

FLOCK

By Chloé Roubert with audio expertise from Kasia Gladki

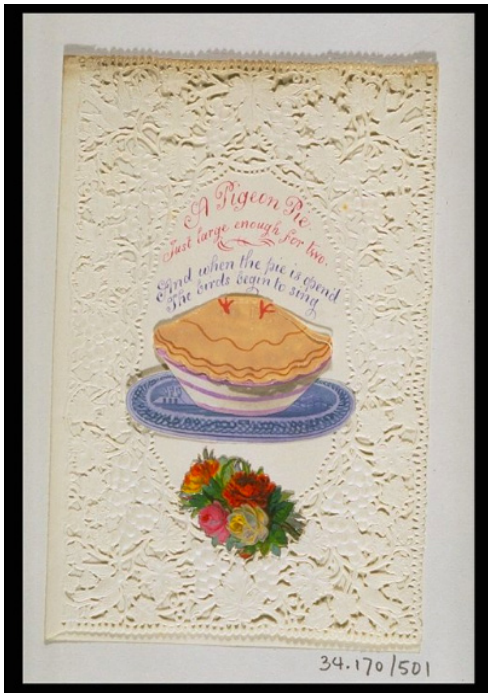
FLOCK is an audio installation based on the movement and sound of Chinatown Centre's most avid frequenters – the local pigeon flock. For the duration of the fair, the recorded audio of their cooing and wings will intermittently resonate throughout the venue. Bringing these urban fauna sounds inside the fair will evoke the way humans extract and classify the reality around them in order purify and exclude what is deemed uncomfortable: considering certain animals pests, appropriating culture or gentrifying neighbourhoods are all results of this drive. The project aims at thinking more holistically about the living and ideological ecosystems that make up our everyday. This map accompanies the piece, and traces these local pigeons' behaviours.



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Mr Fantastic, le pigeon le plus cher au monde: 500.000€!



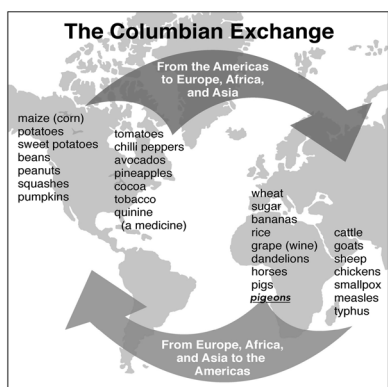
9.

Cher Ami

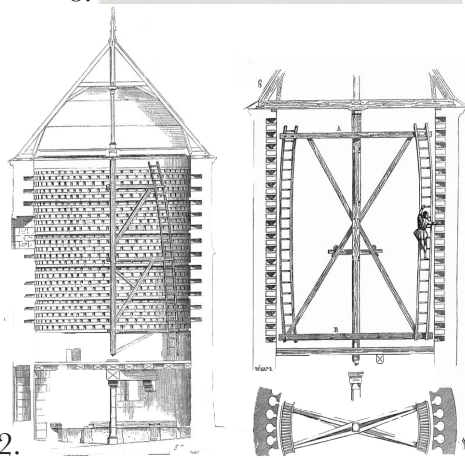
The stuffed body of Cher Ami on display at the Smithsonian Institution

Born	May 1910
Died	June 13, 1919 (aged 9) Fort Monmouth, New Jersey
Place of display	Smithsonian Institution
Allegiance	United States of America
Service/branch	United States Army
Years of service	1914 - 1918
Unit	77th Division
Battles/wars	World War I
Awards	Croix de Guerre

10.



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13.

GIANT RUNT CLUB

615 Brock Ave



Scientifically referred to as rock doves, rock pigeons or columbia livea, pigeons, like humans, each have their own set of unique characteristics: their plumage can come in grey, rust, gold, white or black with various wing bars and body spots. These are called morphs. Body types vary as well as feathers that can be straight, undulated or curly, longer around the tarsus (ankles), sprout in various directions around the throat, crown, belly or breast, and eye colouring can vary between white, grey, pearl, blue, coral, orange and black. These differences are observable right outside Chinatown Centre where there is a flock of around 50 pigeons.

Some of the most famous of these associations is Charles Darwin's pigeons (he was a famous pigeon breeder, also called pigeon fancier) that, with their numerous intergenerational morphs, were important in changing how humans conceive of biological evolution. While there are fewer and fewer pigeon fanciers with the emergence of new forms of pet-ownership (dogs) and collective entertainment (television, sports), Toronto is home to a few pigeon coops, including one of white pigeons (doves) on Rusholme St near Dundas St, and to one pigeon clubhouse, the Giant Runt Club of Canada on Brock Ave. The giant runt is a type of pigeon characterized by a heavy weight (2 to 3 pounds), small beak, broad chest, imposing posture and soft wings.

