

# RACHEL ROSE SITTING FEEDING SLEEPING

Introduced by Ruba Katrib

I shot *Sitting Feeding Sleeping* in a cryogenics lab, where nitrogen-pumped bodies circulate their own blood. In a robotics perception lab, where machines read human emotion. And in zoos, where animals live extended lives emptied of sexual, social, survival cues. I used these three spaces as prosthetics for understanding deathfulness — being alive, feeling dead.

## Sitting Feeding Sleeping

2013, 9 minutes 49 seconds, HD video with sound

## Introduced by Ruba Katrib

**Ruba Katrib:** *Sitting, Feeding, Sleeping* takes us on a very particular journey through contemporary constructions created around different life forms, from medical breakthroughs to basic scientific facts to animal care within zoos. What was your research process for this work, and how did you decide on the connections between the information and images? The video remains fairly abstract, although still full of content.

**Rachel Rose:** When the project began, I was doing two things at once and it wasn't clear to me why I was doing either. I was researching the way different cultures determine when a body is dead, and I was taking aimless, wandering visits to zoos. Looking back, I can see this as my way of not being alone with what I was feeling — which was a kind of numbness.

The research went unexpectedly, and I ended up following the sources of the papers I was reading. It was this that led me to interview people at the robotics perception lab at UC San Diego, and the cryogenics lab in Arizona. But I didn't end up using these interviews. I felt the places themselves could express what was said.

When I started editing, I didn't want to label each space, but create one visceral feeling. The video was a place where I could be more conscious, sensitive to what I had experienced. I could see this feeling of deadness latch with the slowness of the animals' movements. Or see the fluorescent, vague light of the cryogenics lab link with that of the zoo. The video was a tool: take these experiences, edit them (literally) and return them as more transparent expressions of this numbness than they could be alone, or before.

**RK:** Can you talk more about the idea of "deathfulness" that you use? I find it interesting how you weave a subjective anxiety about death into a more expanded framework, articulating the range of different stages of death and life, also as states that might be more indeterminate than we can imagine. This also gets us into a conversation about "quality of life," which I think is dealt with in a compelling way within in the video. How can we gauge or even understand this concept of quality, as our relationship to life forms through science and technology becomes even more complex?

**RR:** Death is the most abstract, vacant state I can think of. So deathfulness, is when something is full of it's own vacant abstraction.

**RR:** Death is the most abstract, vacant state I can think of. So deathfulness, is when something is full of it's own vacant abstraction.

One example might be the polar bear in the video. Last winter, I shot him on a rare snow-filled day. The climate finally resembled his natural glacial life. But after years in containment, he had so adapted to a version of life populated with fake rocks and plastic toys, in temperate New York, that he seemed to have lost sensitivity for snow. He didn't react at all. He had absorbed the zoo's flatness into himself, adapted himself as that abstraction.

In emotion, it's more obvious. Its expressions are depression, numbness, and boredom.

I think when things get far enough away from the particular, they become too abstract go back. And when those abstractions are close enough to us to be re-absorbed, deathfulness becomes a quality of our lives.

**RK:** How do you articulate that condition, of deathfulness, with the state of dreaming? The video takes on a stream of consciousness and dreamlike mood, underscoring the sometimes-blurry line between being awake and sleeping. It's as if the different states of death can also be tied to different states of consciousness, which we all experience.

**RR:** This question reminds me of when I was young, maybe 7 or 8. I would sit in my room repeating one word over and over again, like 'rice.' When I'd first say it, it felt as though it legitimately referred to that white thing you eat. But as I repeated it, the word and the meaning would drift apart. The feeling of saying 'rice' would entirely separate from that concrete white thing. Everything would feel uneasy, and movable.

When you repeat a word over and over again, you can literally feel the distance between the concrete sound and its meaning grow farther and farther apart, the emptiness expanding in the gap.

The shots in the video range from being hyper close to distant. Distance is often tied to the gradation from aliveness to deadness. The closer up, the more concrete and the more alive. The more distant, the more abstract and the less alive. What I was trying to express was that all this is flexible. That this feeling of distance can be in things you think are close, and so on. Like bringing the yellow from the plastic bottle next to the polar bear forward, so that it fills the screen. Or by making the crackling of the panda's bamboo come in a few seconds too late, and loudly. This re-editing of distance comprises what I think of as dreaming, but also, as perceiving.

## **Credits**

Courtesy of the artist

2013, 9 minutes 49 seconds

[www.rachellrose.com](http://www.rachellrose.com)