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What We Can Do: Art Methodologies and Parities in Meeting

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The equally manifest senses of purpose, enthusiasm and urgency generated within animal studies groups internationally over the last few years have led many to adopt a position of moral virtue and to an acceptance of greater commonality between human and non-human animals, bound up in a broad set of sensibilities kindled by the residual sparks of late 20th Century race, gender and sexuality conflicts.

Much has been written and much read and from this basis and a back catalogue of theoretical discourse has provided the framework not only of thought, but also of response and discursive action.

The irony in this seems to be that in sanctioning a dependency on the same learned and developed faculties, (being those of language), the absence of which in other species has been used traditionally to demonstrate our distance from and superiority to non-human animals, we continue to distinguish and distance ourselves from, rather than draw any closer to our subject and by so doing compromise the possibility of the ‘otherness’ of understanding that might otherwise accrue around alternative approaches. Where such approaches are attempted, the results are often dismissed as being fanciful – impossible to evaluate on the simple grounds of their intrinsic lack of accountability by means of rational analysis.

Citing the artwork of our collaborative partnership as well as the work of related thinkers and practitioners, this paper examines the apparent conundrum of thinking without words, using art methodologies to approach a new understanding of our relations with other species. It acknowledges relationality as being pivotal to this project and indeed as a crucial paradigm for the application of our intellect to the puzzle of our environmental crisis and inertia.