CHINATOWN CENTRE

222 Spadina Ave

A beautifully coordinated ballet of pigeons flies routinely from Chinatown Centre to 231 Spadina every 20 minutes or so. They fly in unison when there is no threat, and will part in groups when one of the red-capped hawks living downtown comes looking for sustenance between late morning and early afternoon. The flock uses organized disorganization, similar to a military tactic as well as speed to flee.

In fact through strategic reproduction humans have created pigeons that can fly 480 km to 970 km in a race at speeds of around 125 to 150 km per hour. Recently Mr Fantastic, a racer, sold for 500,000 euros.

A female generally lays two eggs. The two parents equally share the incubation for around 18,5 days; the male stays from midmorning to the end of the afternoon and the female from late afternoon till the morning. The most active reproduction season is between May and August but if food is abundant they can reproduce all year.

The neighbourhood has a number of pretty active pigeon feeders including one that will drop-off bags of bread crumbs in front of the statue of Sun Yat-sen. Humans feeding pigeons increase the size of the flock.

PHO HANG

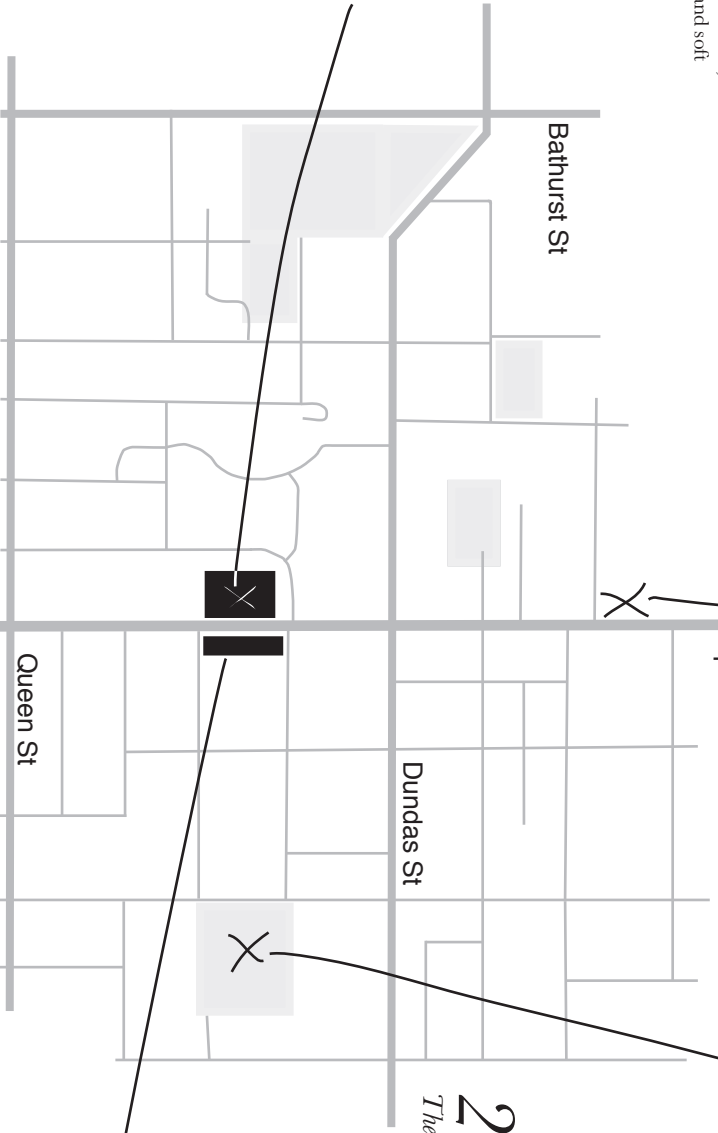
350 Spadina Ave

Unlike their cousins the passenger pigeons (extinct since 1914) and the mourning doves, pigeons are not native North Americans. European humans brought them on ships as a key and easy source of protein: pigeons procreate and grow quickly and have no desire to escape their man-made nests (coops) thanks to 10 centuries of human domestication. In fact they reproduced and grew faster in size than most birds till anti-biotics and electricity reached farms.

