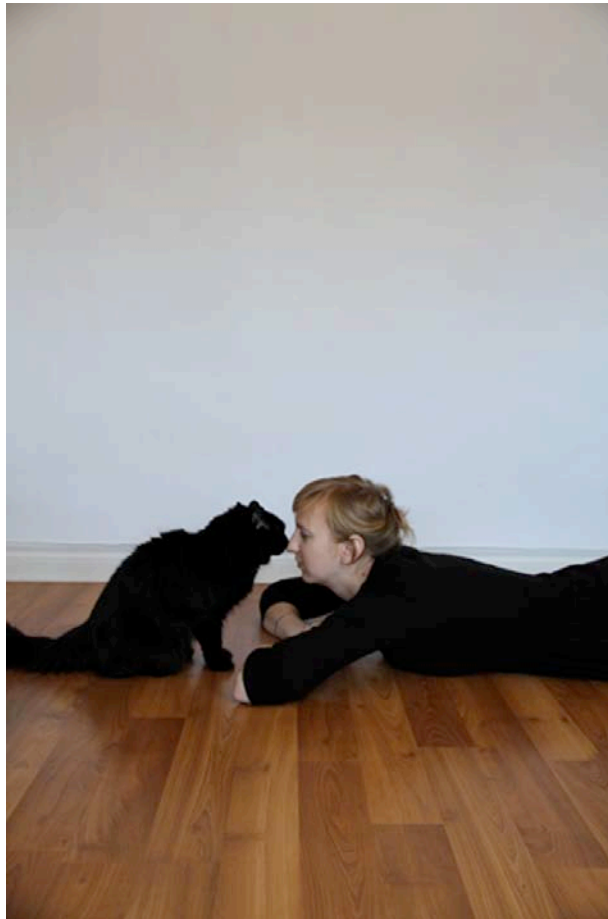


ANIMALS IN THE ROOM



LISA VISSER

A thesis paper presented to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in
the Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design program.

ESP GALLERY, 1086 ½ Queen St. West, 24 August – 3 September 2011
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ANIMALS IN THE ROOM

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ABSTRACT

Animals in the Room is a thesis project consisting of written scholarship and a series of performances that investigate communication between human and animal species while expanding upon concepts of performance art. In *Animals in the Room*, I discuss human-animal relationships in the context of contemporary performance art practice, focusing on potential frameworks, methodologies, and mythologies contained therein. *Animals in the Room* explores the ways in which humans and animals collectively cultivate self-knowledge and connection across the barriers of our species. It is an inquiry into the removal of these barriers and the absence of division. It explores the human-animal relationship through research-led performative practice.

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and to what we become when we become together.

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We are training each other in acts of communication we barely understand.
Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 2008b: 16

INTRODUCTION

Animals in the Room is a Master's thesis project that responds to my developing and sometimes confounding relationship with my cat Sushi.¹ In my research, I attempt to understand this specific bond within a more expansive framework of human-animal relationships. I focus on applying my lived experience, daily observation, and learned knowledge to existing structures for understanding human-animal connections, scholarship, cultural production, and contemporary art practice. During the research and production of my Master's thesis, I realized this project by developing my artistic practice through experimentation, observation, and speculation and by continuing to nurture an ongoing inquiry into human-animal communication. *Animals in the Room* is a project led by process and performance, through the intensification and concentrated development of my intuitive, artistic practice, and by intersecting theory with presumption and ambiguity. It responds to two central questions: in what ways have human-animal pet relationships amplified an existing form of communication between species?; and to what extent has research and production in contemporary performative practice investigated these forms of human-animal relationships and communication?

Animals in the Room strives to address human-animal relationships through an experimental and speculative dialogue with and about animals. I aim to locate this

¹ Sushi is my companion animal. She is a 5-year old, black, medium-haired female feline with white bursts at her neck and lower belly.

dialogue as it is established through presumption and experience, relying on an understanding of the animal as a sentient being. This sentient animal is modern, postmodern, posi-postmodern.² In attributing consciousness and emotions to animals, the degree to which animality and affect are read varies with each pet relationship; this project establishes and builds upon the premise of the sentient animal being capable of emotion, contribution, and communication. In this paper, I acknowledge that animals do have emotion, but that these emotions are unknown, mysterious, and determined only by subjective human experience and language.

The animal specific to this thesis paper is the domesticated creature, the pet.³ In the establishment of this thesis project, I identify a posthumanist framework⁴ within which to consider animality and concepts of “becoming with”⁵ and “being with”⁶. These concepts are not synonymous, and I detail contrasting and complementary elements in my understanding of these phenomenological determinants with my description of “coming apart.” I take note of theoretical developments related to animals and the way that animals are commonly understood, and I reflect on concepts of human-animal

² Posi-postmodern is a theoretical and methodological approach to understanding relationships, concepts, troubles, and truths. I will describe in detail the origins of posi-postmodern later in the text in TWO, pg 63.

³ By using the term ‘domesticated’, I am referring specifically to close pet relationships, generally with cats and dogs. Although the term ‘domestic animal’ can refer to any animal that has been ‘tamed’ by humans, such as cows, sheep, pigs, or horses, for the sake of this paper I will not refer to those other animals unless noted.

⁴ This is posthumanism as developed by Cary Wolfe, which I will discuss in depth in TWO, pg 53.

⁵ “Becoming with” is a term that Donna Haraway introduces in the text *When Species Meet* (2008b). It refers to the moment of meeting (between humans and animals) and what results from that meeting; it is an ontological and biological shift. I will discuss “becoming with” throughout the text, specifically further in ONE, pg 17.

⁶ “Being with” (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 1953) is a concept that describes the very nature of being human and of being human with another. I will apply this concept of “being with” to humans and animals later in ONE, pg 20.

relationships and interspecies connections in philosophy and psychoanalysis. With speculation and in light of the possibility of intuitive communication, I outline an underdeveloped potential that is present in all human-animal relationships and investigate selected artwork by artists who have offered insight into intuitive relationships with animals in their artistic practice. Furthermore, I detail diverse practices in the recent history of performance art and the way that mythologies of the artist and of performance events have been encouraged and emphasized.⁷ These mythologies reflect an aura, formed by combining the medium of photography with performance and mediated through the only available remains of early performance art: still images with vague supplementary information.⁸ What then confronts the contemporary academic and student of performance is the potential of the work existing as mythology as a consequence of our reliance on still image documentation. The mythology that is developed through performance art by this documentation and narrative is emphasized and pushed forward through my own artistic experiments. I include in my thesis an investigation of artwork that elaborates on conventional notions

⁷ Certainly, there are artists who have manipulated video and photo documentation for an alternate understanding of performance, such as Yves Klein (*Leap Into the Void*, 1960). This practice was integral for the mythologization of certain performances: an experience of an event created without being present for the event itself. However, as Amelia Jones argues in *"Presence" in absentia* (1997), this mediated relationship to performance resonates with any relationship to any cultural product (12). "While the live situation may enable the phenomenological relations of flesh-to-flesh engagement, the documentary exchange (viewer/reader <--> document) is equally intersubjective" (Jones, 12). Jones goes on to point out that the intention of the artist falls under scrutiny by the audience, regardless of being present or reading an image of the performance, and in some cases the hindsight afforded the viewer of an image may create more meaning and comprehension around the historical and narrative processes of the artwork.

⁸ An example of this is Joseph Beuys's *I Like America and America Likes Me*, 1974, which I will discuss later in ONE, pg 37.

of performance to develop a discussion of performativity in practice. Throughout this work, I consider degrees of performativity on the part of both the artist and the animal.

In my performative practice, I consider the removal of implied barriers between our species - mine and Sushi's - and seek to examine the implications of the human-animal dichotomy for our relationship. Through this process, I adopt an overarching ideology of what I call posi-postmodernism, a strategy for the everyday; it is both a theoretical perspective and a conceptual approach. Posi-postmodernism acknowledges Sushi and me in the human-animal dichotomy yet enables me to establish the concept of human-animal relationships, along with signified barriers and limitations to our communication.

Animals in the Room captures a momentary glimpse at my relationship with Sushi. In this glimpse, one can see Sushi and me perform together, play together, love each other, antagonize each other: we are companions and co-dependants. It is important to note the distinction of species: that we are human and animal. However, in this project, I speculatively position Sushi and myself as void of definitive species. I playfully consider ourselves species-less when we are together in the room, performing with one another; I do not regard Sushi as an animal collaborator. Instead, in our performances, I position the term collaborator as being irrelevant; while certainly we are both performing, we are performing together in order to "become with." When I photograph only Sushi in the frame of the camera, she is "being" without a sense of performing. The same can be said when I am the sole performer in the frame; however, when we perform and are together we are "being with." By positioning ourselves as

performers and companions, the experimentations that are represented in *Animals in the Room* toy with the absurd and the speculative. Despite advances in animal cognition and animal communication, much about animal emotion remains unknown. As such, I rely on human presumption while queering the possibility of knowing Sushi's thought process and emotion. The inherent truth of working with an animal in performative practice is that our shared emotions are known only by speculation, sensation, and a visceral notion rather than by fact or data.

This thesis is built upon the idea of performing a relationship. It is a process-based, intuitive, and reflexive project. The process, performative and experimental, leads reflexive research and intuitive responses to human-animal relationships — specifically, my relationship with Sushi. As the human creator and the lead performer/researcher/producer in this project, I take actions from my daily life with Sushi and stage a glimpse of this action for the audience, mediated through still photography. In my everyday relationship with Sushi, I believe we love each other, I project my feelings onto her, I care for her, and I understand that she reciprocates this affection. I believe in the essential nature of our relationship. In our performances, I position our relationship as transcendental. We communicate through our learned language and experience, a mixture of read body language and signs, verbal communication (in that I observe that Sushi responds to my voice), and intuitive transmission of affect. Sushi's role in this project is both as an autonomous being and as a reflexive medium for our intuitive relationship. Lacking an ability to speak plainly, I project Sushi's experience and the results of our research-creation onto this thesis

project. *Animals in the Room* is a dual projection: one, by the process of reading Sushi's emotion and experience, and two, by interpreting this observation through my own filtered authorship, subjectivity and constructed frameworks. This leads me to suggest that our relationship is deliberately elusive, ambiguous, and confounding due to my implicit projection of intention and human language. My aim in the project is to emphasize speculation while illustrating a cultivated intuitive awareness and communication across the species divide. This project may offer a subjective resolution to tenuous human-animal relationships, providing an example upon which to break down dichotomies and negotiate new possibilities while challenging pre-existing notions of interspecies interactions. *Animals in the Room* also questions traditional modes of performance, relationship, and process.

Some primary objectives of this thesis project have been to research and experiment with concepts of "becoming with" through performance. In the process of these performances, I have considered experimentation as an integral component of my methodology, which has allowed me the freedom for complexity in theorization. Essential to this work was to develop a process in which constructed limits became limitless, invisible, and irrelevant. Key in the process of performance and speculative experimentation is to find a balance and disrupt it, to acknowledge limitations in order to move forward. Furthermore, I have been investigating an expansive understanding of performance as it relates to humans, animals, and contemporary art, considering the removal of barriers between species and the process of "becoming with" that is expressed in performance. I have used certain terms in this project, such as 'species',

'phenomenal', and 'posi-postmodern', adopting and adapting to the authority of human language to shape that terminology in order to provide connections to my own concepts and processes.

This speculative research questions a human need to connect with animals on a sensorial and intuitive level that is based on shared communication. Humans have some limited information on how animals communicate among themselves, with other animal species, and with humans. However, much of what we understand about human communication with animals relies on projection and hopefulness, a human need to connect to another being. My thesis project therefore contributes to a questioning of this connection (and this need) that we feel towards animals in spite of the limitations of our species, in spite of rationality and scientific knowledge. Heidegger notes that it is impossible to know animals, much less ourselves or other humans - and yet that is the very inspiration to "be with": to "be with" is to know.

This thesis furthermore contributes to an inquiry of practice-led research, an ambivalent and sometimes haphazard approach to artistic and creative applications. By framing my performances with Sushi as experimental research, resulting in observational data, visceral notion, and documentation in the form of the artwork, I am investigating possible implications that practice-led research can have on performative practice.

The full discourse of human-animal (in academia, what can be referred to as 'animal studies')⁹ is penetrated by the weight of ethics. The notion of ethical treatment pervades, explicitly or implicitly, all human interactions with animals, referencing a long and very complicated history of human mistreatment and exploitation of other creatures. Acknowledging this history should enable progressive movement forward in leveling respectful treatment of animals. In doing so, we can value a multitudinous species with extraordinary abilities and lives, and we can take care in our everyday relationships to approach animals with thoughtfulness and openness. This thesis, therefore, strives to take note of this history while enabling Sushi as an individual being deserving of respect, without sensationalizing the concept of a live animal presence in performance art.

Unfortunately, 'animal studies' has also become associated with attempting to solve the species divide: to find a solution to a very complicated problem that is engraved on our collective human memory. Contemporary research in academia is vast and can sometimes be totalizing by trying to comprehend the discourse and solve larger questions of humanity and animality. There is also a tendency in academia to marginalize the political rhetoric of animal studies, creating more ambiguity, complexity, and texture. In my thesis, I attempt to take note of this discourse while avoiding a rehearsal of what is already present in this discourse. I endeavor to move

⁹ It is important to note the differences between academic "field" and an academic "discipline". A discipline is a branch of research and scholarship, whereas a field is the study within that discipline.

forward in my research and practice, and I will reference the timeless discussion of human-animal without being limited by it.

ANIMALS OF EVERYDAY

Investigating an artistic and scholarly discourse on the notion of animals, in this thesis I reflect upon a familiar element of our everyday lives - the domesticated animal, or even the basic concept of animals - and I consider our relationship as humans with this animal. When speaking specifically of the domesticated animal (cats and dogs, commonly) we¹⁰ may consider this animal as one that some of us sleep and snuggle with: it is a being that we care for, and presumably, we believe it cares for us. It is a creature that we may conceptualize as having an animal personality with narrative thought process and complicated emotion. We coddle this animal; we anthropomorphize this animal; we make this animal a part of our families; we love this animal. We believe in the possibility that this animal also loves us.

Beyond the domestic space, the notion of animals is unavoidable in contemporary culture. Even if we do not have a close relationship with an animal as a pet, we are bombarded with animal imagery, animalistic concepts, animal metaphor. Animals are a part of our common experience: in addition to pet relationships, we interact with pests that we try to avoid or dispose of, we pay for the privilege of gazing at wild animals up close, and animal representation is integral in visual media such as film, fashion, art, advertising, and design. Many of us also consume animals, with the

¹⁰ I am using the term "we" in this paragraph to note humans with pets, as a generalized and otherwise non-specific group of people.

exception of vegetarians/vegans like myself. We farm and harvest animals for their meat, milk, skin, bone, and fur. Our culture is satiated with animals, concepts of the animal, animal imagery, animal products.

But where do we acquire a definition of what is animal? Colloquially, 'animal' means what humans conceptualize as *not being human*; however, biologically, we - humans - are animals. The particular term 'the animal' is generally avoided in emergent discourse because it is a deeply monolithic concept that relies on all animals being alike and yet distinct from humans; the reality is that humans are animals, and animals are more varied than the term 'the animal' can imply. I intend to look more specifically at the relationships between animals and humans while concretely investigating my relationship to my own pet cat. In addition, I consider how the inextricable bond and connection I feel for my companion animal can be expressed in other relationships. In using the terms 'animals' and 'humans' in my text, I am also creating and confirming a division between animal and human species. This strategy in dictation merely avoids confusion, and I aim to demonstrate throughout this text and artistic project that we are the same. Posthuman scholars such as Haraway and Cary Wolfe have developed an understanding of what 'species' can mean. In the development of my thesis, I evoke questions of species boundaries between Sushi and me within this posthumanist framework.

Animals have long been connected to the cultural development of human history. Evidence for this can be found in Adam's naming of the beasts in *Genesis*, in the cave drawings at Lascaux, in the taxonomic *Bestiary*, or in allegorical unicorn tapestries;

this idea is embodied in the hybrid and talking animals of myth and legend. The domestication of cats was recorded as early as old Kingdom Egypt,¹¹ and the recent times of modernity when wild animals were kept as prizes, given as gifts from one sovereign to another, or used in sport. The confinement of horses, cows, chickens, and sheep for utilitarian purposes also perpetuated the concept of the dumb beast: void of emotion and incapable of suffering, disconnected from animal subjectivity. The propriety of animals also increased a division between predator and prey, and humans have since been developing a hierarchy of utilitarian or companion animals. This hierarchy is based on use-value and aesthetics, which latter is exemplified in the competition of show dogs, cats, and horses (Kalof, 2007).¹² This development of human-animal relationships and animal representation in human culture is long and complicated, and the relationships themselves are still tenuous and unresolved.

The convoluted nature of our understanding and categorization of animals makes it impossible to provide one sweeping generalization about how animals are represented in popular culture. Taking reflection of a shifting notion of animals, which includes considering what animality means within the framework of our understanding of our own humanity, our notion of animals is anything but static or definitive. Despite the rise of posthuman thinking, a culture of human superiority still exists either through literal dominance or based on an idea that all animals rely upon humans to provide

¹¹ There is evidence of cats as being semi-defied, mummified, and preserved in carefully constructed tombs with humans. However, cats living in Egypt at this time were also utilitarian as assisting humans in wild fowl hunts (Howard 1951: 150).

¹² The vast scholarship produced on the presence of animals in human history is beyond the scope of this thesis. The text by Kalof is only one of many that detail a development of animal representation and human-animal relationships in history.

for them.

The animals that are represented in popular culture can be anthropomorphized, given a human voice or expression. Animal representation provides an arena of diverse examples of animals on which we continue to project our desires and emotions. These animals can be cute, soft, ideal, and humorous, or wild and savage. A celebrity animal like Maru¹³ is like your pet only better, because you don't have to clean up after him. In certain literary genres, animals are narrators. Animal narrators are common in children's literature as well as in books targeting young adults, such as *Black Beauty* (Anna Sewell, 1877), *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* (Jack London, 1903; 1906). Additionally, there are essential literary examples geared toward adults: for example, *Beautiful Joe* (Margaret Marshall Saunders, 1894); evocative and omniscient animal narrators like the complicated *Timbuktu* by Paul Auster (1999) or *Animal Farm* (George Orwell, 1945); *Watership Down* (Richard Adams, 1972); and the notable graphic novel *Maus* (Art Spiegelman 1986; 1991), among many others. Through these examples, human authors capture a sense of humanity, an emotion that we identify with being human, in the voice of an animal. These animal characters have complicated emotions and strong politics, goals, and motivations, and the narratives reflect lives comparable to how we understand our own human lives. In film, through a diverse range of representation, animals are transformed into humans and back again, turned into

¹³ Maru is a charming, awkward, eccentric, and famous Internet cat (also known as *Box Cat*) made popular by the videos that his human companion, Mugumogu, creates and posts on YouTube. At the time of the creation of this text (March 2 2011) Maru had over 100,000 subscribers to his YouTube channel. "Maru", accessed February 27 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/user/mugumogu>.

monsters, act as a character foil or as the voice of reason, or are used for comic relief. A more contemporary example is the phenomenon of YouTube and the Internet, which have increased the ways we can observe and interact with animals through the screen, providing a diverse bestiary of animals that are filmed, photographed, put on display, or given poor Internet grammar and language, as with the *LOLCats*.¹⁴ The proliferation of animal characters on the Internet has altered the way that animals are present in a domestic space: our pets exist on the Internet, and we can engage with someone else's pet through the virtual world. The boundary of our private lives becomes public through our pets, and baby talk and infantilization has become familiar ground on the Internet.

Common knowledge and understanding about animals in contemporary society is gleaned from a mash-up of this culture of animal representation. As Barbara Smuts writes in *Between Species: Science and Subjectivity* (2006) regarding domestic dogs,

most humans' expectations about dogs derive from popular culture, dog trainers, and personal experience with a limited number of dogs. Because these sources of knowledge do not begin to do justice to the complexity, adaptability and inventiveness of dogs, many aspects of dog-human relationships have more to do with our limited expectations and mistaken assumptions than with who they really are (124).

What results from this misunderstanding can be the infantilization of animals, or the notion that these animals are incapable of complex thought and communication, leading to the suppression of animal subjectivity: animals are thought of as either

¹⁴ Simply put, a *LOLCat* (laugh-out-loud-cat) is a photograph of a cat combined with text (usually uppercase), anthropomorphizing the cat. The text is often idiosyncratic and grammatically incorrect, known as 'lolspeak' or 'kitty pidgin'. *LOLCats* are widely distributed as Internet memes.

“highly dependent, boring, or aggressive” (Smuts, 124). Instead of this negative approach to understanding animals, Smuts suggests that if we treat animals as “mysterious individuals with highly advanced relationship skills, myriad desires, and uncanny abilities, we are in for some wonderful surprises” (124). Any relationship needs to be developed and nurtured: Smuts emphasizes that this openness and development is essential to human-animal relationships. It takes real-life interaction to learn from these relationships, rather than unreliable representations of animals in our everyday culture. This understanding of animals as individuals is not something that can be mediated through popular culture or through the limited expressions of animals offered in literature or film. It is an awareness of humans and animals that must be experienced through touch, sense, and emotion.

ONE

This chapter identifies the artistic and conceptual groundwork for *Animals in the Room* and briefly introduces my methodological approach, which is then expanded upon in the second chapter. This section will also provide an introduction to Sushi, as well as the major conceptual framework of “becoming with,” the concept that has been developed by Donna Haraway and elaborated on by Barbara Smuts. Following this, I will determine an alternative way of framing “becoming with” through an introduction to Heidegger’s concept “being with.” Furthermore, this section investigates the impact of the performance *I like America and America Likes me* by Joseph Beuys and considers this thesis project and scholarship as embedded within these art historical and theoretical contexts.

