

Becoming Simian: Darwin, Picasso and Creative Evolution

Fae Brauer

University of East London Centre for Cultural Studies Research;

The University of New South Wales Art and Design

In his anticolonialist and anticapitalist quest for "primitive consciousness" untainted by "civilizing missions", it has been well established that Pablo Picasso turned his gaze to •tribal cultures. What has not been explored is his quest for interspecies relationality, •particularly with primates, fuelled by the popularisation of •Darwin's explorations of animal species amongst French naturalists, zoologists, geographers, neurologists, including Jean Martin Charcot, and Anarcho-Communists, and the irrevocable severing of interspecies relationships accompanying the •"scramble for Africa". As the Anarcho-Communist geographer, •Élisée Réclus, so poignantly lamented: *"The world of animals, from which we derive our genesis and which was our tutor in the art of existence ... the habits of work in common, and of the storing of food – this world has become a stranger to us. ... the gulf which separates man from his brethren the animals has widened."* Not only was this quest for interspecies relationality illuminated by Picasso but also by •Rembrandt Bugatti, •Paul Jouve, •Clémentine-Hélène Dufau, František Kupka and •'Le Douanier' Henri Rousseau, amongst others, as revealed by my book, •*Picturing Evolution and Extinction*. Inspired by •Charles Darwin, often caricatured as a simian, their quest was integral to the rapid growth of animal rights, antivivisectionist societies and the concept of •*L'Évolution créatrice* in which Henri Bergson theorized how animal instincts were vital to achieving "creative evolution" conceived neither as deterministic nor mechanistic but as a creative impulse of becoming.¹

By unravelling this interdiscursivity through the lens of Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's concept of "becoming animal", this paper will examine how, at the very moment when animals were becoming highly endangered, "becoming

simian" was represented by Picasso as a means of achieving "creative evolution".

Unconvinced by Charles Bell's theory of the facial muscles of humans being unique in conveying expression, Darwin had visited London Zoo to see for himself. Mesmerised by Jenny, the first orangutan to be exhibited to the British public, Darwin had actually climbed into her enclosure to observe her emotions, intelligence and gestures, especially in response to apples, an harmonica and a mirror. Continually he noticed the similarities between Jenny and humans in expressing pain and suffering, as well as the close proximity of the tittering of monkeys to the laughter of humans. Not only did Darwin observe how primates could use tools but also how they had the facility to make them and share them with one another. To expose the anthropocentric fallacy inherent in homosociality, Darwin then narrated in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* how primates lived in closely-knit communities in which they shared their food, groomed one another while exuding compassion, cooperation and altruism. His research became seminal to Anarcho-Communists, French zoologists, animal welfare leagues and artists, particularly the young Picasso who had been exposed to Darwin by the Anarchist *Darwinistas* in Barcelona and in Paris, especially through the Anarcho-Communist theories of Piotr Kropotkin and Réclus.

In *The Descent of Man*, Kropotkin pointed out that Darwin had recorded that in numerous animal societies where there are sufficient resources, the struggle between individuals disappears and is replaced by cooperation. In such societies, the fittest are not the physically strongest or the most cunning, but those best able to provide "mutual aid" for the welfare of the community. Réclus took this one step further, proudly confessing that he "embraced all animals in my affection for socialist solidarity" and insisted they be granted equal status in mutualist society, particularly primates.² His supporters included Bergson, who stressed human kinship with all living creatures and the need for their mutual interpenetration to unleash instinct and intuition.³ These theories seemed to be corroborated by the Darwinian research pursued by Neo-

Lamarckian zoologist, •Edmond Perrier as Chair of Zoology at the •Musée national d'histoire naturelle, particularly his concept of animal colonies.