Anthropologist Mary Douglas, famously argued that for a society to function it has to have an agreed cosmology—a set of organizing principles that provide purpose and rationale. Exceptions to these

principles are anomalies that threaten the system, and therefore are casted as dirty or impure: "dirt is matter out of place". Accordingly, the pigeon is often considered much dirtier than the industrial chicken, because it isn't part of the agro-industrial food complex rather is in between spaces—in between the domesticated and the feral, the pet and the food.

In certain cultures squab remains a meal of choice. In China it is often served in soup or fried. Pho Hung, a restaurant opened since 1989, sells a fried pigeon dish for \$16. Interestingly there has been a growth in demand for squab meat in Toronto with the rise of the Asian population in the GTA.



221-241 SPADINA

The Siles of Change

Originally from the cliffs of the mediterranean and Middle-East, pigeons adapted well to our city's built environment. Pigeons are very imaginative and see protected ledges under overpasses, store awnings or abandoned cracked façades as analogous to their native habitat. A number of nests are visible in this area, on some of the ledges.

Also on this block are traces of some of the changes occurring in Chinatown with some of the older grocery, Chinese medicine specialty and tourist shops closing down, leaving stores focusing on cupcakes and "surtwear" to open up. With these new establishments and clientele come new expectations of urban cleanliness.

Illustrations 1. A 'Jacobin' pigeon competing during the Annual Pigeon Association Meeting called The Grand National in 2010. The first mention of pigeons being bred for colour appears to be in a poem written by the Greek poet Homer in 950 BC. Today pigeons are bred according to aesthetic standards such as colour (white, grey or "blue", rust or "red"), feather texture (curly, long, short, etc.), feather positioning (neck, feet, wings, etc.), eye colour (orange, red, grey, etc.) and morphology. Pigeon fanciers are declining but compete every year in provincial, regional and national competitions. (Keep an eye out for these varieties in the city!) Photograph of Champion Old Dutch Capuchine, Blue Bar OC #1354 Rated Excellent by Layne Gardner (2010). **2.** Package of a Dove soap bar with the famous icon of a dove. The difference between a pigeon and a dove is arbitrary because there is none: the dove is a white pigeon. Pigeons come in many different shades and plumage patterns. **3.** Photograph from 1915 of a Swiss cyclist part of the mountain troops during WWI with a backpack of carrier pigeons. The pigeon has the ability to return 'home' from long distances and has been used extensively throughout military history to exchange messages about troop locations, lost soldiers, battles won and military advancements. Photograph from the Swiss National Museum (1915). **4.** Pigeons were domesticated for their proclivity to reproduce fast and their natural tendency to always fly home making them the perfect source of protein (till quite recently pigeon pie was very common). Indeed a pigeon is very faithful to its nest – both to its physical location and to the partner it shares it with. Their fidelity as well as their spring 'flirting' whereby couple 'kiss' (exchange the bile necessary to feed their young) have made doves often the subject of Valentine's day cards such as this one. Card from the Museum of London (1860-1879). **5.** On May 25th 2017, the BBC reported that customs officials in Kuwait had apprehended a pigeon carrying drugs in a miniature backpack. The bird, caught near the customs building in Abdali, close to the border with Iraq total had a total of 178 pills in the fabric pocket attached to its back. In the 12th century AD Sultan Nur-ed-din built pigeon lofts and dovecotes in the cities of Cairo and Damascus, where pigeons were used to carry messages from Egypt to cities as far away as Baghdad in modern day Iraq. This extensive system of communication, using pigeons to link cities hundreds of miles apart, is considered to be the first organised pigeon messaging service. Since then organised crime has been using pigeons quite well too: in 2015, prison guards in Costa Rica caught a pigeon carrying cocaine and cannabis in a zipped pouch and in 2011, Colombian police discovered a pigeon that was unable to fly over a high prison wall because of the weight of a package of cocaine and marijuana strapped to it. Screenshot taken on June 28th 2018 from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40042260>. **6.** Many humans are scared of pigeons and dislike their feces (but have a high tolerance for dogs) and as such will go great lengths to scare pigeons away. This contraption developed by a brand called Lucifer uses sound waves proven to affect babies to frighten them away. It is available for 11 euros on www.amazon.fr. **7.** Pigeon whistles (ko-ling), are used in Beijing extensively: mounted on the tail of a pigeon, when the bird is in flight the multiple aeolian flutes create beautiful soundscapes. It is a dying art form as more and more pigeons are used for their more lucrative racing abilities rather than their musical talents. This multiple aeolian flute is made from bamboo and was purchased by the Horniman collections in 1998. **8.