THIS IS SUSHI

Animals in the Room involves Sushi and me. We are the animals in the room. The room is our home; we live together with few physical boundaries. The boundaries that exist are abstract: the interspecies divide and a lack of a shared human language. I understand our relationship as obsessive, eccentric, and sometimes aggravating.

In 2006, I decided to adopt a house cat. My parents were farmers, and I had always loved animals, especially the barn cats. My sisters and I coddled these barn cats, who could be affectionate despite being tough and dirty. These cats served their purpose as mousers, living a dangerous life in a world of farm equipment and coyote predators. Their lives had no boundaries.

Before Sushi, I had never experienced living in a room with a cat (and at the time that I wanted to adopt a cat, I was living in a tiny, one-room bachelor apartment). I visited the Kingston Humane Society with a clear idea of the kind of cat I wanted to adopt: specifically, an older female cat who was socialized, calm, sweet - a nearly invisible companion with few needs, an animal that was self-reliant. Instead, I opted for Sushi (her original name was Snicker), a kitten at 3 months old. I don't have a "she chose me" story.¹⁵ I looked at her, she looked at me, I gave her a little pat on her little head. At the time, I did not have a strong conception of how varied cat personalities could be. Sushi looked at me, and I thought I saw the ideal qualities in her: calm and

¹⁵ Sentimental stories of immediate connection between species are pervasive in the discourse of pet relationships. Of course, I feel a connection to Sushi now, but my decision to adopt her was arbitrary.

confident, an expression of feline femininity. I named her Sushi because I made sushi for dinner that night.

When I brought Sushi home, she was completely destructive, running excitedly around my tiny apartment. She knocked over every possible thing that was not secured, chewing on the spines of my books until her gums bled. Even when we sat together she was obstructive, positioning herself so that I ended up with a mouthful of fur or sharp claws in my leg. The first night we slept together, I was insistent that Sushi sleep at the foot of the bed but she stubbornly walked from the foot to the pillow, over and over again. I gave up, exhausted and sleep-deprived. At the time, I was working (rather, over-working) four jobs and rarely got a full night's sleep as it was. Convinced I had made a huge mistake, I began to strategize how to return Sushi to the Humane Society without feeling guilt. But after a few days of guilty thoughts and endearing moments, I committed myself to Sushi. I trusted that whatever she was expressing at that time was a combination of her kitten eccentricities and adaptation to a new home and that we would settle into a comfortable living situation over time.

Sushi still sleeps on the pillow. Her animal primacy, determination, and obliviousness to my wishes has led to early morning wakeups caused by her scratching at the door, picking her claws at the carpet, biting my hands, arms, face, head. When I am home, I am constantly moving Sushi off the kitchen counter, away from glasses of water, or off my lap because I have other things to do and need to stand up. Sushi follows me around the house, which causes me to trip over her multiple times every day. I am usually aware of her location. I also follow Sushi around the house. One of her

favourite sleeping spaces is in my closet, in a basketful of scarves; sometimes I sneak up on her in the daytime, scaring her awake when I'm bored. Sometimes she wakes me when she's bored and restless. We often snuggle together. It is important to me to appreciate Sushi through touch, and I try to give her my undivided, affectionate attention, if only for a few moments, every day. I like to presume her eccentricities are also expressions of deep affection.

BECOMING WITH

In *When Species Meet*, Donna Haraway begins with a question: "How is 'becoming with' a practice of becoming worldly?" (2008b: 3). According to Haraway, companion species relationships are continuously developing and in a state of becoming, which we can understand as the process of "becoming with". Through my reading of Haraway, I interpret "becoming with" as a meeting of humans and animals and the resultant reaction on a physical and phenomenal level.¹⁶ This experience of "becoming with" points to a possible shift in the way we, as humans, can understand our own humanness - meaning that each connection with an animal results in a shift in the biological and emotional make-up of our species. For Haraway, to be worldly means to learn from "grappling with the ordinary" (2008b: 3); it is expanding beyond

¹⁶ My intention in using the word phenomenal throughout the text is to imply something greater than the ordinary - highly extraordinary - or relating to phenomena. I also use the term to denote an experience that is sensory and profound. Phenomenal can mean that which is cognizable by the senses (rather than the mind), relating to a primordial understanding of self, others, and situations.

levels of comfort, gaining knowledge and experience, becoming aware. Haraway

observes that:

the human genomes can be found in only about 10 percent of all the cells that occupy the mundane space I call my body; the other 90 percent of the cells are filled with genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such, some of which play in a symphony necessary to my being alive at all, and some of which are hitching a ride and doing the rest of me, of us, no harm. I am vastly outnumbered by my tiny companions; better put, I become an adult human being in company with these tiny messmates. To be one is always to 'become with' many (2008b: 3-4).

This mixed community of genes that creates a human body, and the way that we understand humans and animals, leads us to question who we really are: beyond an understanding of biological identity, we are forced to consider how we function as well as where and how we intersect with animals. This concept is integral to the development of my thesis project, considering that in each moment that Sushi and I meet, we experience a shift in our ontology. Haraway writes in *The Companion Species Manifesto* that "beings do not pre-exist their relatings" (2003a: 6), meaning that I am who I am because of my relationship with Sushi, and vice versa. As Barbara Smuts posits about her relationship with her pets, "our relationships are a perpetual improvisational dance,¹⁷ co-created and emergent, simultaneously reflecting who we are and bringing into being who we will become" (115). Haraway considers who we become when we meet another species. In Haraway's terms, "becoming with" occurs on a micro level: our cells interact with one another and we "become with" our companions. This is not a voluntary relationship: we cannot control this interaction or

¹⁷ Smuts developed the concept of the dance with Stuart Shanker. It is a metaphor based on the analysis of communication across species that is "mutually contingent, co-regulated, and creative" (2006: 115).

the resultant reaction that occurs within our internal being. "We make each other up, in the flesh. Significantly other to each other, in specific difference, we signify in the flesh a nasty developmental infection called love. This love is a historical aberration and a natural cultural legacy" (2008b: 16). To extrapolate from this, Smuts discusses her relationship with her dogs, challenging the notion that bonds are "caused" by the individuals (124). Instead, the notion that both Haraway and Smuts support is that animals and humans, both highly social, have malleable traits enhanced through relationships. These character and behavioral traits are not defined by genes or history, nor are they defined by species (Smuts: 124). Instead, Smuts writes, "if they (other beings) relate to us as individuals, and we relate to them as individuals, it is possible for us to have a *personal* relationship. If either party fails to take into account the other's social subjectivity, such a relationship is precluded" (125). Lived experiences, individuality, personality, and subjectivity define and develop relationships between species. As Nigel Thrift notes, "people and things and circumstances become intermixed in an interior community which offers some degree of immunity to its members and so produces a kind of temporary skin. The environment in which 'we' are situated becomes something much more fluid or 'atmospheric'" (2008a: 86). I believe this example from Thrift is a further development of "becoming with," a concept of change that can only take place among current members and within a certain space and proximity. In this equal, interior community relationship, what results is more sensorial, a feeling, an atmosphere: something that cannot be articulated in words but is known by all members of the relationship.

“Becoming with” is a constant progression between humans and animals.

“Becoming with” is always moving forward, always in motion. “Becoming with” is a plurality of ideas. I suggest here that “becoming with” is both a declaration of animality, of animal nature and the expression of instinct, inherent in both humans and animals, and a description of how we understand animality and humanity. The spectrum of animality ranges from domestic to wild, from controlled and overpowered to out of control, extinct, dominated, and manipulated. Within this spectrum, we find ourselves as humans and animals.

That humans have felt an inextricable connection to animals has been widely acknowledged and understood by scholars ranging from Cary Wolfe and Haraway to Jacques Derrida, Temple Grandin, Jacques Lacan, and many others, stemming from the impact of the Darwinian Revolution.¹⁸ It is no coincidence that the concept of animality permeated post-1945 Western critical theory during a period of crisis of critical thought. In this period, humans were at a loss to explain humanity and to feel connected. This connection to animals, simulated or otherwise, is also proved through our common histories (we’ve evolved alongside one another), our shared life cycles (of birth, life, and death) and, as noted through the Darwinian Revolution, shared genes. But do we share knowledge, experience, and collective memory with animals? Do we share intuition with animals, whom we collectively regard as predominantly instinctual beings? How do we recognize ourselves in relation to animals, when, as Donna Haraway writes, we

¹⁸ I will discuss the impact of the Darwinian Revolution further in THREE, pg 77.

are almost entirely constructed of animal microorganisms? We are truly not our own humans; we have never been human.¹⁹ We are as animal as the animal.

BEING WITH

Being human, or animal, or hum-animal, is a concept rooted in an understanding of ourselves, of our own humanity. Haraway's concept of "becoming with" is integral to the development of my thesis project as the basis and inspiration for my performance series *Animals in the Room*. However, it is important to consider this concept, and the adjacent *Companion Species Manifesto*²⁰ by Haraway as an ideal situation. The micro-meeting of cells and protists in "becoming with" is a literal, biological interaction, but the companionship that Haraway discusses takes the form of her specific relationship with her dogs: it is not a universal sensation. For this reason, in my performances with Sushi, I attempt to convey an expression of hyper-awareness and heightened intuition that is speculative and ambiguous. To clarify, Haraway's concept of companionship with animals is an ideal that should be worked towards and cultivated through daily positive interactions with animals. However, this ideal requires projection, assumption, and imagination.

¹⁹ 'We have never been Human' is the title of the first part of Haraway's text *When Species Meet*. Her usage of the phrase connects to a complicated history of the human in theory and the expression of the human in the posthumanities. She is also paying homage here to the text by Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (2003).

²⁰ *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People and Significant Otherness* (2003) by Haraway is an anecdotal and historical text about the significance of dogs (animals) in our human lives, evoking a situation in which humans and animals can function and evolve alongside one another.

In regarding our pet animals as companions, we humans rely on the human-human companionship model: that is, we use terminology such as 'equal' and 'fair' and apply it to a relationship with living beings that have emotion and a thought process that is unknowable to a human. I may project a sense of companionship onto Sushi and feel that I treat her well (to the best of my ability), but she is not my equal. However, I am also not suggesting that, simply because I am human, I am dominant over her, as there is no logic to assume this dominance. Rather, Sushi and I exist on two different planes of being, and within that, on two different levels. One, we are human and animal. I live in the human plane of existence, the human world, and Sushi lives in the animal world. Two, I experience life in my *Umwelt*²¹, my subjective environment, and Sushi situates herself in her own subjective environment. We exist distinct from one another, although we at times interact with and cross over into each other's *Umwelten*. I can never know what Sushi is experiencing in her phenomenological being, and similarly, she can never truly enter my *Umwelt*. Helene Weiss explains Jakob von Uexküll's theoretical biology and concept of *Umwelt* in the article *Aristotle's Teleology and Uexküll's Theory of Living Nature* (1948), writing that "each species has its specific structure, and correspondingly, its specific world. The animal's world is not identical with our world, nor is the world of one animal species the same as the world of another. The animal's world is constituted by what it perceives of its surroundings and by the extent to which it acts on its surroundings" (49). In this way, Uexküll combines what has theoretically been merely a speculative world of perception with action in perfect

²¹ *Umwelt* is usually translated as "environment" or "surrounding world". Uexküll theorized that organisms could have different *Umwelten*, even though they share the same environment.

correspondence. And this perception and action varies among animal species, between what Uexküll refers to as higher and primitive animals. As Weiss illustrates, “a primitive animal, e.g. a tick, perceives very few qualities and reacts with very few actions. Higher animals have richer and more complicated worlds, though this by no means makes their functioning any surer. Each animal's *Umwelt* differs from what we call its surroundings, which are noticeable to man” (49). This is to say that humans can take note of how an animal may function within its own world, its own *Umwelt*, but we do not perceive the animal’s world. The animal’s world exists only for that animal, and similarly in the reverse for humans. Each human lives in his or her own subjective world that cannot be known by any other human or animal. In Uexküll’s theoretical biology, the animal is not in isolation, but it is together with its specific world through “being”: existence.

Each animal has a world within which that animal exists, and it is also a world that counter-intervenes upon our human world. According to the research of Uexküll, animals function according to a plan that has inconsequential effects on individual humans. In this research, animals do not sense deep connection to humans but rather utilize what is available to the animal in their world, which may be a human (as a pet owner) or something that humans have created and placed in this animal’s world. Both humans and animals each live in our human and animal worlds with some infiltration from other human and other animal worlds. This negates Haraway’s concept of the companion animal, which suggests a shared sense of the world and environment, with

awareness and fondness across human and animal worlds instead of arbitrary choices and infiltration.

In light of this concept of *Umwelt*, I would like to suggest that the contrasting concepts of “becoming with” and “being with” open possibilities for a new direction of understanding human and animal being. Because we take example from our human-human relationship models when projecting onto our animals, using terminology like ‘trust’, ‘mutual respect’ and ‘communication’ to arrive at ‘equality’, we must also consider the imperfections of this model. To be human is to be disappointed in humanity: it is perpetual heartbreak, frustration, aimless projection, wasted love, and regret. The lack of verbal communication between humans and animals leaves much to be desired. To be human also means to search: for meaning, for optimism, for a truth. Looking to the philosophical concepts of Heidegger²², “being” and the complementary “being with” tend to counter some of the idealism of Haraway in light of an existentialist and crisis-based idea of what it means to be human. This conflict represents the tortured logic of being a human and attempting to understand the stakes of working with, caring for, and being with animals in this “nature culture legacy” of Haraway’s. But despite this conflict, the concepts “becoming with” and “being with” complement one another in that both concepts are rooted in ontological process: the

²² The limitations of this section are in both scope and practice – Heidegger’s text *Being and Time* is a pivotal phenomenological and philosophical text, which has countless translations, deconstructions, and critiques that I could not possibly begin to take note of here.

very nature of being. This tortured logic, full of conflict and negotiation, is expressed fully in my theory of posi-postmodernism.²³

I will briefly outline my understanding of “being with” as an introduction to posi-postmodernism and consider this concept in relation to Haraway’s “becoming with”. These opposing yet complementary notions will lead towards a new concept, that of “coming apart”: the sensation of being together yet apart. I outline “coming apart” as based on the human model of an idealism that can easily be destroyed by the companion human. In human-animal relationships, the potential for separateness is there as well, and is in fact inherent by reason of the very lack of common language, which creates a barrier that can never be overcome. Why, then, do humans approach animal relationships with this utopic notion of unconditional love? No human, with the possible exception of babies who also lack language, can be trusted with unconditional love. There is no such thing as unconditional love that does not have expiration, and this temporality should be applied to human-animal relationships as well. Humans can certainly love one another, love animals, and express this love: but there is a limit to this love.

In contradistinction to the concept of “becoming with” is Heidegger’s phenomenological concept of “being.” This is an essential starting point to understanding humanity, and there the discussion of being human in the world can be introduced. This dialogue of “being” is timeless and exceedingly vast in the scope of ontological discussion, and as a result it is a dialogue that has been rehearsed with little

²³ I will detail posi-postmodernism later in my text in the methodology section, TWO pg 63.

impact on the way we can understand our relationship to animals. In the very discussion of being, as Heidegger writes, "it is said that 'being' is the most universal and the emptiest concept. As such it resists every attempt at definition" (1953a: 1). The ambivalence and elusive nature of this "being" makes it critical in a speculative dialogue about humanity. "Being" does not refer to a being, but it is a phenomenological notion, of "being," being oneself, being human.

My thesis project is a detailed attempt at developing and gaining self-knowledge as an artist and as a human that "becomes with" an animal, Sushi. However, as Heidegger notes in his description of "being with," to be with is to know, to cultivate an inherent knowledge of that which you are with. However, humans are consistently and reliably in crisis: who among us can say that we really know ourselves, or understand our "being"? How then can we truly, phenomenologically, be human? How is it that we can "be with," to know another, if we cannot even know ourselves?

To be human in the world is to consider what this can mean, and the fields of psychoanalysis and philosophy have been dedicated to determining and theorizing the terms and conditions of humanity - the terms of being human. The definition of "being," as Heidegger notes, is that "being" cannot be one thing, but many things, and it is a "being with" that is in motion. "Being" human is to be in motion yet solid and still, a concept that transcends conventional discourse. Alan Schrift considers this motion as bringing us towards "an approach to reformulate the notion of the subject itself - not as a fixed and full substance or completed project, but always as a work in progress. The central idea is that, as a work in progress, one's life is never complete" (2000: 58-59).

This incomplete and ongoing process resonates with the concept of “becoming” from Haraway, but it also references Deleuze and Guattari in stating that we are not a fixed subject, but consistently experiencing, moving, “being.” “Being,” in this form, is a word of motion and action. “Being” is existence; “being” is that which exists.

“Being with” complements the question of being, the question of existence: in order to be in the world we must “be with” others. “Being with” others means to share the same concerns, to share the same world in our existence, and it is a concept that can be applied to human relationships. William Large analyzes Heidegger’s concept of “being with” by saying, “even when I walk alongside a field in a countryside, and nobody is there, others are still present as Being-with, because the boundaries of this field mattered to someone at sometime, and my walk itself traces the contours of their concern” (2008: 55). But as Large continues to note, the very form of “being with” is an expression of loneliness: “I can only be alone because I am already with others” (2008: 55). “Being with” is not a knowing, but it is a concern, and it can be cultivated by what Heidegger called “considerateness and forbearance” (2008: 55). There is also built into this loneliness an anonymity in that the specific individuals are not whom we are “being with” but a more abstract sense of *they*, or *others*. It is in sharing the conditions of being human that we can “be with,” because we share the same human world.

Breaking down “being”, “being with,” and “becoming with,” we are left with a sense of emptiness in considering how we are human. How, then, do we apply these questions of our existence to our relationships with animals (Or, in a Heideggerian sentiment, how do we ask the questions so that the thinking through is more

productive to know than the answer to the question itself)? How do we conceptualize a relationship with animals that can be hopeful and idealistic yet also concerned with concepts of existence, acknowledging the separateness of our subjective environments and the elements that we can never experience?

We can “come apart.” We can breakdown - emotionally, biologically, ontologically, phenomenologically - but physically, we remain where we are, in the space, in the room together. “Coming apart” means knowing the depth of our relationship with animals and acknowledging the limits of our very being, our *Umwelt*, and our love. “Coming apart” can mean respecting these limitations and admiring the mystery of human-animal relationships. It is a resigned loneliness in understanding that a knowing of another, a “being with” or “becoming with,” cannot occur: humans, and we can speculate animals, will always sense a loneliness in “being” and will never truly know another, human or animal. There is no such thing as a completion of oneself found in another, but only hopefulness and projection.

ANIMALS IN THE ROOM

In this section, I consider the possibilities of “becoming with” and “being with” through my performance with Sushi, and I reflect upon the research and process of the artwork. My goal in this project was to investigate the potential of working and thinking through dichotomies by engaging in the artistic process with an animal, with special focus on the human-animal dichotomy. I have relied on my own speculative tropes to transmit my conceptual ideas in investigating this dichotomy.

I believe that art can be used to break down essential concepts of relevant issues, leading to a solution, a strategy, an ideology, a shift in thinking. I am convinced that many artists, very generally, are hyper-aware of their social, political and environmental surroundings, and in questioning their position in the world - by reaching towards or rejecting normativity - artists create a situation where the audience may be subtly interrogated or thoughtfully provoked. For artists, the process of seeking out a position through engaging in the practice of art is also related - and even inherently connected - to seeking self-knowledge. By ascribing this intuitive approach to artistic production, I posit a relationship in which artists and animals are fundamental to contributing to a shift in conceptualizing and representing human-animal relationships.

Animals in the Room is derived from documentation of a series of performance events. These events take place in the home that Sushi and I share. These performance events represent active research (participant observation), data collection through photographs and notes, and reflexive interpretation. Each event is a performance of the concept of "becoming with," showing a vibrant, daily practice in which we base our production on a reflection upon research and art. The data collected through this experimental research provides the basis for my written thesis and art exhibition, both entitled *Animals in the Room*. Each component of this project, in each iteration of experimentation, scholarship, and art production, is distinct and yet ultimately intertwined with all other components. An awareness of this method of production is essential to understanding the project as dynamic and interdisciplinary.

The artistic project *Animals in the Room* is comprised of the documentation of the performances. As the lead researcher and artist on this project, and while defining Sushi as a contributing performer in the research phase, I position myself as the sole author of the final product: the exhibition and the written scholarship. This is in light of the fact that through the process and practice of “becoming with” Sushi, I have experienced a shift in my emotional, ontological, and phenomenal construction of self. Meaning that, despite being human, being myself, Sushi has infiltrated my very being, and influenced the production of this work.

In the presentation of this work, there are sequences and solo images that capture events of “becoming with.” I feel that each event represents an amplification of the intuitive and idealistic possibilities of my relationship with Sushi, and through the medium of performance I have provided a glimpse into our everyday lives. The documented performances are process-based, unscripted, and spontaneous. What happens outside the frame of the documentation is unknown to the audience, who must place trust in me as the producer that the resulting artwork is presented as truth, or instead engage in the speculative nature of the project. This truth, which is evidence of lived events, is mediated through the medium of photography, documenting a fleeting moment of interaction.

