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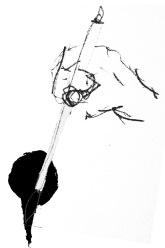
it is a sad penguin: seven steps



step one: dip the brush in the sumi ink or crude oil

it is a sad penguin and another sad penguin and another and another. i paint sad penguins. i invite you to paint sad penguins with me. why? the practice of painting them seems to make a difference. though possibly trivial, the difference they make is just enough that i continue to paint them. it is a practice that cultivates ecological sensibilities and political engagement. this quasi-essay is structured as a list of directions to paint sad penguins. painting sad penguins together attempts a particular speculative ecological attunement. the painting of the penguins generates

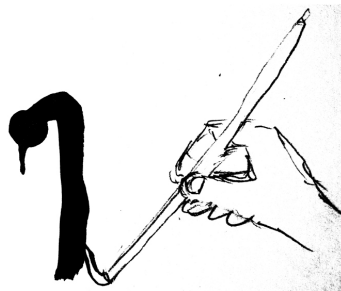
more sensibility and apprehension than anything i can write about it. in order to partially situate, i shall follow the steps of painting to tell the story of how i came to sad penguins. painting sad penguins is an ongoing experiment creating aesthetic connections that are both inter-subjectivity and inter-objectivity. inter-objectivity is the ecological mesh of relations and entities. this essay following object oriented ontology(ooo) naively posits that penguins actually exist; they shall neither be reduced to relations nor particles. they really exist as both individuals and various groupings such as communities, fishing groups, and something like species. ooo does necessary ethical work by positing the realness of any possible cut in the network; every possible entity is real. i think this is a useful concept for considering co-existence. there is an entity made of all the blood and feather penguin worlds. though i cannot understand penguins and their worldings, i can cultivate inter-subjective responsiveness to penguins through aesthetic encounters. felix guattari might call this a penguin machinic; I name it *a penguin possible* to acknowledge the uncertainty of my speculation (and all aesthetic relations).



step two: head and beak; bring the brush down onto the paper and paint a circle or a blob, finish with a downward small triangle or line.

the background for how i came to paint sad penguins is intertwined with climate justice, mass extinction and industrial destruction of patterns of living and dying.

warming is happening and has happened. the global nation-state system has completely failed to mitigate climate change. industrial politics are petro-politics. biopolitics is co-substantiated by fossil fuels. the climate is changed. we have already tipped over the edge into the spiral of climate chaos and disruption. sad penguins responds to this. it is very difficult to continue working as an activist living in the contradiction of the understanding severity the situation. in order to communicate for change and slow the violent momentum of the economy of accumulation and growth it is necessary to understate. direct delivery stimulates disbelief or helplessness. the first sad penguin was an accidental reading of an abstract painting by artist ernesto salmeron. we were working in a small town in a coffee growing region of nicaragua. the violence of colonialism and petroleum fueled necropolitics permeating everything. returning to the (dis)united states disillusioned and exhausted. depressed.



step three: shoulder and back and side. move the brush up and away from the head; forming the shoulders and back. then when ready draw the brush down to paint the side.

returning to the (dis)united states i felt paralyzed. i began to paint sad penguins. it was delightful. the penguins were really cute, especially in groups. each one was also immediately strangely itself. in practice the physical operation of painting the

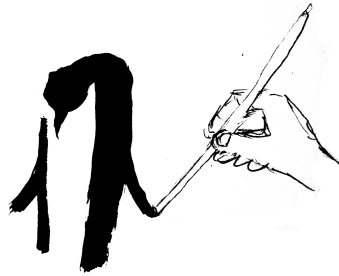
penguins is an act of self-compassion. painting one sad penguin after another is strangely relaxing. as if each penguin unwinds a bit of the paralysis of my intersubjective entanglement with the climate change. the repetition and repetition of the sad penguin does not therapeutically disentangle me from the irreversibly changed climate; every painting returns to the grief by the attempt to paint the penguin sad. the practice therapeutically holds me in the grief. the hesitating, contemplation of trying to paint a really sad penguin over and over dissolved my guilt, denial and bitterness (oh yes it does refresh itself from seeming eternal the springs of contradiction). some of the early penguins had quite sarcastic word bubbles but they pretty much faded out after a couple hundred. the sad penguin practice thickens connections with more than humans, with a penguin possible and, perhaps, a sadness possible. specifically, each sad penguin is carnal enactment of a partial connection between the embodied(corporeal) movements of painting and the penguin possible. each repetition inscribes in hand and arm and shoulder and eye a different way of knowing that is embodied in and bodying each sad penguin. the repetition does something that makes difference. iterative. pushing through feelings of futility and helplessness. the painting of sad penguins enabled me to continue participating in nonviolent climate justice activism. organizing and acting against expansion of the fossil fuel complexes.



step four: paint the other side, downward stroke

i painted sad penguins. soon they were all over my apartment. some people really liked the sad penguins. i gave them away. when the opportunity to perform something for *listening to the earth ii: temporalities*, (a performance art event organized by ecosexual beth stephens) it was obvious sad penguins would perform. this non-spectacular durational presentation continued the experiment. the audience and other artists really liked the penguins. they seemed delighted; most folks took one or more home with them. are the penguins just cute? that is just it. the cuteness is important. seemingly harmless yet palpable. they provoke serious conversations and feelings about climate. when i performed sad penguins in the streets of beijing audience members educated each other about global warming and extinction quite beyond the capacity of my limited mandarin vocabulary. the cuteness provides both aesthetic closeness(and distance). drawing the audience into the sadness almost non-violently. or the sadness slips in along with the cuteness. the sad penguin paintings are intermediating entities that may help loosen the paralysis of denial, guilt, and grief that tend to accompany emergent awareness of selfie selfie me me meme entanglement in the violence of global industrial ecology. (after the first performance at *listening to the earth ii: temporalities* i realized the sad penguins are an experimental enquiry responding to my extended readings of timothy morton's work(foot note- since creativity climate change talk in 2008).) the penguin possible is not just my own private penguin possible. they are a shared awareness of global heating and industrial induced extinction. given that neither i nor the audience can every really 'connect' with penguins, each painting is an autonomous

entity, a shared vector, building aesthetic intimacy with the penguin possible. a non-violent apprehension of that may ease the paralysis of crisis and encourage active muddling. get messy.