In his 1881 treatise, •*Les Colonies Animales* in which Perrier generously acknowledged the influence of "the great Darwin", he emphasized that the highest forms of evolution arose through the laws of association and cooperation exercised by animals, as epitomized by primate colonies. For Perrier, the cooperation of primates with one another and what he called "their excellent domestic relationships" had been confirmed by Darwin.⁴ Contesting Thomas Huxley's concept of "the animal world" as "a gladiator's show", Perrier demonstrated that diverse species do not evolve through "might makes right".⁵ Conversely "low forms" were not necessarily eliminated in "the struggle for existence", •despite this being the way in which Darwin's "survival of the fittest" had been translated by Clémence Royer. Instead he explained: "Association, mutual assistance, the division of labour ... the solidarity which results [from them] have played a preponderate role in the evolution of organisms".⁶ Even with the simplest of living forms such as •monera, Perrier found that there was a strong tendency to associate with one another, cooperation, which happened also in the growth of *Protomyxa* on abandoned shells (right).⁷ Yet he regarded the colonies of mammals most admirably governed were those of simians, as was being •illustrated by a range of French 'animaliers', particularly Paul Jouve.

In his 1888 book, •*Transformism*, Perrier singled out the high intelligence and "true solidarity of "The great monkeys".⁸ Deferring to George Romanes' •*Animal Intelligence*, which Perrier had translated,⁹ he highlighted "their intelligence, ... powers of reason, imitation, "observation and readiness to establish new associations".¹⁰ •On also translating Robert Hartmann's German treatise on the social customs of anthropoid monkeys by comparison to those of humans, Perrier highlighted their mourning rituals. With simian mothers grieving for the loss of their children to the point of death, Perrier deduced: "Affection and sympathy are strongly marked [in simians] more so than in any other animal."¹¹ In his illustrated book synthesizing this research, •*La vie des animaux illustré*, Perrier concluded: "They are sociable, courageous and

devoted to their communities". •Dovetailing his images with this text, Perrier concluded that "their love for their offspring and the compassion that they show for feebler beings ... whether they be of their race or not, can only inspire us with admiration".¹² This is what he called their "*solidarité simiesque*". Even in captivity at the •Galerie des Singes, Jardin des Plantes, Perrier reported that they displayed remarkable sensibility and a high degree of moral development far surpassing that of many of their human spectators. These theories proved instrumental to a non-anthropocentric reuration of the •Natural History Muséum.

Drawing upon Darwin's theory of evolution and Perrier's Transformism, curators at the National History Museum sought analogies and homologies between species in order to reveal how they were related through evolution. In its *Grand Galérie de l'Evolution*, not only were exhibits arranged into •Galleries of Comparative Anatomy so that all organisms appeared associated but so that that they also appeared to have evolved from the oldest and simplest to the increasingly complex. •As this postcard of the Galerie des Singes taken around 1901 illustrates, apes, gorillas, chimpanzees, orangutans and monkeys were situated within the Muséum displays as the culminating point in the evolution of complex organisms before homo-sapiens. That Picasso was familiar with these displays is indicated by his comments to André Malraux about the bones he encountered there appearing "never sculpted" but "moulded" and about his having rounded off the ends whenever he drew them.

At the •Jardin des Plantes, not only was the collection of primates increased in the •Ménagerie but •the Palais des Singes was featured as a major attraction. Once the Muséum issued cards •permitting artists to set themselves up in front of animal cages, they could study them live.¹³ From 1900, these included such well-known *artistes-animaliers* as •Paul Jouve and •Rembrandt Bugatti, as well as Picasso's close friend, •Le Douannier Rousseau. "Often on Sunday", according to a close friend of Rousseau, "he would walk in the Jardin des Plantes" watch the lion, tigers and primates for hours before

picking up his pencil or stick of charcoal to sketch them vigorously". •Picasso pursued less legitimate means of access.

Around midnight, Picasso would sneak into the Jardin with his friend, the poet Nicolas Deniker, son of zoologist, •Joseph Deniker. An authority on apes at the Muséum National de l'Histoire Naturelle, Joseph Deniker's 1886 treatise comparing ape, gorilla and gibbon genitals, as well as foetuses, with human ones concluded that differences were only observable in the last part of gorilla's foetal development.¹⁴ Not only was his son aware of his theories but seems to have also been given his father's key to the Jardin des Plantes.¹⁵ Once safely inside, he and Picasso would visit the •*Galerie des Singes* and pretend to be monkeys and orang-outangs, taunting the lions until they roared.¹⁶ Not until four years later did Picasso visit the •ethnographic museum at the Trocadéro, curated by Professor of Anthropology at the Muséum National de l'Histoire Naturelle, E.-T. Hamy.¹⁷ Hence well before Picasso experienced his notorious epiphany on encountering •African tribal masks and sculpture at the Ethnographic Museum, Picasso had frequently visited the animals at the Jardin des Plantes.¹⁸