The composition of the photographs and performances were intended to be simplistic, both aesthetically and in the actions that have been performed. In the living room of the home that Sushi and I share, there is a blank wall that faces three bright, west-facing windows, providing a vibrant natural light. For the performances, I set the

camera on a tripod and take photos using a hand-held remote. As a result, there is a transparency of process visible in some images, as I am holding a remote when the images are captured, or the framing of the work is sometimes imperfect. To me, this transparency implies the nature of these performances: each represents a moment of a daily life existing in concept and as object. Additionally, the integrity of “becoming with”, and representing this as an event, implies that only Sushi and I be in the space together. Therefore, I staged and photographed all performances myself without relying on a third presence. During the performance, it is only Sushi and I in the room, with no other audience. What has resulted are a series of still images that lyrically reflect, to some extent, my artistic intention in the process and performance. In some cases, I merely place myself in the frame of the camera and await Sushi’s interaction with me in the room. With patience, I gently request, in a method reminiscent of telepathy, that Sushi enter the room and the frame of the camera lens. There are times when she has initially followed me into the room, and other times in which Sushi does not appear in the frame at all.

In some instances, I have a loose idea, a plan, for the performance. For example, in *Drying* I anticipated how Sushi would get wet. Sushi usually waits outside the bathroom door for me while I shower and immediately enters the bathroom when I open the door, where she will sit at the bottom of the wet shower in a pool of water. There are times when the tap drips water onto her head. Because she is a medium-haired cat (not quite long-haired, but certainly not short-haired), the water clings to her when she leaves the shower. In the case of *Drying*, I wanted to capture her reaction to

my trying to dry her with a towel. This is a high degree of being an unnecessary caregiver of Sushi, in which I rarely indulge: she does not regularly rely on me to dry her wet fur. Certainly, we play together, and I brush Sushi's fur (which she seems to enjoy) and sometimes trim her nails, but that is the extent of the caretaking that is common in our relationship - with the obvious exception of feeding her. When Sushi was a kitten, shortly after I brought her home from the Humane Society, I tried to bathe her. This clearly upset her; the atmosphere during this exchange was sad and humiliating. I remember being upset with myself, giving up, and not able to negotiate my own emotional turmoil at causing Sushi discomfort. After the attempted bath, she refused to allow me to dry her wet fur, and instead hid from me, shivering. When she finally relaxed, I wrapped her up in a towel and showed her affection as a means of an apology. *Drying* is my second attempt at drying her wet fur, 5 years later.

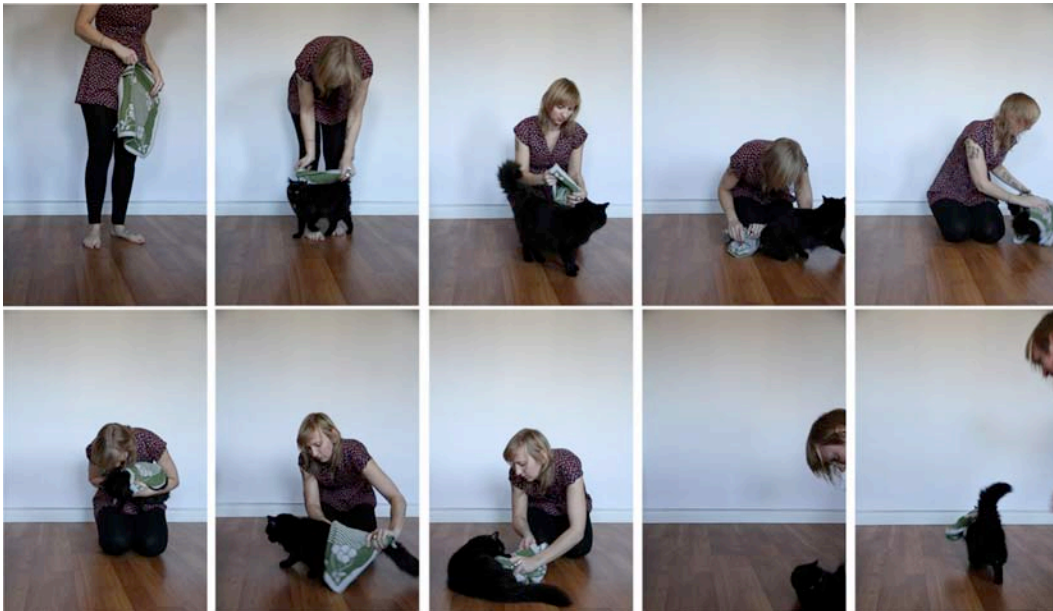


Fig. 1. *Drying*, 2011

In the case of *Drying*, I analyze this experiment post-performance as a failure to communicate (though not as a failure to perform). Because we do not regularly interact in this way (me drying her with a towel) she rejected my attempts, moving away from me, lying on her back and batting at my hands in playfulness bordering on aggression. This attempt to represent an infantilization of Sushi made us both uncomfortable; for the last five years I have sought to respect Sushi as an autonomous being and avoid disrespecting her ability to take care of herself. When I brought Sushi to the vet for the first time after her adoption, the women who were working the desk at the veterinarian's referred to Sushi as "my baby," "little cutie," and "sweetheart." I had an almost violent reaction to the type of language being used. In the first days with Sushi home, I didn't know what to say or how to talk to her; we barely communicated to one another because I wanted to ensure I did not resort to "baby talk" as a default mode of communication. I vowed to myself that I would never anthropomorphize Sushi to the point of seeing her as a "fur baby" (Fudge 2008: 48). "Fur baby" is a contemporary term coined by Erica Fudge suggesting pets that are "parented" by their human companions, a phenomenon common amongst young, childless couples. Parents of "fur babies" set themselves apart from other pet owners because they sentimentalize their roles as caregivers, believing that they provide special attention for their pets by giving them substantial play and socialization time with other animals. "Fur babies" are treated almost as human children with fur (49). Although I do love Sushi deeply, I try not to force her into a role of infancy or consider her infantile, reliant, under-developed in intelligence, or lacking (beyond the regular feeding and interactions that are intrinsic in

pet relationships). In observing Sushi, I have reasoned that she is an extremely intelligent animal who does not require this treatment.

The performances *Brushing*, *Snuggles*, and *Fur Baby* are all examples of artistic experimentation in which I am imposing a desire to "take care" of Sushi, leading to what I frame as resultant failure. I often brush her fur, but during the *Brushing* performance, she became unusually aggressive instead of enjoying it as she generally does. It is possible that she sensed that my motives were not as casual as usual, noticing that instead of wanting to provide her pleasure, I had alternative motives that conflicted with our regular habits. In *Fur Baby*, I wanted to represent us sleeping together (which we do, each night), but Sushi refused to acknowledge my intention and went her own way. She refused to lay down with me and squirmed away from my grasp, an unusual moment for a cat that is generally overly affectionate. *Snuggles* is meant to represent our regular activity of interacting with affection. This affection is necessary because, like Sushi, I have so much love to give, and our mutual affection for one another provides an outlet for expressions of this love. Though *Snuggles* is not essentially a failure, it illustrates a degree of interaction, affection, and obsession that is indicative of my complex relationship to Sushi.

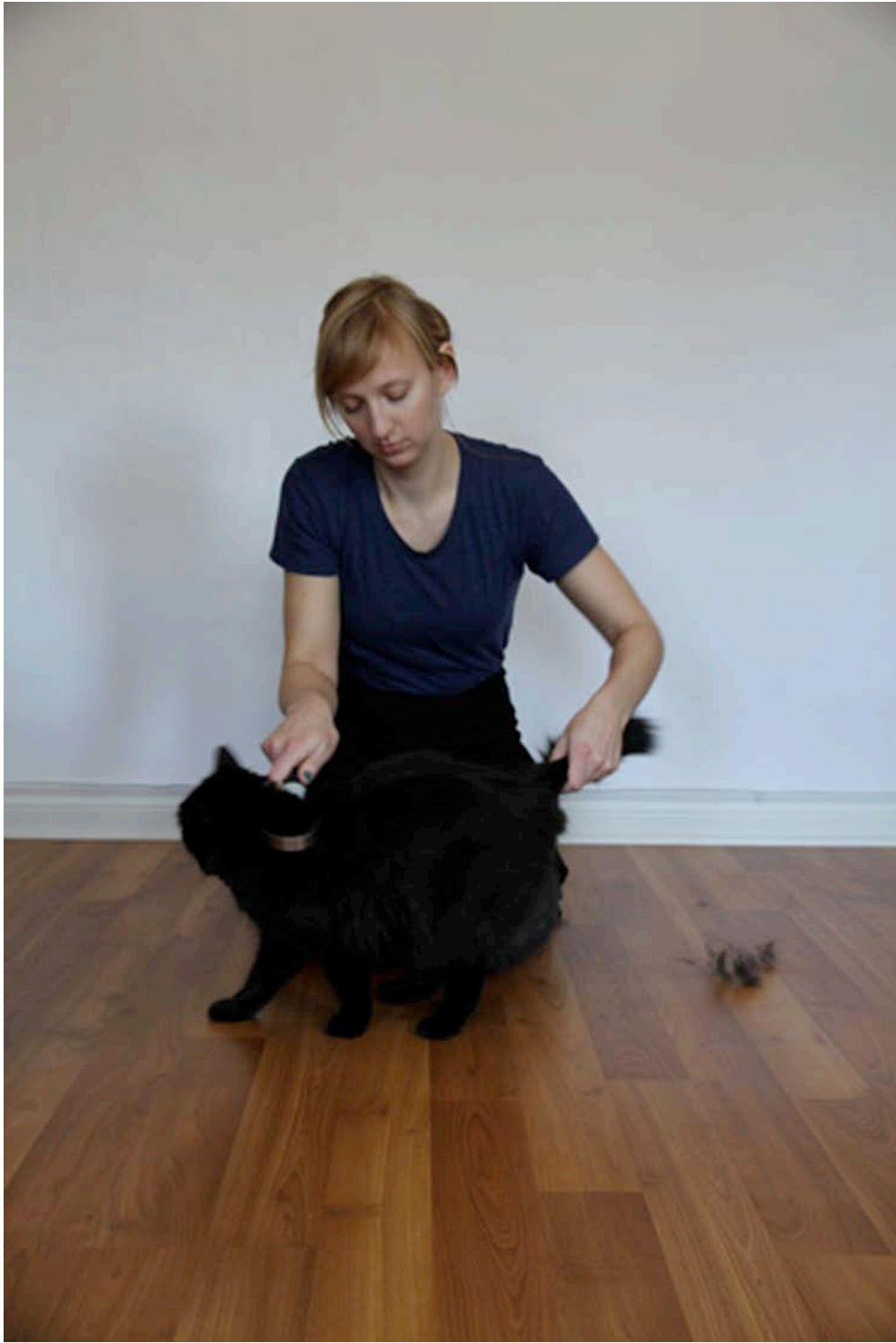


Fig. 2. *Brushing*, 2011



Fig. 3. *Fur Baby*, 2011



Fig. 4. *Snuggles*, 2011

JOSEPH BEUYS AND LITTLE JOHN

The starting point and inspiration for my thesis research is the performance by German artist Joseph Beuys *I like America and America Likes Me* (1974). Beuys's artwork and legacy are critical, though certainly not limited to, a discussion of performance art, human-animal communication, "becoming with," and expressions of animality in this thesis. His performance is regarded as a quintessential example from which to investigate the possibilities of human-animal relationships in performance art because it is complex, suggesting a human-animal bond that was built and reinforced.

Beuys, who is known as a sculptor and one of the pioneers of performance art in the Western canonical art world, produced artworks that emphasized the importance of preserving nature while advocating sustainability.²⁴ His interest in pedagogy and social communication led him to be politically active, and he became well known as a provocative and controversial artist. Beuys constructed an identity and art practice that were embedded into one another: the artist was the art, the art was the artist. During his career, Beuys consistently refused invitations to visit America, "saying he would not come as long as the US remained in Vietnam" (Levi-Strauss 1999: 2). Public reception of Beuys's work in North America was ambivalent as a result and is best summed up in the article by Kay Larson that appeared in *Art News* (1980) shortly after a retrospective of Beuys's work at the Guggenheim was installed; the article was titled, *Joseph Beuys: Shaman, Sham or one of the most brilliant artists of all time?* A key concept that Beuys

²⁴ Beuys is a pivotal figure of the contemporary Western art world and his influence can be seen on a global level. Unfortunately, the limitations of my thesis do not provide ample room to fully discuss his legacy.

developed through his performative practice was the cultivation of his identity as a shaman.²⁵ These factors contribute to the impact and legacy of *I like America...*, a performance done in May of 1974 with Beuys and a live coyote in René Block Gallery, New York City, for seven days.²⁶ This was Beuys's second visit to America.

In this piece, the environment of the empty gallery space can be essential to understanding the human-animal relationship that unfolded. Both Beuys and the coyote, named Little John and hailing from New Jersey,²⁷ are positioned in a space that they had never visited before and are introduced to one another for the first time; however, Beuys was at an advantage because he had prior knowledge of the possible gallery space ecology, while it is unknown whether or not Little John was familiar with gallery spaces.

Beuys arrived in New York, at Kennedy Airport, from Germany. He was wrapped from head to foot in felt, his trademark material, and rode in the back of an ambulance from the airport to the gallery. Without seeing any of the American

²⁵ Beuys discusses his shamanistic approach in an interview with Heimer Bastian and Jeannot Simmen in 1979, saying, "when I do something shamanistic, I make use of the shamanistic element – admittedly an element of the past – in order to express something about a future possibility." My reading of this description is that Beuys appropriates elements of traditional shamanism in his performative works, which inevitably leads to questions of his integrity, or the sham (92). It is important when discussing shamanism to acknowledge the appropriation of the term and the contemporary hybridization of the form from spiritual and aboriginal traditions that span across cultures and continents. Shamanism is not a term specific to one culture or tradition, but can, in a general sense, be acknowledged as a position held in a culture/society by a person of some supernatural or psychic ability, sometimes a healer and seer (Harner 1990). Contemporary and new age trends have appropriated the concept of shamanism (in the same category as palm and tarot readers or astral projectionist), and artists such as Beuys have borrowed the term in a performative, speculative sense.

²⁶ There are conflicting accounts regarding the length of this performance: Tisdall writes that it was seven days, while Levi-Strauss recalls a three-day performance.

²⁷ Both Little John's origin prior to the performance and his post-performance whereabouts remain a mystery.

landscape or environment, Beuys was delivered to the gallery. Levi-Strauss writes that in this action - the blind and bound ambulance ride - and with the drama of the ambulance, there could be no doubt regarding the purpose of his trip to America. "Wrapped in a felt cocoon inside the ambulance, Beuys recalled his own myth of origin, in which he was shot down over the Crimea and rescued by nomadic Tartars, who wrapped him in insulating felt to warm him. Here again, the artist journeys to another world through ritualizing threshold rites. Again he is wounded and in need of treatment" (5-6).²⁸ Levi-Strauss suggests that Beuys is in need of healing, coming to the coyote with a desire to repair his trauma.



Fig. 5. Joseph Beuys, *I Like America and America Likes Me*, 1979

²⁸ Beuys was well known for perpetuating a mythology around his origin, and the scholarship on this is vast. Caroline Tisdall recounts Beuys's plane crash over the Crimea during the Second World War. Beuys was a rear-gunner for the Luftwaffe, the German air force. Apparently, the pilot died in the crash and Beuys's broken body was found and nursed back to health by the Tartars, a nomadic tribe. In order to heal his broken bones, they wrapped his body in felt and animal fat, two materials which became essential to his later art practice (Tisdall 1979a: 16-17).

In the René Block Gallery space, a meeting of human and animal contained countless potential scenarios, including aggression or violence. For the performance, Beuys, with his usual uniform of a felt hat and a fishing vest, brought with him props: a walking stick, two felt blankets, a musical triangle, gloves, a stack of hay, a flashlight, and fifty *Wall Street Journals*, with fifty more to be delivered each day (Tisdall 2008b: 6). Over the course of their time together, Beuys performed an orchestrated sequence of actions, repeated over and over again. As Levi-Strauss outlines:

A triangle is struck three times to begin the sequence. This triangle that Beuys wears as a pendant around his neck is the alchemical sign for fire (dry, fiery, choleric warmth), which ancient glacial Eurasian shamans sorely needed. It is also a sign for the feminine element (earthy & mercurial) and for the creative intellect, and it is the Pythagorean symbol for wisdom. Striking its three sides three times, Beuys calls himself, Coyote, and the Audience to order. After the triangle is struck, a recording of loud turbine engine noise is played outside the enclosure, signifying 'indetermined energy' and calling up a chaotic vitality.

At this point, Beuys pulls on his gloves, reminiscent of the traditional bear-claw gloves worn by 'master of animals' shamans such as those depicted on the walls of Trois Frères, and gets into his fur pelt/felt, wrapping it around himself so that he disappears into it with the flashlight. He then extends the crook of his staff out from the opening at the top of the felt wrap, as an energy conductor and receptor, antenna or lightning rod. The conical shape of the felt resembles a tipi, the nomadic shelter which migrated from Siberia to North America with the hunters. Topped with the crooked staff, it also recalls both the stag and the shape of the lightning in *Lightning with Stag in Its Glare* (1958-85), and is a reference to the classic shamanic antlered mask, also going back to the caves of the Upper Paleolithic, as does Beuys's 'Eurasian staff,' the shamanic *phallos* (Coyote carried his around in a box on his back) and staff of the psycho pomp - messenger and mediator. The felt enclosure doubles as a sweat lodge for Beuys, accumulating the heat necessary for transformation.

Beuys bends at the waist and follows the movements of the coyote around the room, keeping the receptor/staff pointed in the coyote's direction at all times. When the beam of the flashlight is glimpsed from beneath the felt, we recognize the figure of the Hermit from the Tarot - an old man with a staff, holding a lighted lamp half-hidden by the great mantle which envelops him. This card in the Tarot indicates wisdom, circumspection, and protection. It

refers to the developed mind of man, the prudence and foresight of learning, and is thought by some to picture Hermes, the Messenger. After awhile, Beuys emerges from the felt and walks to the edge of the room, marking the end of the sequence of gestures. There is a pile of straw, another piece of felt, and stacks of each day's *Wall Street Journal* in the room. Beuys sleeps on the coyote's straw; the coyote sleeps on Beuys' felt. The copies of the *Wall Street Journal* arrive each day from outside (like the engine noise) and enter the dialogue as evidence of the limits of materialist thinking (6-7).

During the lengthy span of the performance, Beuys executed these deliberate, ritualized actions within the space, and Tisdall observes that Little John took the lead role in moderating and regulating the timing and the mood of these actions (2008b: 7). Beuys's actions in these performances were, to the audience, ambiguous expressions of ritual; in Levi-Strauss's interpretation of the work, however, each of the artist's actions were deeply embedded in shamanistic or mythological symbolism. During this performance, the interaction between Beuys and the coyote was cautious, deliberate, tenuous. The coyote, by virtue of its very wildness and mystery, created the conditions and limitations of the performance. Little John appeared to mark his territory on each of the artist's objects. The coyote's expression of animality was expected; it seemed to move around the gallery space in a suitably animal way. In Tisdall's narration of the event, she suggests the coyote was aware of the impact of his own actions on Beuys's performance, that there was a degree of consciousness on the part of the animal.

Beuys's choreographed ritual was repeated over thirty times for the duration of the performance, with the coyote reacting differently each time: nervous, disinterested, watchful, waiting, cautious, mischievous, aggressive (2008b: 7). At times, the coyote appeared to express his animality: Little John tore the felt apart; he tore the *Wall Street Journals* apart; he relieved himself on them. Levi-Strauss speculates that

this action, the coyote pissing on the pile of newspapers, was intended "to mark it, as if to say 'everything that claims to be a part of America is part of my territory'" (7). Little John never slept with his back to the audience. In the confined gallery space, the artist and the animal formed a visible bond, suggesting an emotional "becoming with" and "being with" one another. Tisdall writes that Beuys and Little John would lie in the straw together, and when it was time to end the performance, Beuys hugged the coyote close (8). After Beuys left, wrapped again in felt and taken in an ambulance to the airport, Little John acted like a caged animal for the first time: pacing anxiously back and forth, "sniffing, searching, whining and scenting the air with fear" (8). In Tisdall's observation, what happened between the animal and the human in this performance transcended concepts of species: Beuys and Little John eluded a definition of their own species in the process of "becoming with", of learning from one another.

In some of Beuys's previous works, he had identified himself with the image of the hare. Levi-Strauss says that "in Beuys's iconography, the Hare symbolizes birth and especially incarnation; vulnerability and the finiteness of humankind. Like the Hare, Beuys is careful . . . he moves slowly and deliberately, approaching coyote carefully" (Levi-Strauss: 7). In contrast, the coyote is wise: in myth, at the time of creation, "coyote taught humans how to survive" (3). As Levi-Strauss succinctly writes it, through allegory in *I like America...*, "hare comes to coyote to learn how to survive" (7). This is a reversal in understandings of human-animal relationships in which the human is dominant; instead, we see that Beuys, after arriving in America acting metaphorically wounded and traumatized, selected the coyote based on Little John's ability to heal.

The relationship that arose, developed, and ended in the gallery space has become crucial to the discussion of “becoming with” and human-animal relationships in performance art practices. Beuys took a risk in selecting an animal for his performance that was not only wild, but also very dangerous. There were elements of the unexpected and spontaneous present in the performance as a result of this risk. And there was also a suggestion of collaboration. According to Beuys, “I had a concept of how a coyote might behave - it could have been different. That’s what I hoped for, but I was not sure whether it would work. But it did - it worked well. Probably I had the right spiritual focus . . . I really made good contact with him” (Tisdall 2008b: 13). My reading of Beuys’s performance is that he acknowledged the tensions between the two species and, as the artist, created a situation in which Little John could assert his animal power and autonomy during the performance.



