in 2018. Historically, artworks ‘speak’ to the audience; in A Constructed World’s work people to speak to eels. In the first interactions they spoke to live eels, then representations in bronze, blue resin and copper foil. By its very nature this project avows blind spots and gaps in speech, waiting for a feint signal. It could resemble what neuroscientist Stuart Firestein calls ‘the communal gap’.

From the bottom of the Sargasso and Coral seas, tiny elvers are said to navigate across oceans to the estuaries, ponds, streams, lakes, mud and haystacks of the world. Until the twentieth century it was thought the eels were born and died locally. Now we have evidence each surviving catadromous eel returns to where they procreate and die in the deepest parts of the ocean. It’s tabled as fact in biology but it hasn’t been seen. So much of the eels’ story continues to evade knowledge. No human has ever seen eels mate and the place of their origin and breeding habitat is notoriously unproven, even though scientists almost universally agree about the speculation.

Eels are guided by instinct and can presumably follow the earth’s magnetic field. ‘What-kind-of-voice lets the eel know when it’s time to leave?’ The major eel scientist the early twentieth century Joannes Schmidt, after searching the oceans for eighteen years, said ‘We now know the destination sought’, in his desire to move away from discredited earlier theories about eel origins Schmidt ‘must have felt the right’ to substitute belief for knowledge.

On the lagoon of Comacchio, in north eastern Italy-which has seen continuous large scale

eel-harvesting for at least eight hundred years, on the night of 4 October 1697, fishermen took, 320,000 kilos of eel- perhaps three quarters of a million fish, in one night's work. It was reported in 2012 by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea that there were 1%-5% of eels alive compared to 1960-79.

There are many reasons to speak and talk to eels and to consider as Vinciane Despret asks: 'what would (they) say if we asked the right questions? ACW offer this ongoing conversation and speech as a fragile, febrile monument to living eels.

Even though most of these performances and activities have taken place in Paris and regional France, and no major version has taken place in Australia, in 2020 Monash University Museum of Art in Melbourne purchased the Partition of *explaining contemporary art to live eels*:

In 3 metal cantines and one cylinder the unique work includes: 86 original drawings, paintings and sculptures, two paper rooms, a tablecloth, an atheism mat, art works gifted into the project by participating artists, 20 edited videos, materials to build aquatic environments, scripts, plans, charts, documents, and printed matter. These materials are stored in uniform A3 storage boxes that both collate, structure and provide care for the archive, in addition to being part of its display as required.(see video)

This Partition, archive and database covers from 2004-18 until the time of the one year residency with the Cneai and the 93<sup>rd</sup> district of Paris, as mentioned above, which was the largest single undertaking of conversations with eels.

ACW have frequently investigated the transient idea of documenting an impulse or a work existing in two-places-at-a-time. In October 2013 a performance Degré 48, Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers was restaged just seven days later, with different performers, at Artspace in Sydney with the same provisional score, that often generated similar arbitrary and unplanned outcomes. Similarly ACW's large scale *Assemblée des culs*, (seen by more than 35,000 people at Nuit Blanche, musée des arts et métiers in 2017) was restaged through a detailed Partition as *Arse Assembly* at Carriageworks in Sydney where informal impulses and offhand gestures, are seen to almost identically re-appear in 2021. The performances speak to each other across space and time.

In the case of *Parler aux anguilles* instead of the audience being spoken to by a work that broadcasts, the audience makes address and speaks-to-the artwork. Whether it is living, bronze, copper, plaster, text based, audio or otherwise...Rather than the physical artworks being at the origin of the discussion, we experience how art-as-a-conversation accrues, accumulates, agglomerates and aggregates as form, rather than the physical artworks that produce discussion. The conversations precede and produce objects rather

than objects speaking-to-us. The conversation, speech, contact, reciprocity, transience and ignorance or defiance of geography and time are the subject and content of the work and the objects and ephemera are the reminders and remainder of the conversation that-took-place. The conversation-that-moves is the body of the work, and we don't look to the detritus to be venerated, but as traces of what-could-happen-again.

These two final summary performances leverage to find a permanent institutional or private base for the second part of the far ranging work and unleash its proper function. Do space and time really exist in themselves? are they perceived in the same way by 'gods, alien races, dolphins, crows, bees and amoebas... or only operative for finite human beings'? Through the speaking device to the eels in the Camargue and Comacchio the artists look to find a home for the final part of *Parler aux Anguilles, (explaining contemporary art to live eels)* **2018-23** in France that would remain in permanent relationship with MUMA in Melbourne (who are willing and enthusiastic to be involved) a reciprocal practical archive of conversation, speech, contact, transience and ignorance or defiance of time, that can be effortlessly enacted. In the temporal geographical coupling the conversations and objects would find themselves in limitless, uninterrupted exchange.