The son of an artist, art teacher, and pigeon-trainer, as a child Picasso would cut figures of animals for his younger sisters and •draw pigeons with his father. So immersed in animal welfare was Picasso that the killing, hunting and eating of animals was anathema. From the time he set up home in Paris, Picasso kept a •menagerie of pets including a dog, three Siamese cats and a monkey named •*Monina*, who stole his cigarettes, ate his apples and took part in the family meals as a matter of course.¹⁹ By no means was this unusual. As Ceri Crossley surmises: "At the turn of the century, one had to look hard to find a French literary figure or intellectual who didn't keep a pet of some sort."²⁰ Like many, Picasso could not have avoided the prolific •*Monkeyana* that provided a parodic parallel to the prevalence of zoological research into primatology led by •Elie Metchnikoff at the Pasteur Resource Centre in 1903.

Continuously caricatured as a •primate in popular culture from first publication of *The Origin of Species* until his demise, Darwin was no stranger to *Monkeyana*.²¹ Although the etymology of this term stemmed from the *Punch*

abolitionist cartoon of an ape bearing the placard, •*Am I a man and a brother*, published as early as 1861, by no means had *Monkeyana* abated by the fin-de-siècle appearing as regularly in print as it did in performances.²² Between 1880 and 1910, Beth Rae Gordon points out that "the number of trained monkeys increased exponentially on music-hall stages".²³ So prevalent had they become at *Folies-Bergère* and •the *Nouveau Cirque* that *Fantasio* warned of an "invasion of monkeys" that would culminate in a monkey union revolutionizing human culture.²⁴ •Drawing upon the popular conflation of monkeys with sexual licentiousness, both Picasso and Kupka had pictured monkeys in association with prostitution.²⁵ Yet in keeping with the satirical reviews in which monkeys were humanized as nobility, particularly the notorious monkey dressed in tuxedos called •*Prince Charles*, Kupka pictured two cloaked monkeys bearing crowns on their heads entitled •*Les Rois-Singes*.²⁶ Consistent with such popular duos as •James Sardner and his monkey, Jocko, in 1901 Picasso pictured a circus clown holding the hand of a monkey dressed in a red jacket, white trousers and black hat. •Such tender parodies of simians seem lifelong, as signified by Picasso's objets-trouvés sculpture of *Baboon and Young* in 1951, which he fondly called his "ancestor". Yet after visits to the Jardin des Plantes, this seems to have changed. While •Kupka portrayed himself working at his desk with his pet monkeys climbing over his drawings, •Picasso portrayed himself as a monkey.²⁷

Appearing •comparable to the parody of Darwin as an orang-outang, the monkey-as-Picasso is crouched with one arm dangling, the other curled, tail unfolding behind him, paintbrush behind one ear, crayon behind the other and a mischievous grin, the kind that Darwin likened to a "hideous grimace".²⁸ While alluding to investigations into simian creativity by primatologists, this self-portrait may suggest how Picasso would look had the trajectory of evolution been reversed following •*Prince Charles'* declaration that he was "The monkey [who] had descended from man."²⁹ The subject of extensive satire, the most reproduced cartoon capturing this inversion was by •Benjamin Rabier in 1901, entitled *La Théorie de Darwin... reversée. Le singe qui descend de l'homme*. Following this cartoon, Picasso as simian may be regarded as his quest for

devolution into a "primitive" pre-human evolutionary state in which he could become more in contact with his raw animality, spontaneity and playfulness lost by capitalism, colonization and the human demarcation from animals. Since primates were regarded as an intermediary stage between man and animal, this inversion was a means of devolving in order to evolve with new forms of creativity gained through direct contact with instinctual impulses and the energy and empathy of animal magnetism. Picasso's identification of himself with the transgressive mischief-making monkey of •Georges Méliès' 1900 film, *Le Savant et le Chimpanzé*, rather than with the gentlemanly demeanour of *Prince Charles*, was also consistent with Picasso's political alignment with Anarcho-Communism.