Fig. 6. Joseph Beuys, *I Like America and America Likes Me*, 1977

This notable performance has inspired countless reactionary performances, homage, and critical deconstruction. It is difficult to escape the influence of Beuys (in any discourse of contemporary art) and the *I like America...* performance is exceptionally crucial when discussing human-animal relationships and animals in contemporary performance art. Beuys's presentation of *I like America and America Likes Me* is largely considered to be a gestured attempt to heal parallel relationships between Germany and America, between idealism and materialism, and between the domestic (human) and the wild (animal) (Levi-Strauss: 7). This example of "becoming with," of animality and humanity, establishes a precedent of the human-animal dialogue in contemporary performance art, and I will continue to refer back to this performance as the ideas surrounding Beuys's work are crucial to understanding my thesis research.

TWO

This chapter outlines the various possible intersections between research and practice in my Master's project. *Animals in the Room* is a combination of a written thesis and my artistic practice. Both elements of this project are an expression of a research-led practice. The research and practice exist symbiotically: one is also the other. I suggest that this structure is non-hierarchical, positioning practice and research as equal components to a process of thinking through, creating, writing, performing, and investigating what it can mean to be a contemporary artist with an interdisciplinary approach to art production.

OBSERVATION

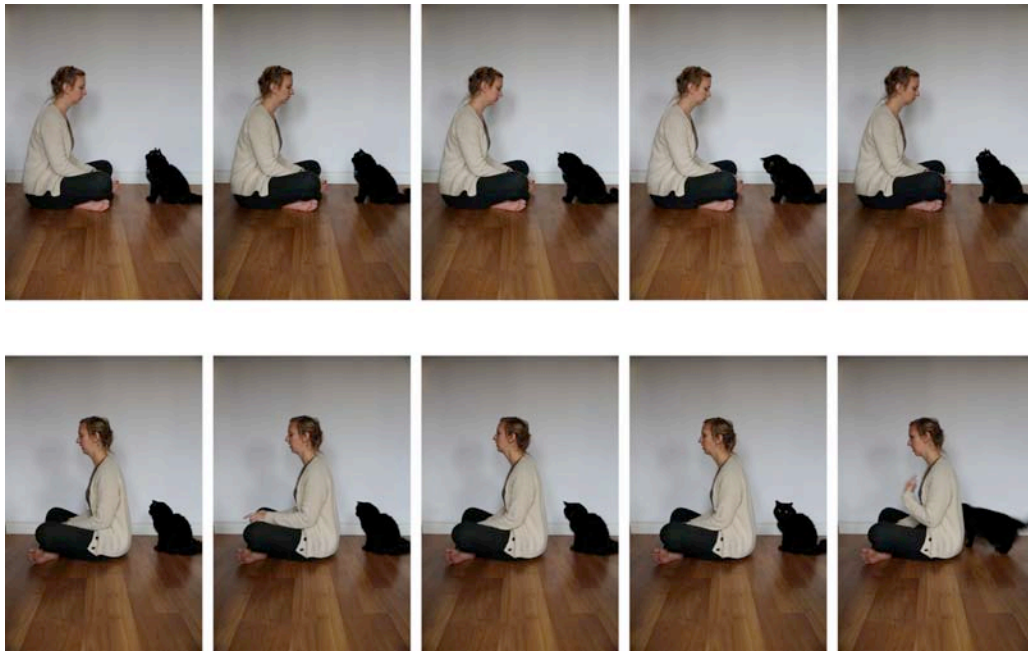


Fig. 7. *Observation I*, 2010

The *Observation* experiments display an example of spontaneous performance between Sushi and me, expressing how we “come apart.” The *Observation* series were inspired by Augusto Boal’s *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (1992; 2006).²⁹ The documentation of *Observation* provides an example of how Sushi and I connect (and in some cases, what I interpret as a failure to connect) on a sensorial and emotional level. In *Observation I*, I meditated upon Sushi’s appearance for some time, then turned myself around in order to describe the way that she looked out loud, based on my memory of the practice of observation. Generally, the *Observation* series follows the format of Sushi and me looking at one other in a still and observant state. Throughout these performances I sensed a strong connection to Sushi. There is no evidence that

²⁹ *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* is a well-known guide, a revolutionary method, for transformation and liberation from oppression in theatre and game playing.

would indicate what exactly Sushi is observing when she is looking at me, and during these experiments, I felt myself moving into a meditative phase rather than being in a state of observation and awareness. I found that Sushi, when we were in a state of unmoving, had a calm and cathartic presence. She appears to live in her own head, oblivious to the stakes of our performances, and yet transmits what I interpret as highly emotional, calming, and reasonable energies.

In the *Observation* series, each performance would begin in the same way. I would sit down and place myself in front of the camera in the room. I would call Sushi into the room through intention, and without words. If she sat and looked at me, we would then observe one another. If she was not interested in engaging in this performance, I considered the performance a failure because the documentation failed to capture a moment reflective of the relationship between Sushi and me. This is not because Sushi made a decision to be an independent being, as she is, and performed as she chose to; instead, it is a failure because we were unable to express the sense of being with one another in a visual way. In these performances, I requested that she perform by observing me, and sometimes she did not. However, when she did not engage, I would continue to sit and observe her actions regardless. My artistic intention for the *Observation* series, to illustrate our relationship, was simple and in some cases successful; however, in her disengagement from observing and therefore meeting my intention, I also failed to meet her animal intention - what it is that drives her actions - and the performance failed. We failed, together. This, then, is "being with" an animal: presuming to share the same concerns and yet feeling isolated in these concerns. We

are “coming apart” by being in the same space together and yet not interacting, not crossing-over into each other’s *Umwelt*. We share a concern for our surroundings, the room that we are in, but we do not understand or know one another. The *Observation* series is a specific example of “coming apart,” particularly as our interactions are without touch or voice and we are therefore relying only on intuitive sensation and emotion.

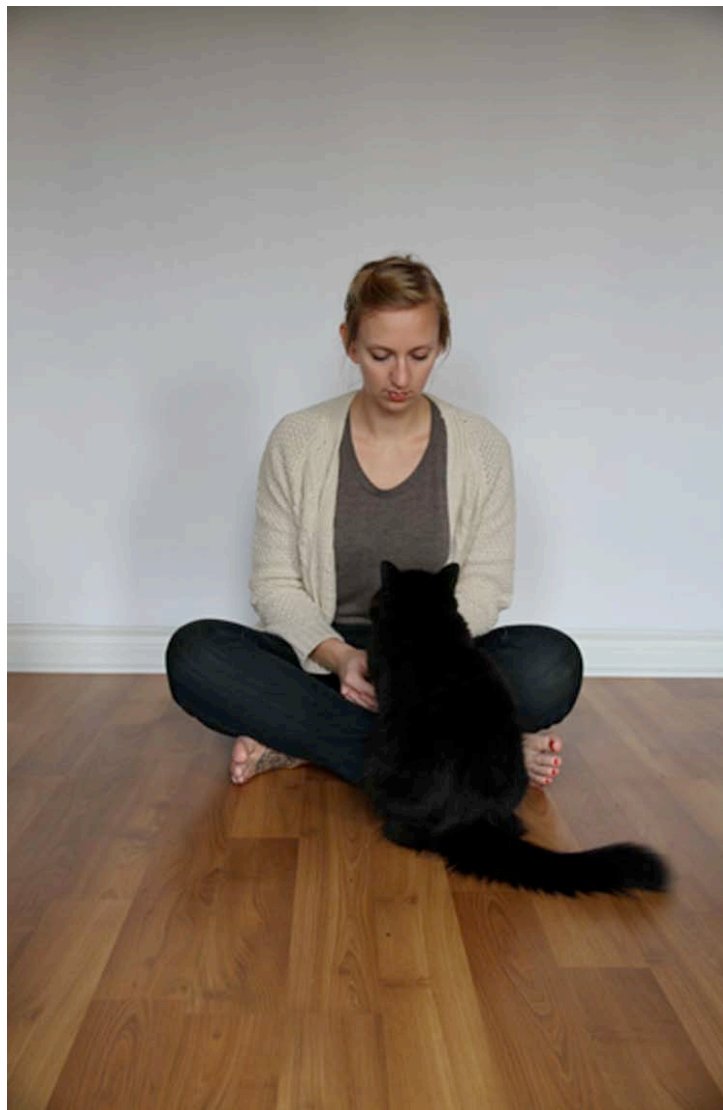


Fig. 8. *Observation II*, 2010

METHODOLOGY

My self-imposed approach to art making has always been disciplined and regimented, yet also very intuitive and forgiving. Ideas change and are influenced by absolutely everything. My ritual of drinking coffee in the morning, the way I laugh out loud alone in a room, the way my cat snuggles on my lap as I'm writing, the way I make eye contact with dogs but not the people that are attached to the dogs, my approach to yoga, my philosophy of friendship and love: all these events and moments inform my practice. Everything influences what I do in my life as an artist, and gaining this information and experience is process-based. This process never gets turned off: it is my methodology. Understanding this process of "being" creates an opportunity to reconsider the subject, the artist, as not fixed but incomplete: a work undergoing process. While "being" in process, that which currently exists in a subject's environment is mutable. It is my belief that many artists are driven by a need to know, to "be": to try to understand themselves in the role of artist, of human, and to understand how this position can be contextualized on a macro-level. This is a position that is based on fluid and organic experiences that influence how we understand "being."

I approach research with a haphazard sensibility, lacking discipline and focus. In my process of "being," I research by thinking, reading, moving, laughing, drinking, running and running away and running into, watching, playing, crying, and sleeping. I feel I cannot position myself in the world without making an attempt to understand the world. Additionally, I cannot understand myself without contextualizing who I am and what I am doing in this world. This investigation has become an essential area of

research and development for my graduate work. Nigel Thrift writes in a discussion of subjectivity, “might it not be possible to think of subjectivity as artists have begun to think of being, as a series of ephemeral mental objects of concentration and dispersal in which physical handwork, material industry, and intellectual labour stand in for the hidden work of crafting self-awareness out of environmental fluctuations” (2008a: 86). This supports my notion that what is thinking through concepts and projects, what is artistic process, is synonymous with developing a sense of self-awareness and self-definition. Furthermore, Thrift expands this notion beyond the role of the artist, using art practice as a model for developing subjectivity and the self. This is the process of understanding “being.”

My artistic process and methodology is diverse, mixed, intuitive, and reflexive. To position myself as a researcher, or artist-researcher, means to move forward from my previous artistic training, which was very technical and based in the studio environment. I consider my approach to my art practice as following an academic model but influenced primarily by my intuition and speculation. In each project, I try to familiarize myself with the context of the work and the history of the concept/topic during my production of the artwork. Coming to graduate school and considering my artistic process as research had initially felt uncomfortable and strange. It is not only a shift in terminology, but in legitimization. Suddenly, I am not an emerging artist who messes around with fabric, glue, paper, cat, and camera in her home studio barefoot while blasting ABBA *Gold* and drinking wine. I am a researcher now. As Arjun Appadurai writes in *Globalization and the Research Imagination*,

What do we mean when we speak today of research? Like other cultural keywords, research is so much a part of the ground on which we stand and the air we breathe that it resists conscious scrutiny. In the case of the idea of research, there are two additional problems. First, research is virtually synonymous with our sense of what it means to be scholars and members of the academy, and thus it has the invisibility of the obvious. Second, since research is the optic through which we typically find out about something as scholars today, it is especially hard to use research to understand research (238).

In my practice, this analysis of invisible research is deeply linked to artistic process. How do we display creative thinking as process to the academy? How do we use artistic research, or practice-led research, to legitimize this process? While the academy is bringing practice-led graduate programs into formation, there is still an ambiguity regarding guidelines and regulations for the research that leads to achieving a degree. The problem of how to validate to the academy a process that must be rooted in intuition and reflection in order to produce artwork that is dynamic is really a question of terminology: why do we use the terms borrowed from other disciplines and fields to legitimize practice?

Therefore, this validation becomes a performance for the academy. Ostensibly, the legitimization of my research can appear to academics and artists alike to be forced, false, and transparent. While attempting to shift my process into an academic scope, I choose to maintain my position as primarily an intuitive and reflexive artist. I would also like to suggest that these intuitive methodologies have become normalized as processes for artists working today. I realize that defining my practice and the role I take as an artist creates an artist/academic dichotomy. In this paradigm, I suggest that 'practice', 'research', 'artist', and 'academic' are inconsequential terms. I am an artist

because that is where I began: it is my origin. I use the term 'practice' to encompass the process of being an artist-academic. Both artists and academics are likely to engage in creative, process-based practice. As artists, and as academics, we begin with an idea, think it through, start the project, stop and keep thinking, carry on, think some more, lose faith, get exhausted, finish it up, over-think the audience's reception. Be done with it.

The main sources for the legitimization of my artistic process and methodology are *Research Design* (John W. Creswell, 2009) and *Reflexive Methodology* (Mats Alvesson and Kaj Sköldbberg, 2000). In discussing my methodology, I mainly refer to my artistic process rather than my academic process, as everything that I have done towards my Master's project has been artistic and creative. Approaching my Master's project as an artist and as a reluctant academic has led to a mixed methodology, composed of grounded/critical theory, reflexive interpretation, and a pragmatic worldview.

My research design, with a mixed-methods approach, is informed by a pragmatic paradigm (Creswell: 5). According to Creswell, a pragmatic framework for a research design is one concerned with actions, situations, and consequences rather than preceding conditions: there is a concern for solutions to problems, for working and thinking through rather than focusing on the methodology or the result of the research (10). Creswell goes on to say that pragmatism "is not committed to any one system of philosophy and reality . . . inquirers draw liberally from both quantitative and qualitative assumptions when they engage in their research" (10). This liberty in research, which

provides a freedom in choosing methods and techniques for collecting and analyzing data, is present in my own sometimes-haphazard approach to research and creation. Because there can be a variety of ways to approach research, I suggest that my main methodological concern is an investigation of a truth (in the case of this project, the truth of human-animal relationships as it is examined in theory and practice), developing concepts of this truth while toying with speculations of untruth, blurry boundaries, and shams. This mixed methodology is also suited to the interdisciplinarity of my project and my humble disconnection from legitimate disciplines and general confusion regarding Cultural Studies, 'animal studies', art practice, and creative research. Trying to find my place in academia has led to ongoing, existential problems of truth and legitimacy. As Cleo Cherryholmes writes in *Educational Researcher* (1992), pragmatic researchers are reluctant to tell a true story: "they would simply like to change the subject" (Creswell: 11). This reluctance highlights some of the critiques of Cultural Studies, the main assessment being that Cultural Studies poaches from other disciplines without a thorough investigation of any one particular method, worldview or assumption.

In this project, my research methodology and the model for the direction of my research design is what Creswell refers to as "transformative mixed methods" (11). This suggests an overarching theoretical lens through which the project is investigated (15). This theoretical lens, which I define, develop, and continue to investigate, is posthumanism.

POSTHUMANISM

Humanism, as it is widely acknowledged and understood, is a philosophy that places distinct faith and trust in our own humanity. A safe and somewhat reductive definition of humanism is that it is “a broad category of ethical philosophies that affirm the dignity and worth of all people, based on the ability to determine right from wrong by appeal to universal human qualities - particularly rationality” (Wolfe 2010c: xi). This affirmation of moral codes supports human interests and the rejection of faith without reason in the supernatural or the divine. It stands in opposition to religion or faith-based principles.

To date, an understanding of posthumanism has often been associated with ‘cyborgology’ or ‘apocalyptia’. In this sense of the term, the ‘post’ of posthumanism follows a progression and co-evolution of the human through technology, defying age and disease, and achieving an optimal condition and status for humans. Although an element of this concept is threaded through Cary Wolfe’s definition of posthumanism in *What is Posthumanism?* (2010c), it remains a developing and still confused term. Wolfe identifies this early, emergent phase of posthumanism as crucial in constructing the definition of posthumanism. According to Wolfe, an understanding of posthumanism (not to be confused with transhumanism)³⁰ does not necessarily come ‘after’, as the

³⁰ According to Wolfe, “posthumanism is the opposite of transhumanism . . . transhumanism is the intensification of humanism” (Wolfe: xv). Transhumanism is rooted in secular humanist thinking, “yet is more radical in that it promotes not only traditional means of improving human nature, such as education and cultural refinement, but also directs application of medicine and technology to overcome some of our basic biological limits” (Bostrom 2003: 493). Instead of seeing humans as developed and complete, Bostrom writes that transhumanists view human nature as a work-in-progress and hope that through responsible developments of science and technology, “we shall eventually manage to become posthuman, beings with vastly greater

prefix 'post' would imply. Instead, an understanding of posthumanism as Wolfe defines it can be read analogous to Jean-Francois Lyotard's reading of postmodernism. In this sense, posthumanism comes both before and after humanism: "before in the sense that it names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world, the prosthetic coevolution of the human animal with the technicity of tools and external archive mechanisms (such as language and culture)" (Wolfe 2010c: xv). Wolfe means here that the human being, inextricable from its own biology (before the machine and the construction of organic-technological hybrids/cyborgs) and currently with the proficient and inescapable impact of technology, has come to function and evolve alongside the ongoing development of language and culture. This is before humanism, it is the origin, it is rational but it is also based in instinct and intuition - it is animalistic and evolutionary. It is not necessary for humanism to be a dominant ontology in order for this version of posthumanism to succeed it.

However, Wolfe also writes that posthumanism does come after humanism when he suggests that though the human is embodied in its own being (in whichever way we understand that being), it is also currently experiencing a moment of de-centering. The need, then, is to acknowledge this paradigm (embodiment and de-centering) and identify and conceptualize a new way of understanding the human.

capacities than present human beings have" (494).

Posthumanism:

comes after (humanism) in the sense that posthumanism names a historical moment in which the de-centering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatic, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore, a historical development that points to the necessity of new theoretical paradigms (but also thrusts them on us), a new mode of thought that comes after the cultural repressions and fantasies, the philosophical protocols, and evasions, of humanism as a historically specific phenomena (Wolfe 2010c: xv).

In other words, this posthumanism is not a disregard for the elements of humanism, nor is it in essence a progression: it is an expansion of the term and the conditions under which humanism operates.

Posthumanism acknowledges that the human is not and should not be the core around which all other elements of our world circulate and are focused upon. And in addition to this, posthumanism recognizes that the way we understand the human is shifting. According to Wolfe, "in my sense, posthumanism isn't posthuman at all - in the sense of being 'after' our embodiment has been transcended - but is only *posthumanist*, in the sense that it opposes the fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy inherited from humanism itself" (2010c: xv). Wolfe writes that in posthumanism "the point is not to reject humanism - indeed, there are many values and aspirations to admire in humanism - but rather to show how those aspirations are undercut by the philosophical and ethical frameworks used to conceptualize them" (2010c: xvi). To use an example, although the ethical and moral position of humanism would require that animals be treated with respect and equality, it is the very amplification of human-centric philosophical and theoretical frameworks that create normative subjectivity, leading to discrimination against animals and also humans with disabilities. This is to say that a

sense of the superiority of 'normal' humans over all others in the development of humanism has contributed to a strengthening of dichotomies, such as human-animal, which Donna Haraway refers to as one of the "Great Divides" (2008b: 21). Haraway adopted this term from Bruno Latour; it refers to dichotomies embedded in modernist understandings of humanism and posthumanism alike: nature/society, nonhuman/human, other/man (2008b: 9). The humanistic dogma, which calls attention to the human-animal dichotomy, is also related to theories of social Darwinism and eugenics, which hold that some qualities of the human are superior (leading to the negative 'isms': sexism, racism, ageism). Posthumanism addresses the problems embedded in humanism by essentially attempting to eradicate humanistic dogma.

In *When Species Meet*, Haraway defies acknowledgement of her position as a posthumanist scholar, although she is a founding member of the posthumanities (a series of texts published by the University of Minnesota Press). Her previous work, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (1990c) is often related to the posthuman, but in the use of the word that references the cyborg, a transcendence of the human and a movement from one being to another while retaining humanity but not gender or race. In this text, "the cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts in to a higher unity" (1991c: 150). The cyborg disregards philosophical and psychoanalytic precedence - it does not need to pay homage to its academic fathers and mothers.

In Haraway's own words, "I never wanted to be posthuman, or posthumanist, any more than I wanted to be postfeminist. For one thing, urgent work still needs to be done in reference to those who must inhabit the troubled categories of woman and human, properly pluralized, reformulated, and brought into constitutive intersection with other asymmetrical differences" (2008b: 17). And in reference to what she reads as the removal of the human-animal dichotomy, quoting Anna Tsing, "human nature is an interspecies relationship" (2008b: 19). For Haraway, this means that there is an embeddedness of the human with the animal (nonhuman) species that is inextricable. This interspecies relationship, or species interdependence, "is the name of the worlding game on earth, and that game must be one of response and respect. That is the play of companion species learning to pay attention. I am not posthumanist; I am who I become with companion species, who and which make a mess out of categories in the making of kin and kind" (2008b: 19). For Haraway, this "becoming with" companion species is an ongoing and ever-present becoming.

Being in flux, what a posthumanist framework suggests is that in order to reject existing dogmas, dichotomies, and influence, we must "realize that the nature of thought itself must change if it is to be posthumanist" (Wolfe 2010c: xvi). Wolfe summarizes a two-part definition of posthumanism - it is a mode of thought, and it engages "directly the problem of anthropocentrism and speciesism and how practices of thinking and reading must change in light of their critique" (xix). With regard to the emergent discipline of what has generally been called 'animal studies', Wolfe identifies animal studies as addressing these problems in light of the greater context of

posthumanism (2010c: 99). By understanding posthumanism as a philosophy and as a system through which to address and critique fundamental humanist paradigms, we can look towards potential new methods of addressing this human-animal dichotomy.

