Bird's-eye view : from surveillance to the verge of extinction - Critical narratives of interspecies relations in contemporary drone and nature photography / an abstract for **IMAGES AMONG US** 5th Helsinki Photomedia 2020 Conference by Jack Faber (Uniarts)

'Bird's-eye view : from surveillance to the verge of extinction - Critical narratives of interspecies relations in contemporary drone and nature photography' is looking at the new interspecies relations forming through contemporary photography between animals and UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle), mostly known as drones.
The presentation aims to explore - through representations in media, visual arts and cinema - specific artistic research methods, models and modules which question the way the relationships between animals and drones are fundamentally shaped by the asymmetric surveillance technologies and modes which UAVs originate from.

   Although UAVs were originally invented as military devices for surveillance photography, remotely controlled by specially trained human operators, today drones are becoming more and more autonomous. Many areas of their operations are governed by AI (Artificial Intelligence) systems, based on codes and algorithms of Machine Learning.
The triangular relationship of Man-Animal-Machine is shifting its gravity toward the Animal-Machine relationship, with the human presence in this equation moving fast out of the frame[1].

   At the same time, drones are the latest innovation in nature photography, bringing the previously elusively and expensively rare 'Bird's-eye view' to the reach of many amateurs. The politics of this image making process and its effects of his silence subjects, the animals, is hardly studied while drone nature photography is spreading like wildfire.

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1. 'We've probably come to a moment in history when most images are made by machines for other machines, with humans rarely in the loop', Trevor Paglen, Phaidon, 2018.

The development of new drones, using photographic tools of perception and traits of assimilation, is highly focused on mimicking animal appearances, movements and behavioral patterns - from the artificial pigeon surveillance drones the Chinese government recently started deploying in public areas to the Hunter/Seeker operational tactics of military attack drones and loitering munition. On the other hand, animals are also being trained to react and disable drones, as in the Dutch national police program which trains eagles to attack drones.

The presentation explores such narrative processes in the perspective of photographic practices which might suggest ways to counter the asymmetric technological strategies - known broadly as 'The Drone Doctrine' -used for the appropriation of animal territories and traits by drones.
The Drone Doctrine, developed by military-industrial complex strategists, is a hybridization of human-machine interfaces with new war doctrines, classic armed conflict philosophies and political agendas. The Drone Doctrine strives for total domination of targeted areas through technological superiority, mostly by using photographic images and their analysis, which is achieved by asymmetric means of engagement.

Asymmetrical engagement, which became the principal design for the appropriation and militarization of public spaces in the current century, is based on conflict between sides which radically differ in their strategies, access to resources and technologies. Becoming more autonomous through AI asymmetric technologies while tending toward the mimicking of animals through shape, movements and traits, the animals themselves are assimilated and at the same time disavowed, exiled and annihilated.

Instead of seeing drones as potential replacements for animals[1] on the verge of extinction, the presentation is further exploring the possibility of facilitating an increase awareness of the partnership we can form with the species around us.

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1. as envisioned intellectually, emotionally and spiritually by Philip K. Dick's *'Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?', Doubleday, 1968.*