Rather than placing simians in their natural environment, Picasso continued to locate them in circuses as illustrated by his •*Family of Salimbanques*, •*Circus Family with Violinist* and •*Family of Acrobats with a Monkey*. Shown listening to music as attentively as the humans, Picasso conveys the comparability of the monkey's and human's physiognomy alongside their emotional and cultural sensibilities. Placed in a similar position to the circus child in the family, the monkey seems as much apart of the family as the child. Not only does the monkey then appear to be comparable to homo-sapiens and granted equal status but also embraced by modern mutualist society. •In his picturing of these circus families, Picasso then seems to bring to life Réclus' concept of *La grande famille* in which animals were not just to be embraced as performers but in "fraternal association" as members of the extended interspecies family. "Does not the horse of the Bedouin... come into the tent?" Réclus asked. "The natural sympathy existing between all these creatures harmonised them in a broad atmosphere of peace and love. [...] ... primitive man was thinking of a fraternal association. He saw in these living beings companions, and not servants."³⁰ However, in Picasso's painting, •*Family of Acrobats with a Monkey*, *La grande famille* appears to be reworked with a Darwinist Anti-Clerical twist.

While the arms of both the adults seem elongated, so do their hands to the point that they seem identical with those of the monkey – the inverse of

•Rembrandt Bugatti's human-animalization of the hands of his sculpture, *Hamadry as Baboon*. While homo-sapiens and monkey are rendered with almost identical anatomical features, particularly their elongated fingers, •also evident in Picasso's portrait of a monkey, •the penis and scrotum of the human baby is reiterated by the genitals of the monkey. Placed within the family, Picasso's monkey seems as much at home in this mutualist society as the monkey in Picasso's *Circus Family with Violinist*. Yet given the intimate proximity with which this monkey sits in relation to the mother, father and their newborn baby at this time of Separation of Church and State and Neo-Lamarckian Evolutionism, this painting seems to re-present the Holy Family as an interspecies family. At the same time while its Darwinian parody of creativity belonging exclusively to homo sapiens is parodied by both •Jouve's *Monkey with a Statuette* and •Kupka's lithograph, its parody of Biblical narratives may be illuminated when juxtaposed with this lithograph entitled *Monkey drawing a portrait of Adam and Eve with a Serpent*.

At this potent political juncture when •Roman Catholicism was being exorcised from the Third Republic while Darwin's evolutionism and Neo-Lamarckian Transformism were being proselytized as a science able to illuminate the origin of species and provide a model for Solidarism uniting French citizens across the ideological spectrum, it was crucial to reveal interspecies relationships. Instead of human-animals being demarcated from animal-animals, particularly simians, •it was significant at this juncture to demonstrate the close evolutionary nexus between human-animals and simians and their interrelationship. It was vital to find ways in which human-animals could identify with simian-animals, particularly through art and other creative performances, and ways in which they could empathize with them to the extent of imagining how they felt, thought and looked at the world – a quest that had long engaged Darwin. In picturing simians and their interspecies relationships with such empathy, 'becoming simian' for Picasso, following Deleuze's and Guattari's concept of 'becoming animal', seemed to have become integral to attaining "creative evolution" – a new form of consciousness that Bergson called "supra-consciousness at the origin of life".

ABSTRACT

Becoming Simian: Darwin, Picasso and Creative Evolution

Fae Brauer

University of East London Centre for Cultural Studies Research;

The University of New South Wales Art and Design

Unconvinced of Charles Bell's theory that the facial muscles of humans were unique in conveying expression, Charles Darwin visited London Zoo to see for himself. Continually he noticed the similarities between primates and humans in expressing pain and suffering, as well as the close proximity of the tittering of monkeys to the laughter of humans. Not only did Darwin discover that primates could use tools but also that they had the facility to make them and share them with one another. To expose the anthropocentric fallacy inherent in homosociality, in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* Darwin narrated how primates lived in closely-knit communities in which they shared their food, groomed one another while exuding compassion, cooperation and altruism. His research became seminal to Anarcho-Communism, Zoophilia, animal welfare societies and artists alongside the reconception of zoos and natural history museums – none moreso than the Musée national d'histoire naturelle in Paris under the Directorship of Darwinian Neo-Lamarckian zoologist, Edmond Perrier.