CULTURAL STUDIES

This dialogue is important in the context of this thesis project in order to identify where this project fits in academia and what its critical impact may be. The goal of this paper is to adopt an understanding of a new way of thinking, posthumanism, in specific regards to the human-animal dichotomy: it is also an understanding of 'discipline' as it relates to interdisciplinarity (which is the rubric under which I functioned during the research and creation of my Master's project). Posthumanism can help identify a crisis within the humanities in which a schism has been cultivating between "scholars committed primarily to matters of history and scholars committed primarily to matters of theory (and the relation of form and meaning)" (Wolfe 2010c: 101). The proliferation of Cultural Studies in the humanities further amplifies this schism, which Ellen Rooney writes is "a welter of competing (and even incompatible) methods, and a quasi-disciplinary form increasingly difficult to defend, intellectually or politically" (Wolfe 2010c: 104; Rooney 2000: 21). Cultural Studies has roots in literary criticism, which engages in similar discussions of artistic value and judgment as art history does. The inability of Cultural Studies (though varying forms of Cultural Studies from North America, the United Kingdom, and Australia have adopted their own strategies in order to thrive) to self-define and self-defend leads to ambivalence and "inclusive vagueness"

(Wolfe 2010c: 104; Rajan 2001: 69), which has facilitated Cultural Studies to take on new academic territory. Many disciplines are adopting Cultural Studies' strategies of trans- or interdisciplinarity as part of a redefinition of theory and practice, and it is this deliberate vagueness of Cultural Studies that appears to be reviving these disciplines. For example, in the text *The New Art History: A Critical Introduction* (2001), Jonathan Harris dedicates his text to the development of various theories within the field of art history (such as Marxist, feminist, and identity politics), discussing *radical* art history as the most recent phase. However, in the conclusion of the text, Harris negotiates the current form of art history to be in fact Cultural Studies: "both shared a similar casual connection to the political radicalism of the 1960's, though both had earlier roots as well. Both have opened up the study of art and culture broadly to inquiries rooted in questions about contemporary society and the ordering of power and identities within it" (2001: 287-288).

However, the strongest criticism of Cultural Studies is the perpetuation of historicism's "text-as-paraphrase" - observing that the "teleology of the new Cultural Studies, under the guise of 'pluralism', is of absolute transparency based on total communicability" (Wolfe 2010c: 105). Because Cultural Studies (going beyond a reductive understanding of Cultural Studies as the study of culture) functions between acknowledged disciplines, it adopts through practice the language, methodologies, and theory lifted from other disciplines, creating a compilation of study that can either contribute to these various disciplines or remain without any impact. Wolfe writes that "Cultural Studies thus involves a repurposing of reading and thinking; it is a 'pragmatic

use of the humanities within a modular structure that appears to promote dissidence' by its pluralism of content and identities" (Wolfe 2010c: 105). According to Richard Johnson in *What is Cultural Studies Anyway?*, Cultural Studies that emphasize critical theory simultaneously strive to "become more 'popular' rather than academic" (1986-87: 40). Therefore, that a heterogeneous global audience for Cultural Studies is taken for granted is "an oxymoron that conceals a deep contradiction in claiming the synchronicity of the unique and the universal, and the global reach of Western notions of 'heterogeneity'" (Wolfe 2010c: 105).

Critics of Cultural Studies identify a crucial role of theoretical reflection in addressing the "intellectual miasma that is Cultural Studies - not because theory is a specialized obsession but precisely because it isn't" (Wolfe 2010c: 105). A lack of theoretical reflection can be found in earlier forms of art history, in which "thematic (or aesthetic) analysis has become the sole mode of 'formal' analysis" (Wolfe 2010c: 106; Rooney 2000: 28). In Harris' words, theory in art history is a "necessary part of any serious and critical project. Theory was (and is) needed in this sense both to allow understanding of existing traditions of thought and disciplinary practice - and to allow us to invent and mobilize forms of agreement and procedures of description, analysis, and evaluation required in the formulation of alternatives to the dominant practices" (Harris 2001: 27-28). Harris quotes Terry Eagleton from *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983),

some students and critics also protest that literary theory gets in between the reader and the work. The simple response to this is that without some kind of theory, however unreflective and implicit, we would not know what a 'literary' or artistic work was in the first place, or how we were to read it. Hostility to

theory usually means an opposition to other people's theories and oblivion of one's own (2000: vii-viii).

The implications of theory as methodology and the support of theory in fields such as literary studies, art history, and Cultural Studies suggest the interdisciplinarity of what Wolfe positions as "animal studies." According to Wolfe,

we should not try to imagine some super inter-discipline called 'animal studies' but recognize that it is only in and through our disciplinary specificity that we have something specific and irreplaceable to contribute to this 'question of the animal' that has recently captured the attention of so many different disciplines: not something accurate to contribute but something specific (2010c: 115).

What posthumanism supports, then, is "not interdisciplinarity but multidisciplinary or perhaps transdisciplinarity - but a transdisciplinarity that accepts the task of making itself transparent by thematizing the conditions of its own speech" (Wolfe 2010c: 115). However, despite this task, Wolfe relates the impossibility of this, to understand "transdisciplinarity as a kind of distributed reflexivity necessitated, by the fact that (by definition) no discourse, no discipline, can make transparent the conditions of its own observations. In this sense, transdisciplinarity means a distributed network of first and second order observers (disciplines) that, precisely by 'doing what they do' call in to question - and are called into question by - other disciplinary formations" (Wolfe 2010c: 116). Not to confuse this with the way that Cultural Studies functions in this dialogue, transdisciplinarity seeks, as a goal, to question the way in which disciplines approach practice and seek to make the process transparent: this is self-reflexivity at the level of disciplinarity.

'Interdisciplinarity', an evasive yet indiscrete term in academia, lacks definition and therefore is used without conviction, despite its status as emergent and progressive. To be 'inter' is to be between, within, or among several disciplines. Therefore, if I can define posthumanism as a theoretical framework that is still in a phase of self-definition, I position this paper in an ontology that is forming and therefore fluid and organic, and certainly cross disciplinary. If this paper is a posthumanist text, it is therefore not art history, art theory, or art criticism. However, the central dialogue of this paper will address art practice, which is therefore the other, or the 'inter' discipline. Is what results from this 'inter' a paper of Cultural Studies? Advocating only the title of 'artist' and eluding any other self-definition, I struggle to position my project as anything other than an art project, with a supporting and investigative critical text. In this, because I fail to subscribe to any one discipline, or even to 'inter', am I contributing to a field that eludes categorization and lacks critical impact? However, if I aim to disregard the term 'interdisciplinary' and replace it with 'transdisciplinary', I can instead function under the umbrella of self-reflexivity and self-reference, which Wolfe claims is at the core of posthumanism. What I aim to do in this paper is to adopt posthumanism as the philosophy, the terms and the conditions of my understanding, and apply these to my performative art practice. This eludes interdisciplinarity. In the same way that post-postmodernism acknowledges the problems in order to strive forward, so does my thesis project. This project is a critical reflection not only on human-animal relationships in art practice, but also the definition of the languages and methodologies of interdisciplinarity.

POSI - POSTMODERNISM

Two key and formative events from my recent past have influenced me during the development of my thesis project. The first event was the adoption of my cat Sushi in 2006, now 5 years ago. From the very start of our relationship, Sushi was very loving and loyal. Literally unavoidable, she was always in the room. She constantly surprised me with her eccentricities. She has led me to think through and expand upon concepts of anthropomorphization in my art practice, in which I have projected my feelings and responses through animal imagery. Themes of anthropomorphization have been strong in my art projects since Sushi's adoption, including *Cat and Bird* (2008), *Continuing Conversations between Cat and Bird* (2008), *Where To Go From Here* (2009), *Hyena One and Two* (2008-09), and more. Observing Sushi at the window while a flock of birds milled and messed around in my backyard originally inspired these projects. I would envision a conversation happening between Sushi and the birds, a negotiation, an agreement. In many ways, Sushi is my muse.

I approached this thesis project while developing posi-postmodernism as an ideology and methodology (and it is certainly also my ongoing approach to life). The origin of posi-postmodernism goes back to 2005, before I adopted Sushi. At that time, I was in the final year of my undergraduate degree at Queen's University, Kingston. I lived in a house with Darryl Bank, John Murnaghan, and Bitsy Knox - a motley crew of unassuming and brilliant artists. When I moved into this four-person home, I replaced Graeme Langdon, a beautiful, brooding, and tortured man writing his fourth-year film thesis on vampires and *Robocop*. Graeme came up with the term "posimodernism"

when he was feeling particularly hopeless, talking to Darryl about girls and buying them flowers. Darryl adopted the term and adapted it in collaboration with several friends. What resulted from the collaboration was posimodernism, which formed the emotional framework for a series of dance parties called *Japanada*. Since then, and in collaboration with Darryl, I've come to associate the term as an overarching methodology. In actuality, posimodernism is not a correct term. If you search "posimodernism" in Google it comes up in some unfortunate academic writing, likely a misspelling of postmodernism, or perhaps somehow relating to positivism.

Darryl's definition of posimodernism:

The prefix 'posi' isn't a proper prefix, but in the case of the inventedness of the word, it has its roots in the 'posi' (short for "positive" strain of U.S. hardcore that probably started in the late 80s with *Youth of Today* and some of the other early Revelation Records bands). I always thought this specific subgenre was particularly inane - it combined an extremely narrow, conservative aesthetic/musical framework with brain-dead, earnest lyrics. It's all about 'the scene', 'looking out for each other', 'staying true', etc. There is a strong resemblance to high school sports, at least in terms of the reinforcement of normativity. So for me, 'posimodernism' was a way of cryptically referencing 'posi' hardcore while ignoring all the parts of it that are stupid. Then it folds back into the dryness and dullness of simplistic and reductive theories of how culture works, for example, postmodernism. You combine the warmth of the saccharine, the earnest, the cliché, with the coldness of theory. Being at university, pretty immature and ignorant, but excited about learning, plus stressed out and anxious, I felt like this combination was something that could help me out and get me through things (Darryl Bank, e-mail message to author, November 21, 2009).³¹

³¹ In my own reductive and over-simplified language, what posimodernism means to me is a dialogue that resembles this:

Me: "We're fucked."

You: "Yes. We're totally fucked."

Me: "But: let's enjoy this moment for the moment. Let's let this moment pass."

Posimodernism is an acknowledgement of the way we've really fucked our own shit up: environmentally, psychologically, sociologically, in every conceivable way. But posimodern is also a brief moment of self-forgiveness. It is a fleeting split-second when, even though we are angry and hurt and upset, we are going to do this one thing, put something positive into the world, for now. It is contradictory and paradoxical. Being a posimodernist means that sometimes you are frustrated and you don't understand why everything has to be a struggle; it is knowing that everything is going to be ok.

Posimodernism is complicated, it isn't a solution; it is far more complex than you and I can ever even begin to fathom over three beers talking about feelings, or six beers talking about ideas. It is hopeless enthusiasm. It is about self-definition as much as it is about earnestly believing in goodness, even momentarily. It is Bruce Springsteen's *Born in the U.S.A.* (1984) and Dolly Parton's *Jolene* (1974). It is hard work and motivation and conviction. To be posimodernist is for me to acknowledge that my cat should not be my cat, and that I have contributed to the problem of domesticating animals by limiting their lives and abilities; it is loving her with all of my capacity and forgiving myself. It is recognizing that we are not all that bad, not all the time. It is awareness and it is complication and it is a brief repair for the irreparable through optimism and laughing out loud.

Posimodernism can be applied to almost any area of your life that you want.

As Darryl Bank puts it:

... Your personal life, academic/theoretical issues, art making, global conflict, etc. In a broader sense, I also think it's a good way of negotiating one of the big

fallacies of post-secondary 'art education'. I'll quote from Sally McKay here, in a comment she left on my friend Gabby's blog:³²

I'm big on research and education and rigorous thinking and participation in the larger cultural discourse, and all the good things that come from getting educated about your art practice. But nobody in his or her right mind would suggest that the best way to be an artist is to read a bunch of theory and apply it to your work (or, worse, vice versa). Yet, that's what an MFA degree demands. Only, since the Profs and students are mostly in their right minds, the demand is sort of tacit and oblique and strained. Students are left reading and making and not really knowing what is expected of them in bringing the two together, and faculty are hoping that the students will somehow rise above the murk and find their own path that surprises and delights without being a) overly pedantic or b) ignorant. Add to that the inevitable infantilization that comes with submitting your art practice to a grading scheme and owie! It's a mess. Now translate that into a PhD. A PhD that is increasingly necessary if you want to support your art career with teaching. Arg (Darryl Bank, e-mail message to author, November 21, 2009).

To be posimodern is to be aware of the flawed system yet to be indebted to it, to be enthusiastic about art and life yet to always be faced with a need to validate or justify. That is posimodernism. It is always a struggle; it is by choice. But it is because there is no other way.

In a recent conversation with my friend, former undergrad advisor, and haphazard mentor, Craig Leonard, I spoke about posimodernism with enthusiasm (after several drinks, my enthusiasm soaked in gin). Succinctly, Craig asked: "Why are you paying homage to modernism? Why are you claiming this genealogy of modernism?" Distressed at being challenged on the term rather than the concept, I thought about this for a long time (what felt like several minutes, at least). I said that it does not have to be called posimodernism. I replied that it could be called anything, that the awareness was the key point, not the term. Since then, I have considered other

³² <http://gabriellemoser.com/>

terms and have settled on posi-postmodernism. I believe that capturing the spirit of po-mo in this term is essential: schizophrenic already, the additional prefix of 'posi' references the original spirit of posimodernism.

Settling on the term posi-postmodernism, I have kept in mind Existentialism as a key referent while noting shifts in conceptual art practice, such as Romantic Conceptualism. Romantic Conceptualism sprouted from conceptual art, which is known as cold, hard, intellectual. Romantic Conceptualists, such as Sophie Calle, have reintroduced the element of emotion and the presence of the self/artist back into the work, resulting in more auto-fictive art practices that express human emotion like desire, a sense of humour, despair. Existentialism has been a long-standing influence on me, and certainly I would consider my art practice, which is commonly focused on the conditions of being human and engaging in relationships, to be an existential practice. However, the additional component of posi-postmodernism is the sensorial, the phenomenal, the moment, the feeling. Posi-postmodernism is process and product, relationships and results, practice, theory, romance, enthusiasm, community, breakups, heartbreak, laughing, sleeping, interacting, engaging, fucking up, acknowledging.

Posi-postmodernism and my concept of "coming apart" are complementary strategies for understanding the human world. Posi-postmodernism is an ideology, and "coming apart" is the appreciation of language. It is considering the terminology applied to a sense of loneliness paired with hopefulness. "Coming apart" is a term for understanding "being" human. To be lonely in the world does not require being isolated

or in despair. In a posi-postmodernist light, what this means is to acknowledge the exciting possibilities, connections, and relationships that may occur in any given human world, and the further myriad possibilities for interference and crossover with the animal worlds. "Coming apart" is a moment of hopefulness, because in this moment we understand that while our "being" exists in our own specific worlds, we also share concern for this world. This is posi-postmodernism and optimism and language and solution, maybe. It can mean failure, some. It is the connection of human and animal in light of new possibilities.

Keeping this influence of posi-postmodernism in mind, the second event that had a great effect on the development of my Master's thesis is the residency I attended at the Banff Centre during the summer of 2010. As a resident of *Beyond Former Heaven: The Institute of Surrealist Ethnography*, I was one of 18 artists, critics, and curators experimenting with dream analysis, hypnosis, astral projection, and other esoteric activities. These activities, done as a group while having the potential to have a deep personal impact on individual participants, has led me to consider this experience in relation to the current focus of my speculative thesis project. In these experiences, it is not a question of faith: you do not have to "believe" in the results of tarot card readings or the possibility of astral projection in order to gain something valuable from the experience. It is more about seeking self-knowledge, of giving yourself over to the unknown, the variable, and trusting your own intuition. It is also about building relationships and experimenting with social performance and structure. These experiences require you to trust your collaborators and construct lasting relationships

through the cultivation of self-awareness and self-knowledge. Inspired by my experience in Banff, in combination with the influence of posi-postmodernism, I founded the GROUP THERAPY collaborative art project with the intention of learning more about the individual self in a group setting, of constructing a circumstance in which self-knowledge could be gained and the conditions under which a transformative personal or collective experience could occur. GROUP THERAPY is a series of events and projects that incorporate ideas of posi-postmodernism (enthusiasm, working for the group or working for the weekend, strong platonic loves) with the esoteric: meditation, palmistry, card readings, and hypnosis.

Tarot card reading has always been an interest for me, as a neat party trick, a formative moment, a truth, a speculation, a sham. My time spent in Banff was exceptionally emotional. I was heartbroken after an intense relationship leading to a dramatic breakup, and separated from my cat, my close friends, and my family. I have had my tarot cards read consistently over the past ten years, and a particular reading in Banff was the most depressingly insightful, yet compelling, reading. Was it because I was feeling particularly emotionally sensitive, or did my heightened sense of emotion bring those cards out in formation? Returning to Toronto from Banff and still seeking healing, I began to read my own cards every morning, grasping at any notion of sense, repair, or hope.

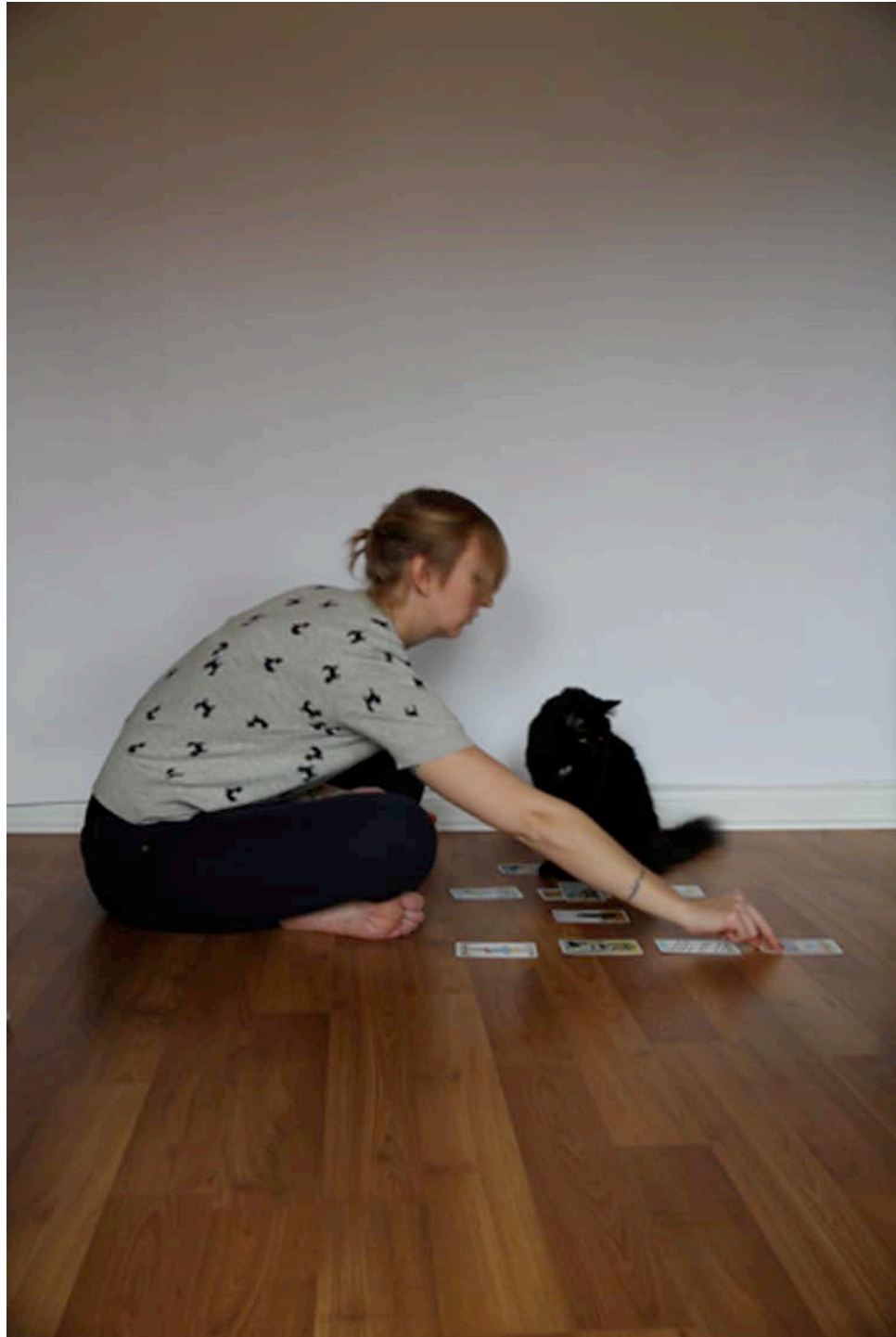


Fig 9. *Tarot*, 2010

I also went to see a psychic in October 2010 who read my cards for me. Overwhelmingly positive, the psychic told me that my future held everything I could want: love, success, and money. To me, this felt like a clichéd reading. However, one thing of note that the psychic told me was that I give too much of myself away (in truth, in time, in affection). This struck a particular chord with me: how can I understand giving a part of myself away if I cannot understand who I am? Who am I when I am with Sushi? How does that differ from when I am with another human? I generally feel that I do not give enough of myself. If I shift my physical and emotional makeup every time I interact with Sushi, what happens when we read our cards together, “becoming with” one another? If I read my own cards, or if I read the cards for Sushi, does this differ from a reading based on Sushi and me together, species-less, subject-less, hum-animal? The performance *Tarot* reflects this inquiry. I sought knowledge, asking the cards: who are we when we “become with” one another? And how can a reading reflect both Sushi and me, reading the spread together? Can we read our cards as two beings yet “being with”? During the performance, I shuffled the card with intention and asked Sushi to touch the deck, which she did. This is regular tarot practice.

