

Artist Statement

Tony Schwensen: Monkey Business I

Two minutes and one second of poorly shot, amateur video posted in multiple forms on you tube and many other locations online of a young chimpanzee in Honolulu zoo finding a frog in his enclosure and then using the frog as a sex tool, or, as the title on You Tube states, Chimp Rapes Frog.

There is something about this meme that intrigued and continue to intrigue.
For the last two years, I have watched this footage on an almost daily basis.

The analogical relationships to the history and practice of actions such as this by humans led me to begin an investigation into the possibilities of understanding this behavior in chimpanzees. This in essence was and is a study in the structuring of coping strategies for the horror of being social animals that requires extensive raising within groups (apparently) as displayed in hominid behavior patters, and how these patterns are understood as cultural production. Moreover, what can be defined or understood as cultural production. (Fitting questions given that the initial starting point for this work is using advanced inter human communicative inventions to watch a video of a chimp and a frog posted by one of my species that has been watched millions of times by others of my species)

Important to note that anthropologists all use their own definitions of culture, cultural primatologists use their own definitions, but herein lies the essence. One constructs and defines ones own terms and parameters by which an investigation is to be understood. This is context specific investigation and this is practice as research.

I am nothing but an enthusiastic amateur in terms of my understanding of the research within cultural primatology, yet reading inside this field fascinated me. Here is an incarcerated male, who finds an other to satisfy a desire. It is of course possible to understand the rape of the frog as a form of tool use, the choice of a specific, albeit living, object to serve a particular purpose, fulfill a need without an thought for the repercussive damage to the being/object that is being used or can I say exploited. Again equivalences abound, use your imagination.

As an hominid professing to be an artist, claiming cultural production as my field of investigation, the applicable translative possibilities of understanding descriptions from both filed research and incarcerated research of chimpanzee actions and behaviors as the actuation of performative scripts, fascinated me. I began to consider this as manifestations of cultural agency on the part of the chimpanzees.

And a means in which to metaphorically explore and contrast the brutal tragedies that are hominid existences.

It is tragic, woeful, abusive, violent, domineering, damaging.

It is also funny. Very, very, funny. If you don't laugh you will cry.

And a harsh beautiful brutal metaphor for life.

Sometimes you are the frog. Sometimes you are the chimp.