While funding facilitated expansion of the collection of live primates in the Jardin des Plantes, postcards of the Galerie des Singes taken around 1901 reveal how apes, gorillas, chimpanzees, orangutans and monkeys were situated within the Muséum displays as the culminating point in the evolution of complex organisms. The conjunctions of anatomy in the new displays to convey the Darwinian Transformist message that all organisms are associated became clear to many Modernists, particularly Picasso. That Picasso was familiar with these displays is indicated by his comments to André Malraux

about the bones he encountered there appearing “never sculpted” but “moulded” and about his having rounded off the ends whenever he drew them. Equally aware of the Jardin des Plantes, Picasso would sneak in around midnight with the son of zoologist, Joseph Deniker, both pretending to be monkeys and taunting the lions until they roared. Picasso’s performances as simian were captured by his pen and ink drawings, particularly one inscribed *Picasso par lui-même* in which the monkey-as-Picasso pictures himself with tail unfolding, paintbrush behind one ear, crayon behind the other and a mischievous grin – the kind that Darwin likened to a “hideous grimace”. By no means an isolated example, the prospect of ‘becoming simian’ was pictured by Picasso in various forms throughout his long life.

By focusing upon these conjunctions of Picasso with Darwin’s research, as mediated by the Musée national d’histoire naturelle and Anarcho-Communist discourses, this paper will explore how Picasso’s desire to become simian may be regarded as a quest for a primitive evolutionary state in contact with raw animality, spontaneity and playfulness that he considered had been lost by the civilization, colonization and rationalization of homo-sapiens and their demarcation from animals. By unravelling the relationship of Henri Bergson to Darwin in *L’Évolution Créatrice*, it will also explore how ‘becoming simian’, following Gilles Deleuze’s and Félix Guattari’s concept of ‘becoming animal’, signified for Picasso “creative evolution” – a new form of consciousness that Bergson called “supra-consciousness at the origin of life”.

¹ Twenty years ago, the prevailing scholarship on Bergson and Darwin pitted their positions as antithetical. More recent scholarship has contested this antithesis, as exemplified by Paul Antoine Miquel, “Bergson and Darwin: From an Immanentist to an Emergentist Approach to Evolution”, *Substance*, Iss. 14, vol. 36, no. 3, 2007, 42-56, and Magda Costa Carvalho and M. Patrão Neves, “Building the “True Evolutionism”: Darwin’s Impact on Henri Bergson’s Thought”, *Revista Portuguesa da Filosofia*, vol. 6, Fasc. 3, 2010, 635-642. They point out that while Darwin only ever referred to “natural selection” and “survival of the fittest” as “a provisional hypothesis or speculation”, many of his other theories were of interest to Bergson. They reveal the impact of Darwin upon Bergson from his earliest writings in 1883 when he refers to “Darwin, the great naturalist” and quotes from *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals*.

² Réclus, *Evolution et révolution*, 1880; 1891.

³ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 1911, p. 266-271; P.A.Y. Gunter, “Bergson and the War against Nature”, *The New Bergson*, ed. John Mullarkey (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

⁴ Perrier, *Les Colonies Animales*, p. 6.

⁵ Thomas Huxley, "The Struggle for Existence in Human Society", *The Nineteenth Century* (23, February 1888) pp. 161-180.

⁶ Perrier, "Préface sur l'évolution mentale", *L'intelligence des animaux* par G.-J. Romanes, 1887, p. xvii: ... j'ai essayé de la faire dans mon livre *Les Colonies animales et la formation des organismes – que le succès dans la lutte pour la vie n'est pas dû seulement à l'emploi de la force brutale ou d'une ruse de mauvais aloi : l'association, l'assistance mutuelle, la division du travail, ... la solidarité qui en résulte, ont joué dans le perfectionnement des organismes un rôle prépondérant.*

⁷ Ibid., p. 70.