In the *Tarot* performance, Sushi and I used the Celtic cross spread, revealing mostly inverted cards. In tarot, an inverted (upside down) card can mean the negative version of the positive, upright card, or it can have the same meaning as the positive, only more subdued. Given that this reading was for Sushi and me, and what we become when we “become with” one another, the results were fairly ominous, negative and very subdued. It is possible that the reading reflected some confusion of the signifier:

the subject, human or animal, or both. Regardless, what Sushi and I may expect in our future together are some obstacles: dishonesty, and potentially some loss, despite having some positive alliances and financial return in our near future. Of significance in this reading is the seventh card, at the bottom of the right hand line of cards: the Hanged Man, in reverse. The position of this card in the Celtic cross spread signifies the subject, whom the reading is directed towards. This card in the positive refers to wisdom, intuition, and sacrifice, yet the inversion is selfishness, the crowd, and the body politic. Possibly, this again may refer to a confusion regarding who is the subject in the reading, being hum-animal, Sushi and me. The remaining cards point to deception, snakes in the grass. The final card, which is what will come, was the Lovers inverted. This signifies failure. I suspect that this may be a true reflection of what is to come in the upcoming months. I will be leaving Sushi for three months and have not told her yet. It is possible that this reading reflects my deception in not telling, and her suspicion of me. This upcoming distance is certain to strain our relationship and result in some inevitable negativity.



Fig. 10. Detail of Celtic cross spread, from *Tarot*, 2010

My adoption of Sushi and the time I spent in Banff, two significant experiences, have been further supplemented by the way that I came to learn about performance art. When I was in high school, the teaching of contemporary art history was limited: the most contemporary things I came across were early iterations of modernist art. When I came to a BFA program that had a strong contemporary art theory component, I began to realize what kinds of possibilities were available to me as an artist. I began at university as a painter and quickly realized that I couldn't be contained on a canvas; I wanted to make books and sound and video, and to perform. I wanted to create relationships with people around my art practice. I wanted to collaborate with the people near me and with people I have never met before. I also learned, for the first time, about performance art. When I first heard about Joseph Beuys, I became a new convert, exhaustingly enthusiastic about him and performance art in general. For me, learning about Beuys was the moment: the pivotal second in which my approach to art making shifted. It wasn't only about understanding art in the everyday; it was more than that. I understood the practice of Beuys, from social sculptures to his self-mythology, to encapsulate everything that art could be, the infinite possibilities of art. Art could be (and is, always is) political. Art can strive to address the confused and complicated situation that we find ourselves in. Art can acknowledge the damage, the problems. Art doesn't have to make a monumental gesture to repair the damage, but it can be subtle, sweet, clever, quiet. Art propels us forward. Art is posi-postmodernist.

As I was learning about Beuys, I also became familiar with performance: body art, feminist, radical, political; emphasizing the use of the body in performance as the

integral element in discipline; endurance, pain. Performance art has a short but very fast-paced and diverse history, and coming to learn about Fluxus and Yoko Ono as well as artists like Chris Burden and Marina Abramovic completely changed my perspective and my approach to art. Genres of performance art have shifted since some of the first contemporary performers and even since I first learned about these artists, but my discovery of these artists and events has had a lasting effect on my practice. Learning about *Shoot* (1971) by Chris Burden or *Rhythm 0* (1974) by Marina Abramovic only through photographs and sometimes differing or conflicting “first-hand” accounts created a seductive, romantic mystery around the event itself. In my research of Joseph Beuys, I once came across the title, date, and place of a performance piece called *We Can't Do It Without Roses*, which at the time I only took mental note of. I do not remember what the performance was and I never found that information again. I convinced myself it was a real performance by Beuys, and created three of my own interpretations of the piece based on the title.³³ The mythology of performance learned through a haze of text and black and white photographs, combined with the reverence that performance art is given by the audience, elevated the status of this art of the '70s in my mind. Before YouTube made fuzzy video documentation available, before video art (and performance video) exploded, performance artists were mythological. And the artists whose practices are captured only through unreliable documentation continue to celebrate this mythology. Some artists, like Beuys, had emphasized and fictionalized

³³ *We Can't Do it Without Roses I*, 2006; *Sinners or We are All Bad People (Please Help Yourself): We Can't Do it Without Roses II*, 2006; *Sinners or We are All Bad People: We Can't Do it Without Roses III*, 2007.

his own mythology by circulating memories and personal accounts of his origins in the form of an autobiography. Other artists, like Ana Mendieta, died young, and by that unfortunate circumstance, her life and performances became mythologized.



Fig. 11. Chris Burden, *Shoot*, 1971

Taking example from these phenomena - both my learning about performance through still photography and the mythologization of performance artists - has influenced my thesis project *Animals in the Room*. By documenting my performance events through still photography, I keep the mystery alive. I create an event that only exists through documentation and my first-hand account. The only two reliable sources are Sushi and me, with the photographs representing the implied truth of the event. The viewer does not see the event in full, but rather a silent moment, with no beginning or end.

T H R E E

In this section, I map out current scholarship and performative art practice involving human-animal relationships with a consideration towards communication and the lack of common language between species. This section includes an ongoing investigation of my performances with Sushi in order to examine the relationship that we perform in a theoretical and artistic context. This section will position speculation as a conceptual trope to examine intuition and instinct.

The emergent field of animal studies in the humanities and social sciences is a complicated and often contradictory method of understanding animals. Study in this field is inextricably bound to a study of understanding what it can mean to be human. Philosophical and artistic interpretations of the animal consistently seek to distinguish the difference between animals and humans. In this section, I look at representations of the animal in contemporary art and theory, focusing in particular on examples of connections or differences between humans and animals.

HUMAN AND ANIMAL

Distinctions between animals and humans confuse and complicate, and can also engender a fascination with the animal. The impact of British naturalist Charles Darwin's unprecedented report *The Origin of Species* (1859b) on the relationship between animals and humans was a result of Darwin's theory of shared ancestry between animals and humans. Rather than the dominantly utilitarian or colonial relationship to the animal in modernity, the introduction of common genetics influenced studies of animal cognition and language as well as philosophical texts regarding an understanding of the animal in post-modernity. Challenging the dominant belief that humans are superior to animals, the possibility that animals came from the same origins was made even more disturbing by the possibility that animals could even be contained within what we understand as psychological subjectivity (Mangum 2002: 43). What Darwin suggested in *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872a) is that humans and what he referred to as the lower animals (dogs, cats, horses) have an innate set of codes, expressions, and reactions that are a combination of involuntary and voluntary. Darwin suggests that animals and humans alike are influenced by consciousness and what he refers to as "the mysterious power of will." This position, that animals are to some degree conscious, aware, and capable of action and reaction led to a total reconsideration of how humans understand animals. Nigel Thrift writes that in suggesting that "other animals have emotions, and some of the expressions produced by animals resemble our own" (2008b: 181), Darwin opened up the possibility of transference of affect across species. Thrift writes that Darwin's claim that "there is a

strong line of emotional descent running from animals to humans” (2008b: 181) is also linked to how animals and humans understand one other - how species react and are called into action in their interconnected lives with one another.

In equal part, we continue to develop the distinctions and differences between humans and animals. Thrift notes that awareness of these distinctions “make a startling difference to the human *Umwelten*, to the worlds that human beings assume exist. The reason that these distinctively human differences are so important is because it becomes possible to learn not just from the other³⁴ but through the other” (2008b: 157). This learning involves pooling our animal resources (through “being with”, “becoming with”) in order to amplify and project our species relationships forward.

Relationships between species are strengthened in the presence of each other. Integral to the development and strength of humanity is the presence of animals, because “the absence of animal being weakens the humanity of the human world” (Lippit 2000: 17). In *Electric Animal*, Akira Mizuta Lippit describes a separation of humanity away from the animal, explaining humans and animals as distinct and different from one another. Lippit writes that as humans began to develop a more heightened awareness of themselves, they began “to recognize the animal as a foreign being . . . In turn, the animal came to inhabit a new topology of its own, and humanity was left to mourn the loss of its former self. The mourning is for the self - a self that has become de-humanized in the very process of humanity’s becoming-human” (18). This suggests not only a loss, or a lack, of the animal in the human world, but also a trauma

³⁴ In this case, the animal other.

that is felt by both humans and animals alike, a trauma that must be mourned and repaired.³⁵ This is also recognizing that our human and animal worlds are distinct, with interference and intervention across worlds.

Heidegger wrote in *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1935; 1993) that the animal does not have a native animal world, but rather exists in a dynamic system alongside other natural life, which can be read analogous to the rhizome. Heidegger writes, “plant and animal likewise have no world; but they belong to the covert throng of a surrounding into which they are linked” (45). This lack of a native world also creates a distance from the human world (Lippit 2000: 56). Heidegger says that in this way, animals are impoverished in the human world (a world which has been established by language). Lippit writes that Heidegger’s notion of language and world are inseparable (2000: 57): “where there is no language, as in the being of stone, plant, and animal, there is also no openness³⁶” (1935b: 73). As Lippit notes, this reductive notion of the animal is problematic when considering the agency of the animal (2000: 57). In this rudimentary reading of Heidegger, the animal becomes a less dominant being, which reasserts anthropocentric preconceptions of the animal’s subservience to humans. Lippit discusses Derrida in a negotiation of this reductive notion; Derrida writes, “the animal does not have enough world, to be sure. But this lack is not to be evaluated as a quantitative relation to the entities of the world. It is not that the animal has a lesser relationship, a more limited access to entities, it has an other relationship” (1989b: 49).

³⁵ We see an attempt at this repair in *I Like America...* by Joseph Beuys, although as mentioned in the reading of that performance, the man (the hare) seeks healing from the animal (the coyote).

³⁶ Or, no world.

Heidegger's concept of the animal as poor in the human world, like Derrida's suggestion of animal presence in other relationships, presents a residual understanding of the animal as somehow victimized or impoverished in contemporary theory, art practice, and everyday life.

This negotiated reading of the animal world creates a clear distinction between humans and animals. If animals are not fully a part of our human world, how can we ever understand them? In general practice and in our pet relationships, because there is a void between us, we read intention (and all other emotions and actions) through what we assume we know about the animal. Despite this and due to the fact that we rely on this presumption, the animal can surprise us by acting wildly. The animal is the constant variable: spontaneous, mysterious, wild. Animals will always express a degree of wildness in a way that can catch us off guard. In the zoo, our expectations of animals (that have lived in confinement) to act wild are often disappointed. Yet in the home, we are displeased with our pets if they go beyond our everyday assumption of trained animal behavior: simple actions such as barking, expressions of sexuality or gender, peeing in locations that are off-limits, biting, scratching, hissing, licking, throwing up. This animal behavior is wild because it is uncomfortable and unpleasant to our human sensibility. Examples of expressions of animality in the media are sensational stories often involving death or critical injury³⁷, and yet a popular reaction to such stories is: "it

³⁷ For example, in 2003 one half of the entertainment duo Siegfried and Roy was attacked (and survived critical injury) by Montecore, a tiger from their act. Roy was responsible for the lions and tigers of the act, claiming that he "didn't so much train the animals as bond with them through a technique he called 'affection conditioning', raising tiger cubs from birth and sleeping with them until they were a year old. 'When an animal gives you its trust,' Roy had said, 'you feel like you have been given the most beautiful gift in the world.'" The accounts of the attack vary:

was just a matter of time.” Although we want the animal to suit our concept of animality, a part of that idea is the unknown, the variable, and the wild. The animal cannot be contained in a conceptual manner. Though literal containment is general practice, animals continue to express their animality, simultaneously conforming to our idea of wildness and defying our expectations.

Because we expect a degree of animality in animals, and although we project a degree of humanity onto them (by way of anthropomorphization), is it possible to bear witness to animals transcending our expectations of their animality? I speculate that through the phenomenon of animal-centric YouTube videos and animal Internet celebrity³⁸, we witness animals acting in ways that are counter to our expectations. When we see an example of an animal acting in a way that exceeds our expectations of a concept of what an animal is - often a projection of our anthropomorphization - we consider that this animal is exceptional, able to express more human qualities than another animals of the same category. This is disrupted, however, when we see this same animal subverting our expectations of species, acting like an animal, and meeting or disappointing our expectations of animals.³⁹ Ingrained in our expectations of animal

some say Montecore was deliberately distracted from his routine by animal rights activists in the audience. Siegfried has claimed that Roy had fallen ill from the effects of blood pressure pills and Montecore realized something was wrong and was trying to protect Roy. However, animal behaviorists have noted that it is more likely that Montecore was on his way to delivering a killing bite, much as a tiger in the wild would bring down an antelope (Nash: 2004).

³⁸ For example, *Stains the Dog*, who won Hot Slut of the Year, 2009, on the popular gossip site D-Listed, <http://www.dlisted.com/node/30375?page=1>

³⁹ Again, countless examples on the Internet prevail in regards to cats exceeding or disappointing our expectations. *Nora the Piano Cat* is an example of a musical cat, playing on the piano several times a day (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vozgQAp7EYw>); *Sebastian the Singing Cat* sings (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljmjmvMTWyY&feature=related>); *Talking Cat* talks (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tRWRSfcDuQ>); all of these vides show

and human species is a degree of awareness. If animals are not a part of the human world, this suggests that they are oblivious or uncaring of humanity, that they are unaware. Instead, animals would have their own understanding of themselves, disconnected from how we conceptualize them in theory and in our literal lives.

Built into an understanding of animality is an understanding of our human ability to self-conceptualize. We pride ourselves on our agency to self-conceptualize, self-analyze, and find an expression of ourselves; we do not know if animals can do this. Despite scientific evidence of animal cognition, on a theoretical level, Lippit suggests “the animal cannot be held accountable for its crimes because it is unaware of its actions” (2000: 50). These crimes, however, would not register in the human world if animals were unaware of human laws and criminal conventions. Building upon this concept of unawareness, I suggest that on a theoretical level, the animal transcends human intentionality. In our human world, expectations and assumptions are irrelevant to the unaware and oblivious animal. In Lippit’s discussion of this concept according to Jean-François Lyotard, this animal precedes the human subject: “the strange ontology of animal being disrupts humanity’s notions of consciousness, thrust from the traditional loci of its subjectivity. Contact with animals turns human beings into others, effecting a metamorphosis” (2000: 51). This follows Heidegger’s, and then Jean-Luc Nancy’s notion of “being with,” in that “being cannot *be* anything but being-with-one-

extraordinary efforts at animal communication or mimesis. In opposition to this, there are countless videos of *Stupid Cats (Doing Stupid Things)* acting in ways that are counter to our understanding of logical behavior, even for cats, such as running into walls, falling off counters, or jumping into tubs full of water (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZV6BsymgwmU>).

another" (Nancy 2000: 3). This "being with," and the resulting metamorphosis, like Haraway's "becoming with," instigates a shift in the ontological construction of the human and animal subject. In examples in literature and film, animals are capable of transcending or developing and exhibiting an understanding of themselves.⁴⁰ Expressions of becoming, metamorphosis, and transformation in literature indicate an animal that is acutely self-aware and capable of complex emotions such as fear or regret, transcending animality and suggesting an implicit humanity.⁴¹

A key example of this transcendence is the children's film *The Last Unicorn* (Jules Bass and Arthur Rankin Jr., 1982). In this animated film, what appeared to be the last unicorn on earth sets out to discover what happened to all the other unicorns. The unicorn lives an ideal life, protecting her fellow creatures in the woods by virtue of her very presence, yet she was still lonely. During her search for the other unicorns and in a moment of danger, a wizard transforms the unicorn into a woman in order to save her life. This transformation leads to a slow degradation of the unicorn's memory (not only of being an animal, but also of being a supernatural creature). The unicorn-woman,

⁴⁰ *King Kong* (1933; remake dir. Peter Jackson 2005) portrays a dangerous, yet expressive and emotional animal that seems to transcend (to a degree) his animality in his affection for the female protagonist.

⁴¹ This is also to suggest that there are no emotions that are limited to humans, and no animal emotions limited to animals, but instead there is dialogue between these concepts of emotion. In film and literature, we can also see examples of creatures who are in some form not animal, but not human. These beings are capable of deeply complex emotion and affection for humanity despite being rejected. *Frankenstein* (Mary Shelley, 1818) is an essential example of humanity in a creature that is decidedly not human. Quasimodo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Victor Hugo, 1831), similarly rejected by humans, struggles and shifts between expressions of love and humanity and deep aggression, or animality. Of course this humanity-animality discourse is not limited to humans or animals, and recalls a complicated dialogue of how we can categorize humans, non-humans, monsters, and animals.

despite initial repulsion at being a human, eventually allows the transformation to take over: she becomes-human. At the fullest expression of her humanity - in this case, signified by her falling in love with a man - she loses the concept of her animality: she knows regret, which a unicorn would never feel. When she is transformed back into a unicorn, she retains this awareness, this regret. Though the unicorn lost herself when she became human, and transcended her animality, when she is transformed back into an animal she retains a certain humanity. This perhaps, too, can be an example of the transcendence of the barriers of our species, resulting in human-animal. This is only one of countless examples of the blurry categorizations of human, animal, or human-animal in film.

B E C O M I N G

To speak of animality and becoming-animal from a theoretical viewpoint, I refer to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). Deleuze and Guattari have discussed an understanding of the animal world in regards to the rhizome, which is a system of dynamic elements connecting and disconnecting through time. In the terms that Deleuze and Guattari use, becoming-animal is a movement from the major (the constant) to the minor (the variable). This can mean the differences between the dog - the pack animal, undistinguishable from another dog - to Dog, the specific, individual subject. Becoming is a deterritorialization in which the subject is no longer stable but moves to a nomadic existence, in flight rather than settled or at peace with oneself and others. British visual theorist Steve Baker writes that becoming is a

kind of “un-humaning the human, and this is something which the animal proposes to the human by indicating ways-out or means of escape that the human would never have thought of by himself” (2000: 103). Becoming, as Deleuze and Guattari write, is not a resemblance, an imitation, or an identification (2009: 237). Becoming is not an evolution or transformation; becoming is involuntary (238), similar to the reflexive “becoming-with.”

Baker discusses becoming-animal in the short text *The Salon of Becoming-Animal*, co-written with British artist Edwina Ashton (2007). Baker, an art historian who specializes in animal representation in contemporary art, writes that the “aim of the arts is to ‘unleash’ becomings” (2007: 170). Deleuze and Guattari write that becoming “requires all the resources of art, and art of the highest kind. The kind of art through which you become animal” (2009: 272). Baker discusses that this becoming, and that which one becomes, can be thought of “as a process or method that ‘replaces subjectivity’ . . . more than just a variation of the poststructuralist theme of de-centering the subject but a full-blown doing away with the subject” (2000: 103). Baker identifies a core theme in Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis of becoming-animal: “the contrasting of interpretation and meaning on the one hand, and experimentation on the other (with a high value seeming to be accorded to artistic experimentation)” (2000: 104). Paradoxical, this reading connects to my own methodology (and that of Marcus Coates, whom I discuss specifically in the context of becoming-animal shortly) by emphasizing experimentation and differences in meaning and intention. Furthermore, Baker indicates the “role of artistic production and artistic discipline in the creative

transformation of experience: it is through a style that one becomes animal" (2000: 104), meaning that the connection between the artist, the animal, and the loss of subjectivity during the act of becoming are inextricably bound up with each other when considering what is unconventionally human. Though becoming-animal is generally an abstract concept, difficult to connect to practice and artistic research, Baker suggests that the high level of creativity that occurs when thinking through becoming affects both the artist and the animal. It is relevant to note that the application of this theory to artistic practice amplifies the importance of the connection between species (although in a true becoming, one would completely lose identification of species, human or animal).

This concept of becoming-animal leads into a discussion about the rhizome and the possibility of movement between (animal and human) worlds. The rhizome can be associated with psychic travel or astral projection - the ability to move as a psychic through distinct planes of being. It consists of interlocking and interacting systems existing in conjunction with other rhizomes, and movement within the rhizome is horizontal and trans-species. As Deleuze and Guattari write, the rhizome "is composed not of units, but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion" (1987: 9). Lippit connects this rhizome to the facilitation of animal entry to the phenomenal world (which is distinct from the human or animal world) (2000: 128). This movement to the phenomenal world, a world that is shared by humans and animals, creates the potential to unblock communication between humans and animals (Lippit, 128). This is important because we can consider a lack of common language between animals and

humans to create the greatest divide between our species. Because both animals and humans can travel to and from the phenomenal world, it becomes possible - theoretically - for any human to communicate with animals (and vice versa). The dynamic nature of the rhizome creates temporary connections, which are constantly shifting or eventually being dismantled; the rhizome creates the possibility of becoming-animal by providing exposure from one world to another. Where it has been connected to becoming-animal, this rhizomatic theory can be exemplified in text and literature. I believe that artists such as Joseph Beuys are able to emulate and develop these theories through conceptualization and imaginative travel. It is important to consider expanding the possibility of the rhizome beyond the development of the concept in theory in order to explain the interconnections across species and to begin to dismantle the species divide.