step five: the wings

in the early performances, audience members would sometimes join in, painting a penguin. it made sense to refigure the performance as a participatory workshop. does painting sad penguins work on/for other people? painting this are you already not quite the same? how many penguins would you have to paint? to worry, in the sense of to work over and over, to feel, and feel, to increase the texture and sensation of a penguin possible. in a way, could this be a way into the anthropomorph, that is part painter part instruction, part penguinish, and certainly some bit itself. the making of this anthropomorph may make a shadow, a penguin-pomorphic possibility in the painter. a dark/hidden but seductive opportunity to change a little.



step six: the feet and tail (optional)

sad penguins is, in part, a prolonged reading and contemplation of object oriented ontology and timothy morton's ecocritique. it is an extended embodied(bodying) experiment. taking aspects of critical and philosophic ideas and working through it. initially i did not realize that sad penguins was working through these ideas. this not realizing may allow an access to an ethical usefulness that the writings might not quite get at. this happened for me. painting sad penguins thickened my connections to a penguin possible through paper, ink, brush, humor and sadness. this thickening obliges me to continue engaging with climate justice projects. enduring and working beyond hope. this essay has tried to adhere to the cute and seeming irreverence of the sad penguins. this approach is trying to provoke an almost dismissal. I remain unsure if anything should be written about this penguin painting project. the painting makes some small difference. it could be useful to speculate that the difference may be more than a slight therapeutic effect for a burnt-out lefty do-gooder, anarchist lover of more than human. maybe idolatry was forbidden because it is more than just representation or symbolism, maybe the depict(ed)(er) entities together enact morphic diffraction patterns. a proliferation of strange possible

entities, like sad penguins themselves but not themselves, apprehension always in relation but not exhausted or emptied in relation.

step seven: start again: repeat and repeat and repeat and repeat.

sad penguins are too hot

sad penguins are paratactical anaphora.

sad penguins are a cryontological extension(casting the painter into the cold).

sad penguins is/are a body multiple and multiple bodies.

sad penguins, the essay is not an essay but an homage to *trout fishing in america*

some sad penguins used to be called auks, great auks, before that they were just called penguins.

sad penguins are cyborgs, part industrial paper machinic, part quasi-penguin, part-political struggle, part-mass media schlock, part weeping gorilla, part weeping guerrilla, part ice.

sad penguins are much better symbolic climate activists than polar bears. polar bears are the ultimate liberal loner. penguins are much more social, like apes. they live in large seasonal settlements, hunt and raise their chicks together.

sad penguins messes with you so you get your hands dirty.

sad penguins are more than one less than many.

sad penguins is a tour between guattari's schizo-cartographies and morton's oo0.

sad penguins are pillow talk for ecosexuals.

sad penguins got in a fight with care-bears and lost.

sad penguins is way too theory heavy.

sad penguins is pointless but lacks not for style.

sad penguins, the essay, is not really an essay. it is a bit of fluff, of penguin down.

.sad penguins is a virtual companion species.

sad penguins wants you to paint sad penguins.

sad penguins is not cool enough.

sad penguins ~~cannot~~ forgot the future.

sad penguins does have a bibliography:

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brautigan, richard, *trout fishing in america*, four seasons foundation. 1967.

sad penguins, to wrestle its way out of subjectivity and back in again, uses
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bains and julian pefanis. indiana university press. bloomington &
indianapolis. 1995. pdf.

sad penguins is enthralled by
haraway, donna. *playing cat's cradle with companion species*, the wellek
lectures at the critical theory institute, uc irvine, may 2-5 2011. internet
video. <http://people.ucsc.edu/~haraway/>

sad penguins are working through:
harman, graham. *guerilla metaphysics*. open court, 2005. pdf

sad penguins learned schizo-cartography from:
holmes, brian. *escape the overcode: activist art in the control society*. zagreb:
van abbemuseum, 2009. print book

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morton, timothy. *the ecological thought*. cambridge: harvard university press,
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---*ecology without nature*. cambridge: harvard university press, 2007. print
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author.
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<http://archive.org/search.php?query=creator%3a%22timothy%20morton%22>
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san penguins was critically encouraged by
povinelli, elizabeth. *economies of abandonment*. durham: duke university
press, 2011. print book

--- lecture and seminar at indigenous cosmopolitics, sawyer seminar,
university of california, davis. 2012. live performance

sad penguins was disrupted by
strathern, marilyn, *property, substance and effect. anthropological essays on
persons and things*. london: athlone press 1999. pdf.

sad penguins is a product of
taller imagen tiempo, collaborative durational performance and research
station, jinotega, nicaragua. 2010. live.

sad penguins has been conceptualized and physicalized through relations with taller
imagen tiempo, sarah lewison, timothy morton, kevin o'conner, lynette hunter, beth
stephens, the santa cruz museum of art and history, and penguins.