⁸ Edmond Perrier, *Le Transformisme* (Paris: J.-B. Baillière et Fils, 1888; Adamant Media, 2006) pp. 326-327: *L'intelligence des grands Singes. –L'histoire de quelques-uns ... montre que la sensibilité et l'intelligence peuvent atteindre chez eux un haut degré de développement*

⁹ G.-J. Romanes, *L'Intelligence des Animaux* (Paris: Félix Alcan, Éditeur, 1887).

¹⁰ George Romanes, *Animal Intelligence* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1882) p. 480

¹¹ Ibid., p. 472.

¹² Ibid.: *Ils sont sociables, courageux et dévoués à leurs semblables. Leur amour pour leur progéniture et la compassion dont ils ont fait preuve en mainte occasion pour les êtres faibles, de leur race ou non, ne peuvent que nous inspirer de l'admiration...* .

¹³ Alphonse Milne-Edwards, *Musée d'histoire naturelle. La menagerie. Rapport au ministre de l'instruction publique* (Paris: 1891), 12: 'Enfin, j'ajouterai que les artistes trouvent, parmi les animaux tenus en captivité, des modèles précieux pour leurs études de peinture ou de sculpteur.'

¹⁴ T. H. Huxley, *Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863) French trans, 1868, *De la place de l'homme dans la nature. Joseph Deniker, Recherches anatomiques et embryologiques sur les singes anthropoïdes, Fœtus de forille et de gibbon comparés aux fœtus humains et aux anthropoïdes jeunes et adultes* (Paris: C. Reinwald, 1886).

¹⁵ Malraux, *Picasso's Mask*, p. 52.

¹⁶ Fernande Olivier, *Picasso et ses amis* (Paris: Librairie Stock, 1954).

¹⁷ Christopher Green, *Picasso, Architecture and Vertigo* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 59.

¹⁸ Malraux, *Picasso's Mask*, 1994, pp. 10-11: *A smell of mould and neglect caught me by the throat. I was so depressed that I would have chosen to leave immediately, Picasso said. But I forced myself to stay, to examine these masks, all these objects that people had created with a sacred, magical purpose, to serve as intermediaries between them and the unknown, hostile forces surrounding them, attempting in that way to overcome their fears by giving them colour and form. And then I understood what painting really meant.*

¹⁹ Mason Currey, *Daily Rituals: Pablo Picasso* (Picador, 2013) pp. 94-95; also refer Picasso's letter to Kahnweiler, 20 mai 1912, Céret, *Donation Louise et Michel Leiris : Collection Kahnweiler-Leiris* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1984) p. 165: *Pour les chiens je ai chargé Braque de me envoyer Fricka et les autres bêtes le singe et les chats.* Also refer Boris Friedewald, *Picasso's Animals* (Munich, London and New York: Prestel, 2014) pp. 59-60

²⁰ Ceri Crossley, *Consumable Metaphors: Attitudes Towards Animals and Vegetarianism in Nineteenth-Century France* (Verlag Peter Lang, 2005) p. 210.

²¹ Janet Browne, "Darwin in Caricature: A Study in the Popularisation and Dissemination of Evolution Theory", Chapter One, *The Art of Evolution: Darwin, Darwinisms and Visual Culture*, eds. Fae Brauer and Barbara Larson (Dartmore: The University of New England Press, 2009) pp. 223-243.

²² "Monkeyana", *Punch*, 18 May 1861, p. 206.

²³ Gordon, *Dances with Darwin*, 2009, p. 93.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 96, with reference to *Fantasio*, 15 May 1909, pp. 681-682.

²⁵ Pablo Picasso, *The Lady and the Monkey*, pen and ink drawing, 1897; also refer Kupka gouache of a striptease artist performing with a monkey dressed in a tophat.

²⁶ Kupka, *Les Rois-Singes*, watercolour and gouache, 1899, Walden Collection, Prague, Catalogue, 35, p. 67.

²⁷ Kupka, *Joujoux*, pen and ink, 1902, Catalogue 61, page 216.

²⁸ Charles Darwin, *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animal* (London: John Murray, 1872) p. 7.

²⁹ "Une Singe qui descend de l'homme", *Fantasio*, 1 October 1910, p. 162.
30 Élisée Réclus, "La Grande Famille," 1896.