Some artists, for example Beuys, have illustrated an attempt at dismantling this species divide by reaching out across human and animal worlds into the phenomenal world. It is unclear in reading Beuys's intention or use of terminology when he discussed *I like America...* whether or not he was aware of the concept of becoming, although in my understanding of the performance, I read a dual becoming: becoming-animal and becoming-shaman, with the additional possibility of Little John's becoming-artist. Like rhizomatic travel, there exists in contemporary performance art the possibility of representing travel from one world to another, amplified through a performance of becoming. Marcus Coates, a British performance artist, illustrates possibilities of becoming and what I will refer to as phenomenal travel in his artworks *Journey to the*

Lower World (2004) and *The Plover's Wing* (2008). Like Beuys, Coates's works attempt to heal or find solutions to problems, and they appropriate shamanic ritual and culture. In a traditional sense, shamans were valued in the community for their ability to communicate with other species in the spirit/lower/animal world. In this same way, Coates takes on great responsibility in both of these performances.

JOURNEY TO THE LOWER WORLD

Much of Coates's artwork has to do with wildlife; he is an active ornithologist. Coates is also a trained contemporary shaman.⁴² He attended a weekend workshop in Notting Hill, London, where he learned how to communicate with the spirit world, to look for answers and act as a mediator between the human world and the spirit world. After completing the course, which encouraged participants to access a 'non-ordinary' psychic dimension with the aid of chanting, 'ethnic' drumming and dream-catchers (Frieze: 2007), Coates was inducted into the ancient techniques of shamanism. Coates has explained the process of phenomenal travel as essentially being a form of imaginative visualization. Coates learned from a contemporary abstracted form of shamanism that relies on animals as 'guides', encouraging practitioners to project personal spirit worlds in relative terms that are familiar to them: to construct an idea of a phenomenal world that is comfortable for the artist/shaman/traveler (Frieze: 2007). Coates's particular adaptation of shamanism is that of seeking out an animal spirit

⁴² Coates is a living, practicing, contemporary shaman. He offers little acknowledgement of the cultural appropriation of the term and instead often represents himself meekly, but with earnest ability. Like Beuys, Coates has often been referred to as a "sham-man".

guide who will provide answers to a specific query, which Coates will then in turn deliver to the human world. In *Journey to the Lower World* he performs for residents of a soon-to-be demolished building in Liverpool, while *The Plover's Wing* is a performance for the mayor of Holon in Israel. Coates acted as a consultant, and through his shamanic perception, he shed light on the problem of youth violence in Holon. *Journey to the Lower World* and *The Plover's Wing* are both examples of Coates's cultivated shamanic performances.

The artwork *Journey to the Lower World* is a video documenting shamanic performance. The performance took place in Rosa's flat, one of the residents of the building. Coates began the performance by drawing the green curtains in a room with a giggling, giddy, skeptical, and chatty audience of about ten people, mostly elderly women, sitting on folding chairs in a cramped cluster. Coates wrote the question, "Do we have a Protector for this site? What is it?" on a whiteboard, vacuumed the 'stage' on which he performed, tied his keys to his shoelaces, and began. During these preparatory actions, the talkative audience referred to what would happen next as a séance (which Coates corrected - they would not be talking to the dead), while they made some observations, discussed what Coates was doing, and laughed. The mood at the beginning of the performance was casual and strangely nervous, even anticipatory.

A series of actions then unfolded: Coates drank from a mug and spat it out on the carpet, deliberately. Walking into another room, Coates turned on a stereo of 'ethnic' drumming and dressed himself in an elaborate stag pelt, the head and antlers on his head like a helmet, the front paws attached to his hands with Velcro bands, and

the body of the pelt worn with suspenders over his brown pants and white shirt. The performance video is edited in such a way that suggests multiple camera angles (and therefore, people working these cameras) in the room. The perspective shifts between one camera that focuses on Coates, one camera in the side room, and a camera that pans across and zooms in on the audience members. When discussing this piece as a performance, it is interesting to note that the audience, being filmed, is therefore conscious of these cameras and performing as well. Viewing the performance video and not having a stake in the housing community, I am displaced from the intent of this performance, and therefore can only read the performance and the suggestion of atmosphere through the screen.



Fig. 12. Marcus Coates, *Journey to the Lower World*, 2004

In Rosa's flat, the mood shifted when Coates came into the room wearing the stag outfit. The audience became silent, with some soft nervous laughs disrupting the atmosphere. Coates sat in the chair, closed his eyes, focused; and after some time got up in what appeared to be a trance, slowly walked across the stage, and began to squawk, squeak, twitter, bark - making what can be referred to as non-specific animal noises. The sobering effect of the drums and Coates' unrecognizable yet primal language appeared to make the audience nervous. Coates became something not human: eyes closed, oblivious to the presence of the audience, making animal noises - suddenly he was wild, the variable, the unknown. This was deterritorialization, unsettled, in flight. Coates was becoming-animal, becoming-shaman. After some time moving around the stage like this, he sat, the drums stopped, and Coates continued to communicate in animal sounds. At times, the only sound was his heavy breathing. The audience waited intensely for something to happen. Coates came out of his trance, opened his eyes, took a gulp of water (then spat it out), and removed the stag costume. Coming out of the act of becoming, the removal of subjectivity appears nearly simplistic in Coates's version of becoming. The changes that take place are mostly interior: Coates's performance and its inherent ambiguity is speculative, suggestive and non-specific. Coates the shaman completes his performance.

Conversation between Coates the man/artist and the audience began: Coates described his journey. In his description, he started at the top of the building, moved down through the elevator, got out at the ground floor, kept going down. Coates the shaman came to a series of caves, a pool of water, a dense forest. Coates described

meeting some birds whom he attempted to talk to, but these animals were not interested in engaging in conversation.⁴³ He saw a stag in the distance. Tired, Coates settled and waited for an animal to come to him rather than continue to reach out to them. Eventually, a small hawk flew near and came to rest. Coates began to ask the bird questions. Coates described that the bird extended one wing, and he saw all the primary feathers moving independently in different directions, so that the bird could not fly. Coates said the bird began to shrink, get smaller and smaller, and then extend lengthwise until it eventually slid away like a snake. At this point, Coates recalled that the drums stopped beating, and so he returned, through the series of caves, up the elevator, back to Rosa's flat.



Fig .13. Marcus Coates, *Journey to the Lower World*, 2004

⁴³ Interestingly, in Coates's description of meeting these animals, he refers to the animals as "it," "that," and "which" instead of "he," "she," "whom," etc. Animals are not objects; animals are subjects.

Coates described the bird's feathers that moved in different directions and identified this as the audience's community. Coates, speculating, suggested that what they needed to do was work together, stick together: that the feathers represented each of them. Coates brought the message back from the lower world that the protector for the site is not some outside mystical animal or force: it is the group, the community. The ambiguity and non-specificity of this response recalls a tarot card reading or a horoscope - each reading contains elements that are significant based upon the open, interpretative, and general nature of speculative readings. An audience member responded to Coates by saying that for years as a community they had been striving to do this, to stick together, but have essentially and consistently failed to do so: as the majority of the group does not contribute to or participate in the community. Coates suggested that they continue to try, keep trying.

By the end of the performance, the audience is serious, receptive, even reverent. It is difficult to determine the extent of the sham and the degree of sobriety of the performer. Though acting foolish, Coates offers real (obvious) advice for this community of (dis)believers. There is a sense of futility alongside a confirmation of what the audience had been thinking all along, what they had been trying to do for their community. The end of the performance is anti-climatic, countering the intense, strange, unearthly⁴⁴ performance. Coates thanked the audience; the audience clapped. There was very little discussion following the performance.

⁴⁴ Or, other-earthly, meaning of an earth that is unknown, *other*, or not familiar.

Journey to the Lower World represents a trusting yet incredulous audience bearing witness to shamanic ritual, becoming-animal and becoming-shaman. Acting as the mediator between the lower animal world and the human world, Coates is convincing, sometimes moving, sometimes silly and absurd. As a consultant in the lower world, we can assume that some animal will eventually respond in a way that Coates feels is revelatory and significant. Moving past the obvious absurdity that Coates emulates in these performances and the sometimes uncomfortable (and regretful) audience, Coates' work is important in the context of the question: is Coates representing intuitive communication with the lower world? Coates' work comes close to dishonouring both his audience and the sober tradition of shamanism. In the style of documentation in Coates' performance videos, an authority is placed upon the performer that may not be appropriate or warranted. The video documentation is polished, edited to pan over the audience's faces and zoom to Coates' sweaty and enthusiastic animal calls. Though Coates claims to be able to access knowledge by travelling through a hole in the ground, towards the centre of the earth, he may also be making a mockery of his audience, shamanistic tradition, and, of course, himself.

Despite this, my reading of Coates' work is that he is earnest, and his ultimate goal appears to be positivity; this is aligned with my own concepts of postmodernism and my experimentation with communication. The performances are clearly performances in the format that they are staged and documented, and yet Coates functions in a way that is non-offensive, thought provoking, and positive. This is clear in witnessing the shift in the audience's attitude to Coates in *Journey to the Lower*

World from nervous confusion to reverence, regard, and gratitude. Though Coates eludes making big statements or providing big solutions, he is able to offer some insight, which, though minor, is essential and cathartic for the audience. Even though Coates does not engage with live animals in his performances, his interpretations of his journey and the images that he creates for the audience are rich, descriptive, and imaginative. On a spectral level, Coates is identifying his place in the human-animal worlds as a mediator, a traveler, a shaman. The ability to cross over barriers of world and language, though rare, is in some cases essential to breaking down the species divide.

This species divide is enforced and intensified by the lack of shared language, which I will discuss in detail below. Language is the tool that humans have used to develop their own primacy over animals, usually considering animals as void of culture or ability (despite evidence of highly sophisticated communication among animal species, such as the pack social behavior of wolves or tool use in birds). Albert Liu writes “language is the enabling force that allowed humankind to separate itself from other beings, to master them” (2002: 152). This division, the lack of verbal communication between humans and animals, draws an idea of humanity away from the animal while asserting human-assumed dominance.⁴⁵ If animals had human speech, I would suggest that while a distinction between animal and human would remain, we would treat animals more as humans, or at least the status of these talking animals would be elevated. This is acknowledging, of course, that humans continue to oppress, dominate

⁴⁵ This – the implied lack of humanity in animals – is particularly important when we consider what the terms human and animal mean along a spectrum of subjectivity.

and dehumanize one another in our deeply complicated human-human relationships, and animals are already in a dangerously low position in humanity's hierarchy of importance. As Marc Bekoff writes in *The Animal Manifesto* (2010), caring for animals does not require a negotiation. One does not have to choose to be compassionate either towards animals or towards other humans. He writes, "many people around the world who work for animals also work selflessly for people. Caring for animals doesn't mean caring less for humans: compassion begets compassion. When we learn to be compassionate to all animals, that includes humanity. Compassion easily crosses species lines" (21). Therefore, in a situation in which we find our companion animals speaking coherently and expressively, we would be faced with the opportunity to stage a negotiation of how we understand our humanity. If we measure our own humanity against what we are not (animals), and if animals act more and more like how we understand humans to act, it would be impossible not to see the species divide blur or disappear entirely. This also works in the other direction, from humans to animals. Within our current understanding of humanity, there are varying degrees of expressions of wildness (we see this in the dehumanization of violent criminals, who are described as "animals," and in discussions of using violent criminals in scientific experiments that are currently done on animals).⁴⁶ Even among humans, there exists a spectrum of animality.

⁴⁶ This is a complicated and vast topic beyond the scope of this text. It is valid to note that animals, by human standards, engage in criminal behavior, such as theft, rape, infanticide and murder for sport.

This human-animal dichotomy is a partial explanation for humanity's fascination with and desire for animals, and the spectrum of animality complicates this dichotomy. To recall Haraway's words, "we have never been human" (2008b). We, as humans, are as animal as the animal; the animal is as human as we are. However, from a humanist and philosophical perspective, the need to know and understand animals comes from a need to know and understand ourselves. We understand ourselves based on how we interact with others, regardless of species. I believe that we see animals as a way to self-define, self-acknowledge, and self-reference. Because we (more specifically, artists) are always searching to know more about ourselves, it becomes necessary to consider the desire to have animals constantly near us. In a historical sense, this fascination is rooted in a desire for domination: to control that which we fear, the unknown and the wild. A more contemporary notion of animal presence addresses a desire for obedience and unconditional love. In a contemporary sense, and to reference French post-structuralist Jacques Derrida, as the animal looks upon us, we are reflected in the animal gaze. In this, we recognize ourselves as we look upon the animal.

This recognition of the self is a specific condition of human narcissism. As Rosalind Krauss writes, in a psychological situation, drawing attention away from the external subject (in this case, the animal-other) and investing it in the self is narcissism (1976: 57). This is transference of interest, using the animal as a mirror for reflection rather than a subject, and could explain to some degree why humans are drawn to have animals infiltrate their lives. Lippit describes Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic

breakdown of the animal, extracted from the text *Mourning and Melancholia*, where Freud identifies the human and animal-other rupture. According to Freud, this is the origin of anthropocentrism and hostility toward animals as well as the identification of the animal-other. Lippit writes that the animal, in Freud's anthropological version, is the preformed ego in an infantile state (2000: 17). Once the infant ego recognizes crucial distinctions between the self and other, the other forms a residual self. According to Freud, this self only emerges through eliminating what is other. With this elimination, the self mourns the loss of the other. The animal in Freud's analysis locates the philosophical and psychological origin of animal sacrifice, affirming humanity's primal identification with animals and a need to overcome this identification (Lippit 2000: 17). By removing an understanding of animals from how we understand ourselves, we disrupt the balance between humans and animals. However, as seen through the writings of Thrift above, this disruption in balance results in a development of the concept of our own humanity, which is a productive and progressive moment.

Derrida discuss this identification of humanity in *The Animal that Therefore I am* (2008a). Of primary interest in the discourse of contemporary art and animality is that of the animal gaze. Derrida's description of the animal gaze is inextricably associated with human self-identification. Derrida writes that the desire to know the unknown, inherently connected to fear of the unknown, is a product of humanity in our current, post-modern era of self-reflexivity. This being said, animal representation and the animal gaze become tools of self-reflexivity, tools used to identify and clarify the unknowns (which may include self-doubt, as Derrida continues to explain) (2008a: 18).

The animal gaze can have a powerful influence on humans: when the animal gaze is met, the focus on animals is inverted back to the human. When we look upon the animal, we are caught in its gaze, creating self-awareness. In Derrida's case, the animal gaze comes from his pet cat staring at him when he is naked, causing him to be aware of his nakedness. This awareness instigates a total questioning of the self and a need to identify the basic experience of shame while simultaneously (for Derrida) needing to explain this shame away. Derrida identifies the power and influence the animal seems to have upon him, and the lack of speech from the animal further empowers this gaze:

As with every bottomless gaze, as with the eyes of the other, the gaze called 'animal' offers to my sight the abyssal limits of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say, the border crossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself, thereby calling himself by the name that he believes he gives himself (2008a: 12).

Unsettled, Derrida writes of "the cat's eyes looking at me as it were from head to toe, just *to see*, not hesitating to concentrate its vision" (373). Derrida identifies the need for humans to acknowledge the animal's ability not only to look, but also to see and to address (383). This famous anecdote of Derrida's nudity and his small female cat is repeated throughout his text. Haraway delivers a concise critique of Derrida's anecdote in *When Species Meet* (2008b); rather than considering the impact of the gaze, Haraway considers the animal, Derrida's cat. This cat is a literal cat, existing in the world, yet Haraway's critique is that Derrida never considers what the animal herself is thinking and the animal's reaction to Derrida (2008b: 22). Haraway is one of the only theorists who considers the animal herself and acknowledges the animal's autonomy. In so doing, Haraway successfully demystifies the animal gaze, discussing the agency of the

animal in a more literal sense as a companion, and reduces notions of anthropocentrism as a timeless conception of humanity.

FOLLOWING

This powerful, mysterious animal gaze, which I have examined in my *Observation* series, is also a key element of the *Following* series. *Following* is another experiment based on Boal's games; in this performance, Sushi follows me around the room. It is simple, silent, and, at times, unsuccessful. My goal for this piece was to identify and represent the strong connections between Sushi and me: we literally follow each other around my home. At times during these performances, Sushi and I would stop moving and look at one another. The connection inspired by her looking, addressing me, facilitated the performance. It is a performance that potentially could have no ending, as our interest in one another is unfailing; at times I could not judge who was following whom. This confusion and disregard for the intention of the performance truly is an example of "becoming with." Though not touching, only looking, Sushi and I were able to follow, follow through, "become with" just by "being with" one another.

The *Following* series illustrated our strong, intuitive connection through movement, through looking, and through sensorial and atmospheric communication. In the original game by Boal, one of the humans is blindfolded. This person moves through the group, responding to the sense of presence. Though neither Sushi nor I were blindfolded, there was at times a lack of visual connection and instead what was

happening was what I would call a more sensorial and phenomenal transmission between Sushi and me. I was able to sense where Sushi was in the room even when I could not see her.

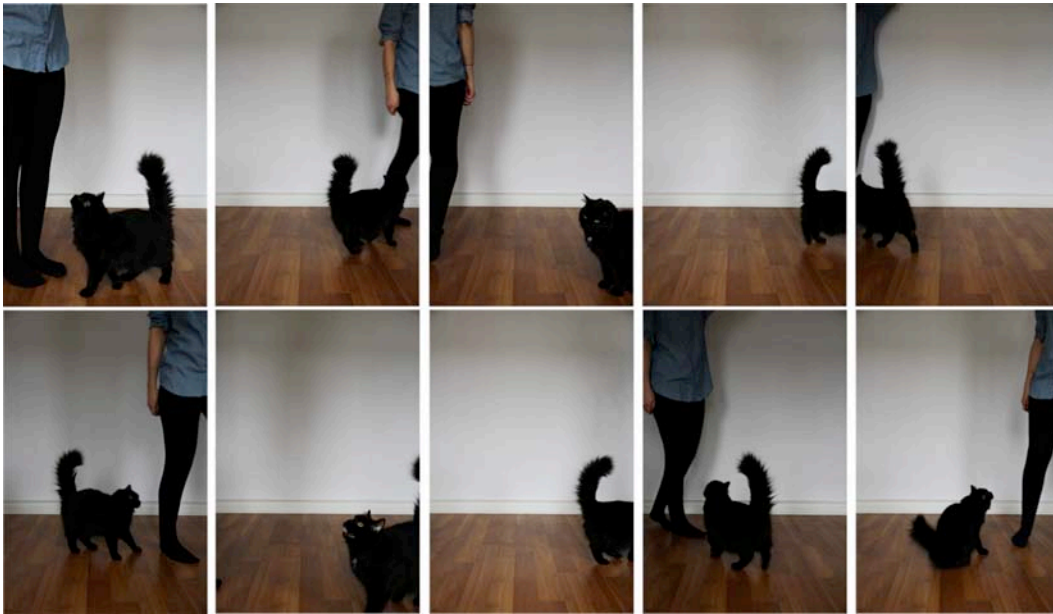


Fig. 14. *Following*, 2011

Our literal connection, sensed through presence, and these literal animals in the room - Sushi and me - become disconnected and removed from the culture of victimization of animals, reductive notions of animals in theory (according to Heidegger, to lack), and a general dismissal of animals as inconsequential. To me, Sushi is of the highest consequence: she is my companion and partner. However, it is easy for me to dismiss other animals, even other cats, unless we have spent some time together and can begin to have a sense of a potential bond. It is important to note that relationships that are formed between humans and animals, though common, are specific to each situation. Despite the fact that I have this deep bond with Sushi, I do not experience this with all animals. Admittedly, I have become normalized into a

culture desensitized to road kill, mousetraps, and fly swatters. Sushi once caught a mouse in my apartment; I encouraged her.

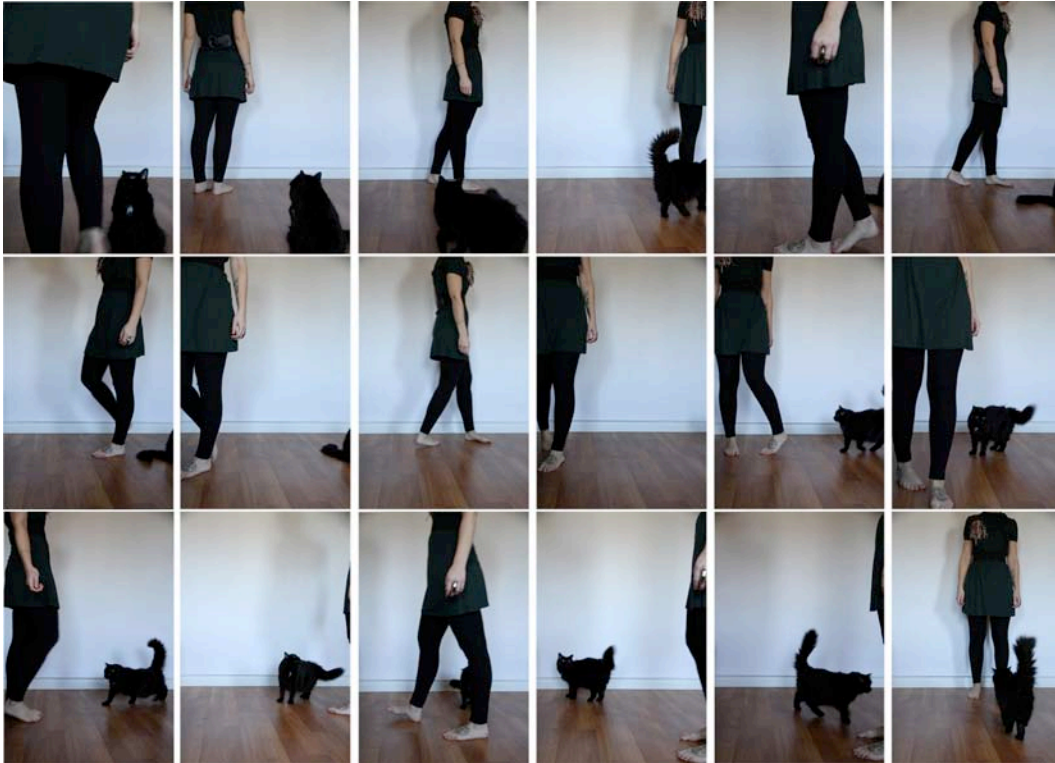


Fig. 15. *Following*, 2011

ANIMAL AS VICTIM / APOLOGIES

Haraway considers the literal animal - Sushi, Derrida's cat, the mouse - to turn the lens to very real conditions in human-animal relationships. Current popular understanding of the relationships between animals and humans tends towards acknowledged tensions⁴⁷ - a mutual caution - referencing a historical overload of

⁴⁷ There are countless ways to frame tensions between humans and animals. Theoretically, we note the differences between humans and animals, and the lack of shared language, which

violence and manipulation of animals by humans. Animals continue to be exploited for entertainment, objectified, turned to as the subject of humour, bred specifically for their body parts and meats, mistreated, left to go extinct, hunted for sport - the list is endless and the results are disappointingly the same: the animal is a victim. It is difficult to discuss human-animal relationships without acknowledging this history.