** Pigeon releases are often used as a form of celebration or symbolic new beginning. Releasing doves at weddings are part of this tradition as is the release of peace doves by the Pope. Famously in 2014 Pope Francis set free two doves (for peace in the Ukraine) quickly before being preyed upon by a seagull and a crow. Generally released pigeons will fly back to their coop, thanks to their incredible sense of direction, however some animal activists have called this practice barbaric as pigeons are quite defenseless and often get attacked before reaching their homes. Here is a photograph from the New York City Archives of "Women releasing pigeons" for the Dominican Republic Participation in New York's World Fair in 1939. **9.** The first historical mention of pigeons being used for the purposes of sport is in the Jewish Talmud (AD 200 – 500). Pigeons can fly at average speeds of up to 125 km per hour but have been recorded flying at 150 km. Pigeon racing is not only a global sport, it is a rich industry with stud pigeons and race winners fetching huge sums of money. Mr. Fantastic has recently been purchased from its Belgian owner by a Chinese racer for 500,000 euros – the most expensive pigeon in the world. It is common for pigeons to fail to return home after a race, with large numbers of birds falling prey to exhaustion, weather conditions and birds of prey. Many of the survivors join feral flocks in urban areas and integrate quickly with feral birds. This is a screenshot of a Belgium magazine covering the record auction that can be found here: <http://www.lameuse.be/122147/article/2017-09-06/mr-fantastic-le-pigeon-le-plus-cher-au-monde-500000eu>. **10.** Cher Ami was a female pigeon in the British army. On the 3rd October 1918, 500 British men from the 77th Infantry were cut off from food and ammunition and were being bombarded by friendly fire. Within 24 hours over 300 men had died. After two pigeons with the message "Many wounded, we cannot evacuate", attached to their legs were shut down by the Germans, Cher Ami with the message "We are along road parallel to 276:4. Own artillery is dropping a barrage directly on us. For Heaven's sake, stop it!" flew the 25 miles back to her loft at Division Headquarters in 25 minutes; and this through enemy fire and despite having been shot through the breast, blinded in one eye, covered in blood, and with a leg hanging by only a tendon. She is often identified as a he, was awarded the Croix de Guerre and a little wooden leg. This is a screenshot of her Wikipedia page. **11.** Originally from the cliffs of the Mediterranean and Middle-East, Mesopotamian cuneiform tablets and Egyptian hieroglyphics suggest that pigeons were domesticated more than 5,000 years ago. Europeans brought them over to the Americas for food mainly but also as a form of entertainment and company. As they escaped they adapted well to our city buildings' ledges (they resemble their native Mediterranean settings). This Columbia Exchange diagram demonstrates the other forms of fauna and flora that were exchanged between continents. **12 + 13.** Pigeon Coops exist throughout the world and history. This diagram of a 17th century pigeon coop from France and photograph from 1929 taken of a Lower East Side pigeon coop illustrate the different forms of habitat humans have created for pigeons. Pigeon coops need to be elevated, permit entry, be airy and clean. If once all urban roofs had pigeon coops, their numbers are decreasing throughout the world with modernity's new pets, new forms of entertainment and new foods replacing pigeons.

GRANGE PARK

Berkeley St & McCaul St

Grange Park offers a nice setting to observe pigeons. Pigeons drink by sucking water and using their beaks like straws. Most birds sip water and then throw their head back to swallow. They will also use fountains to clean and cool off. Around their throats most pigeons have iridescent colours that go from purple to turquoise. This is the result of the refraction of incident light caused by the microscopic structure of the feathers.

Domestic pigeons can live up to 31 years old, but those that live in the wild have a lifespan of 4 to 6 years. Pigeons are one of the most intelligent birds; they pass the 'mirror test' and also have a strong memory; watch a pigeon-feeder walk into the park, and before crumbs have even been laid out you will be surprised to see

the pigeons flocking in! They also have exceptional navigational skills. A pigeon will always fly back to where the food and soul mate are. This means that you can drag a pigeon to any geographical location, even one it has never been to in the past and it will fly home. Cher Ami a female pigeon that won Le Croix de Guerre for saved 200 British soldiers during World War One by safely making it to her coop.

Pigeons feed themselves, often in small groups, early in the morning and right before dawn and mostly consume grains, fruits and sometimes invertebrates. But human activities can alter this. In cities pigeons can regroup around a pigeon-feeder anytime during the day and consume bread, popcorn, grapes and peanuts.