This victimization of animals is not only an indication of historical, and unfortunately contemporary, treatment of the animal, but also of an ingrained cultural memory that creates a literal separation and avoidance of animals (when they are not our healthy companion animals), particularly animals we perceive as pests. This also suggests a hierarchy among humans and animals. In this hierarchy, humans are the most dominant; following that are companion and utilitarian animals; and further down the line, there are what we understand as less sentient and pestilent animals. We would rather not kill a mouse in our kitchen, but if we do have to kill it, hopefully it will go quietly and without making a mess. A dismissive and passive relationship towards

results in misunderstanding or manipulation. There are also academics and activists like Peter Singer, whose texts *Animal Liberation* (1975a) and *In Defense of Animals* (2006b) are renowned for measuring the ethical worth of human and animal life. Singer writes in the introduction of *In Defense of Animals* that what he aims to do in his activism is to “make the limited and defensible claim that where animals and humans have similar interests, those interests are to be counted equally. We must not disregard or discount the interests of another being, merely because that being is not human” (7). There are, of course, distressing examples of animal life in factory farms, and capitalism pushes toward reducing the animal to a non-sentient being, despite concrete evidence that the only benefit to factory farms (despite environmental concerns, the risks posed to human health and well-being, and the huge drain on farmable land) is the resultant low-budget foods (Jonathan Safran Foer, 2009; Michael Pollan, 2008). These are only a few examples of the tensions existing between humans and animals, specifically referring to human-assumed dominance. There are also many examples of animal violence against humans, equally distressing, such as the documentary *Grizzly Man* (Werner Herzog, 2005).

animal pests is most common: these animals are regarded as a nuisance, with humans paying little attention to or regard for the animal.

Baker leads the discourse of “animal as victim” (which steers into a conversation about violence and animal bodies) into contemporary art. In the text *Killing Animals*, Baker acknowledges, “dead animal bodies (or even images of dead animal bodies) carry a considerable symbolic weight” (2006: 78). A dead animal body is a politically and ethically charged object in art - much more than inert material (78). In considering the intention and use of animal bodies, we must also consider the overarching historical thread of human oppression towards animals and ask ourselves: what is to be done? How can we address/acknowledge/rectify this damaged relationship?

Shaun Gladwell’s performative video *Apologies* (2007-09) investigates this tense relationship of humans toward pest animals. In this specific case, the artist performs with kangaroo road kill in the Australian outback. Kangaroos are iconic of Australian life, but an increase in numbers has led to kangaroo harvesting: the Government of Australia website states that every season, based on kangaroo population, licensed hunters harvest kangaroos. Because of this increase in numbers and a culture of limitation, kangaroos are often seen as pest creatures, and tend to be the victim of regular road kill incidents.

Gladwell takes this common scene, the corpse of a marsupial on the side of the road, and turns it into a grave act of apology, an expression of guilt, and a reverence for a life lost. *Apologies* is a somber, romantic ritual that the artist performs in penance for

countless kangaroo road kill, already dead, on the side of the Australian outback roads. In the video, Gladwell rides up to the side of the road on his motorcycle, parks, and approaches the dead animal. The legacy of Joseph Beuys has infiltrated this artwork, which references the performance *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965). In that performance, Beuys murmured to a dead hare as he tenderly cradled it in his arms. In Gladwell's video, ritualized action and an apology to nature (the animal world) are slowly, softly, and silently performed by the artist. Gladwell is dressed in futuristic motorcycle gear, completely protected from head to toe with a covered helmet, black leather jacket, gloves, pants, and boots. The anonymity of the artist contrasts with the vast and overheated Australian landscape, and heat waves can be seen coming off the pavement. The video, filmed slowly and simply, with one shot for each kangaroo and a stable camera, is framed by a bright blue sky, red earthy tones, and the suggestion of extreme heat. As Gladwell rides up and gets off his motorcycle, we can begin to form the composition of the scene. Gladwell walks over to the dead animal and tenderly moves flies away from the body, softly and slowly picking up the animal, cradling it like a small child. The length of the kangaroo's legs sometimes escapes the artist, and the long paws hang down as Gladwell walks across the frame of the camera in a silent lullaby.

Gladwell's video and the intimacy between the artist and the dead animal provide insight into a deeply private experience: death. Though the violence and the moment of the death of the animal escape the audience, the suggestion, the swarming flies, and the sometimes-open wounds refer to this violence. Gladwell aptly captures

the ongoing problem of road kill (certainly not limited to Australia) in a respectful, apologetic manner. The image of road kill suggests a dismissal and disregard for dead animal bodies. The assertion of dominance by human and machine as the kangaroo's enemy is unnatural, consistent with an un-symbiotic and destructive relationship that has developed with wild or pest animals. These animals that are not companion animals are therefore lower in the human-constructed hierarchy of animals. And for these reasons, Gladwell performs an apology. The video suggests the apology is not just as a motorist on the road who likely could have contributed to this tragedy, but from the artist toward all animals who have been killed through human contact. There is a Pietà-like moment, a somber and silent mourning, in the way the artist tenderly picks up and cradles these dead animals. The complete silence of the video contributes to the somber nature of the work. Pointing to an international problem of human-animal interactions that result in unintended violence, Gladwell identifies the reality of the animal victim in the human world.

Gladwell's video can also be read as an example of "becoming with": despite the reality that the animal is dead, we read a deep emotional connection formed between the artist and the animal. In death, the animal cannot reciprocate this emotional connection. However, in Gladwell's gesture of tenderness, reaching out towards this animal, the intended effect is more significant than merely picking up and moving road kill. Gladwell, in his human presumption of responsibility, makes a grand gesture of apology that is both sentimental and romantic, and which confirms the role of animal as a victim of humans.



Fig. 16. Shaun Gladwell, *Apologies*, 2007-09

The “animal as victim” debate also leads to an unavoidable discussion that addresses ethical and political topics such as animal rights and speciesism. Peter Singer, an animal rights advocate, is one of the leading academic proponents for the ethical treatment of animals. Singer is well known for his radical opinions on animal liberation and the value of living beings. In his book *Animal Liberation* (1975a), Singer writes extensively on speciesism. Speciesism demands a radical, political response - identifying animals as victims and deserving of justice. In Singer’s words, “speciesism is

the idea that it is justifiable to give preference to beings simply on the grounds that they are members of the species *Homo sapiens*" (2006b: 3). Singer's point of view on speciesism in academia is controversial at best, as he positions the argument of species against boundaries of race, gender, and other markers of oppression and disadvantage in attempting to create a morally relevant understanding of equality. In the world of philosophy, with some powerful exceptions such as in the work of Haraway, the ethical treatment of animals is often not addressed or is under-represented in the discourse. The term "animal rights" is generally not used in academia for its connotations of extremism. Despite this, there are parallels in Singer's advocacy with posthumanism, connecting a radical politicized conviction of human-animal relationships to a grounded philosophical understanding of human-animal relationships. Posthumanism, in its rejection of human supremacy, advocates human responsibility towards animals. Regardless of humanity's impression of or attachment to animals, humanity has a stake in the animal dialogue. This is exemplified by representing the unavoidable connection between humans and animals, and Wolfe points to the progressive stance that humans must be thoughtful, responsible beings (2010c: 25). Gladwell embodies this sentiment in his *Apologies*, taking on the burden of apologizing to and bearing responsibility for the animal victims. It is essential in our understanding of animals to acknowledge and consider our responsibilities to animals and to ourselves despite the differences we've come to understand between species.

LANGUAGE

Taking responsibility for one another as species points to the connection that we, as humans, feel towards animals. The surge of philosophical interest in the animal subject following Darwin's discoveries reflected humanity's longstanding fascination with animals⁴⁸, and this relates to the idea of a shared sense of being and consciousness. Animal-related art and scholarship over the past twenty years⁴⁹ can be partially explained as a narcissist attempt to understand ourselves, which, though seductive, can lead to misunderstandings and misrepresentations. A lack of shared verbal language displaces the animal from our concept of humanity, emphasizing difference - in a human-centric understanding, language may be the primary distinction that creates a separation in how we can understand and communicate with animals. However, in animals' lack of human speech (although a "lack" suggests that the animal is somehow found wanting), there is a possibility for alternative, non-verbal communication.

This lack of shared language mystified the animal and disrupted our ability to conceptualize the animal's humanity. Lippit proposes that the fascination with animals seen in theorists and artists comes from a separation that is formed by the animal's

⁴⁸ Lippit notes several contributing circumstances to this recent surge of interest in animals in theory: along with the impact of the Darwinian revolution, he also considers the popularity of Freudian psychoanalysis and advances in technological media (2000: 2).

⁴⁹ Of note are the following texts and exhibitions, beginning in 1990, that have contributed to the ongoing development of animals represented in literature and art: *Simians Cyborgs and Women*, Haraway (1990); *Animal.Anima.Animus.*, PS 1 MOMA (1999); *The Open: Man and Animal*, Giorgio Agamben (2003); *Becoming Animal*, MASS MOCCA (2005-06); *The Animal that Therefore I am*, Jacques Derrida (2008); *The Animal Gaze*, conference (2008, 2011); *Adaptation: Between Species*, The Power Plant (2010).

inability to communicate through language (2000).⁵⁰ This is not a new theory, but one made popular more recently through the writings of Lippit and Derrida. Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher of the Enlightenment, postulated a moment in history at which animals claimed simultaneous difference from and connection to humans. In the *Conjectural Beginning of Human History* (1786), Kant identified the origin of human language: the animal cry.⁵¹ Lippit discusses Kant's construction of the animal cry, which is instinctual and mimicked by man, "moved for the urge for communication to make his existence known to other living beings, particularly to such as utter sounds" (1786: 54). The human was inspired to communicate across species (and among his own species), doing so in imitation of the animal. This is Kant's language-origin story: man, in mimesis of the animal, was taught language by animals.

Kant's explanation of the animal cry and the origin of human language lead me to consider the distinction between how we understand animal language and human language.⁵² Lippit has acknowledged that animals, able to communicate among their own species, possess a secret language (secret, of course, because to humans it is incomprehensible). Lippit writes that animals, silent figures of nature lacking the capacity for human speech, also lack the ability to self-reflect and self-conceptualize.

⁵⁰ There are exceptions to human-animal language, for example, animals in captivity that have been taught communication or primate animals that use sign language to communicate. Humans endeavor to understand animal-animal language as well as make attempts to breach the animal-human language barriers.

⁵¹ The animal cry recognizes the animal's impulse towards language and communication though can often be described – in human terminology – as unintelligible, primordial or instinctual (Lippit: 41).

⁵² There are examples in literature and film in which human characters are able to communicate to animals, or animals have the ability to speak human language, for example, *Dr. Dolittle* (Hugh Lofting, 1920-52; dir. Betty Thomas, 1998) *Chronicles of Narnia* (C.S. Lewis, 1950-56).

The result of this inability is animals' lack of control in determining or regulating the discourse they put forth (Lippit 2000: 21). Although this may seem similar to Heidegger's reductive notion of the animal - that of a creature lacking one of humanity's essential abilities - Lippit instead empowers the animal with the ability of alternative communication. In Lippit's analysis, the animal lacks control, and in place of communicating, the animal transmits (2000: 21). This transmission is analogous to radio waves, or the transmission of a feeling.

Thus, the possibility of an alternative, operative method of communication across species opens up. I suggest that this alternative method of communication is spectral in nature. The transmitting animal does not lack awareness, but instead is uncannily hyper-aware, omniscient, and capable of deep revelation for humans (Lippit: 70). This is an animal that is incapable of keeping, or even having, a secret. Haraway discusses the honesty of the animal in *When Species Meet*. Haraway identifies a process that bio-psychologist Barbara Smuts calls "embodied communication" (2008: 26). This means nonlinguistic communication through meaning, touch and greeting, which can also lead to understanding and honesty across species.

EMBODIED COMMUNICATION

In my performances with Sushi, I have sensed an atmospheric shift, a shade of "becoming with". In the *Embodied Communication* series, I approached each performance by simply lying down, allowing Sushi to react to me and direct the performance. Without movement, sound, or touch, and without requesting Sushi to

perform in any certain way, she approached me of her own volition and expressed her affection.⁵³ In both *Embodied Communication I* and *II*, as I lay on my stomach, Sushi came to meet me face-to-face. In the first of the series, we simply touched noses and made eye contact, and she moved on to engage in other activities, lying near my side without touching. In this performance, I felt we had a strong connection, built and emphasized through that one nose-to-nose touch. In the second of the series, Sushi again approached me, and as we looked at each other she began to lick my face. There is a moment of affection that is unquestioned: Sushi is providing a gift to me and I graciously accept.

This fleeting moment of “becoming with” was sensorial. In our regular, daily lives, if Sushi begins to lick my hands or arm I will allow it but generally my face is off limits. However, in this performance, I felt an overwhelming and powerful connection to Sushi that language cannot capture: her desire to provide affection and care for me was welcome. Cats generally lick humans to groom and show affection: the grooming may also be a way to remove ‘human’ scents like soap and moisturizer so that the cat may mask this domesticated human scent with the animal’s own. After this has been

⁵³ I am aware of the durational performance *Infinity Kisses* (1981-88) by Carolee Schneemann and the projects that she has undertaken with her cat Vesper. In this work, Schneemann has suggested that in the action of holding her camera, Vesper would immediately kiss the artist on the mouth. I acknowledge that Schneemann’s work may be considered pivotal in the dialogue of human-animal communication in performance art. However, in my research, which includes having witnessed Schneemann present on *Infinity Kisses* at the *Animal House* exhibition (SAW Gallery, Ottawa, 2009), I feel as if the artist is deliberately silent regarding the ethical or political implications of her practice. Her ability to deflect an ethical dialogue leads me to exclude her from my investigation of human-animal communication in performance. For a discussion on Carolee Schneemann, see Schneemann, Carolee. *Imaging Her Erotics: Essays, Interviews, Projects (Writing Art)*, MIT Press, 2003 and Cameron, Dan, Kristine Stiles and David Levi Strauss. *Carolee Schneemann: Up to and Including Her Limits*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1997.

completed, the animal can be assured that the cat and the human are of the same species. Regardless, I read Sushi's intention as one of deep affection, and I believe I reciprocally transmitted my affection.

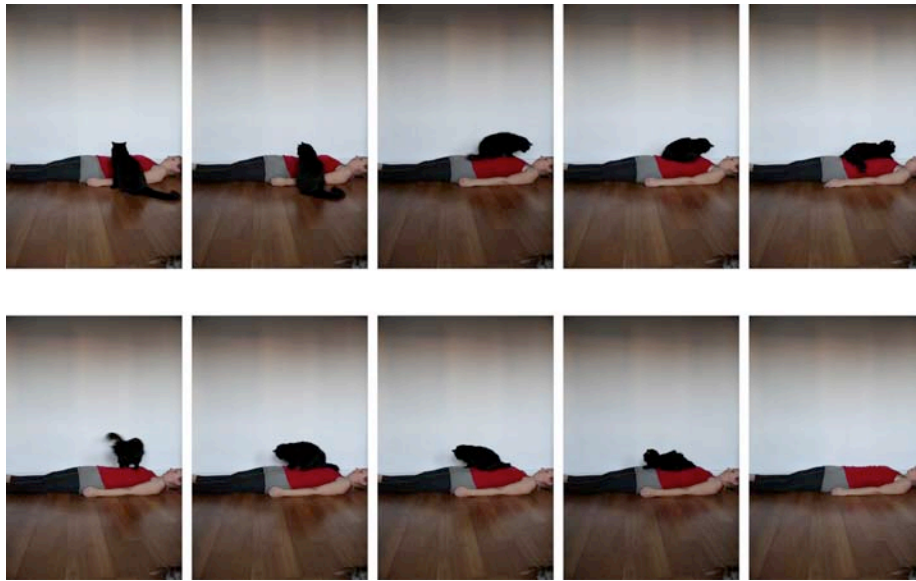


Fig. 17. *Embodied Communication III*, 2011

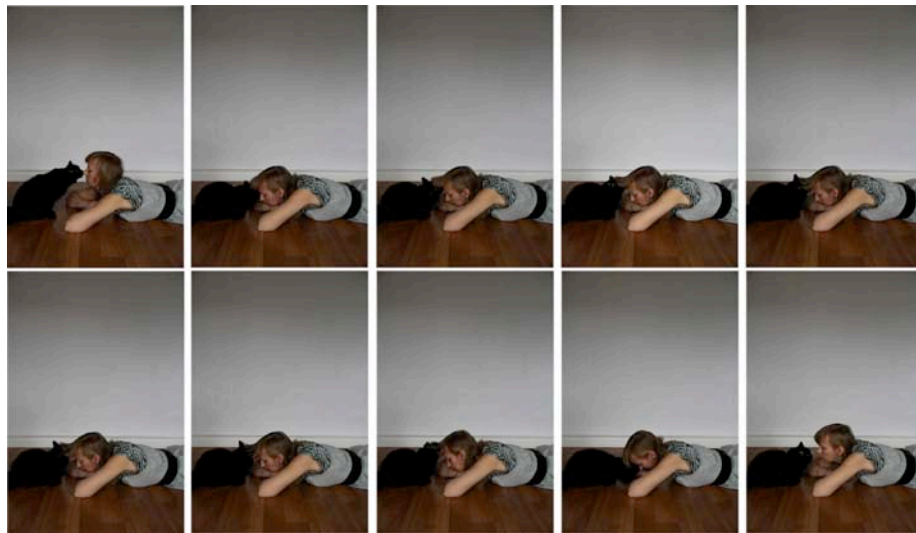


Fig. 18. *Embodied Communication II*, 2011

In the third of the *Embodied Communication* series, I lay down on my back and called Sushi into the room without words. She came into the room, contemplated the situation, and lay down on me, first face-to-face and then she shifted around to face my feet. There is some replication here, of Sushi responding to the way my body has formed and imitating that. This closeness captures our relationship, the inextricable way that we are deeply connected and simple acts of affection and motion amplify this connection. In this series, I believe that we both felt this connection, this “becoming with” and “being with.” In the *Embodied Communication* series, I suggest we captured a sense of “coming apart.” In my use of the term, I understand that Sushi and I physically were together in the room, and as a result of this meeting, we experienced “becoming with.” Also, in the form of the performances and artistic project, Sushi and I were in this series attempting to or achieving a knowing, “being with,” sharing the concerns and conditions of our relationship. Yet we “came apart” in our own *Umwelten*, we existed in the same time and space and yet we did not influence one another. We “came apart.”

INTERNET KITTEH

In light of transmission and communication through alternate means, the performance *Internet Kiteh* is a sensorial experience between Sushi and me. Instead of calling her into the room without words, I used the Internet site *Meowmania* (meowmania.jqln.org). *Meowmania* is a series of cat faces (which look like collaged cutouts from magazines). When you click anywhere on the screen, a new cat face pops up along with an accompanying meow sound. The clicking, cat faces, and meows are

endless, obsessive, always hilarious. Sushi was immediately drawn into the room when I opened and began to click *Meowmania*. She ran into the room and moved around my computer, tried to find the cats inside, moved over me, sat on my lap, rubbed her face in my face. She was obviously confused but purring like a maniac; *Meowmania* was one of the only interactions that Sushi has had with other cats. I was confused by her reaction to the webpage, as she would sometimes focus her attention on me, and sometimes on my laptop. The resultant sensorial effect of this performance was confusion, yet also an overwhelming feeling of euphoria. I felt good about *Meowmania* because it could make me laugh, it was spontaneous (yet tirelessly predictable) and Sushi, by evidence of her very loud purring, appeared to have a good time as well. Whatever happened during this performance was communication and a sincere and honest transmission of positivity. The feeling that is transmitted is earnest and heartfelt. When both Sushi and I felt this euphoria, it seemed that the feeling cannot be questioned and instead, in the spirit of posi-postmodernism, we engaged in the moment, laughed out loud, purred like crazy: we let the feeling take over. Sushi and I were honest animals in the room.



Fig. 19. Jacqueline Steck, *Meowmania*, 2010

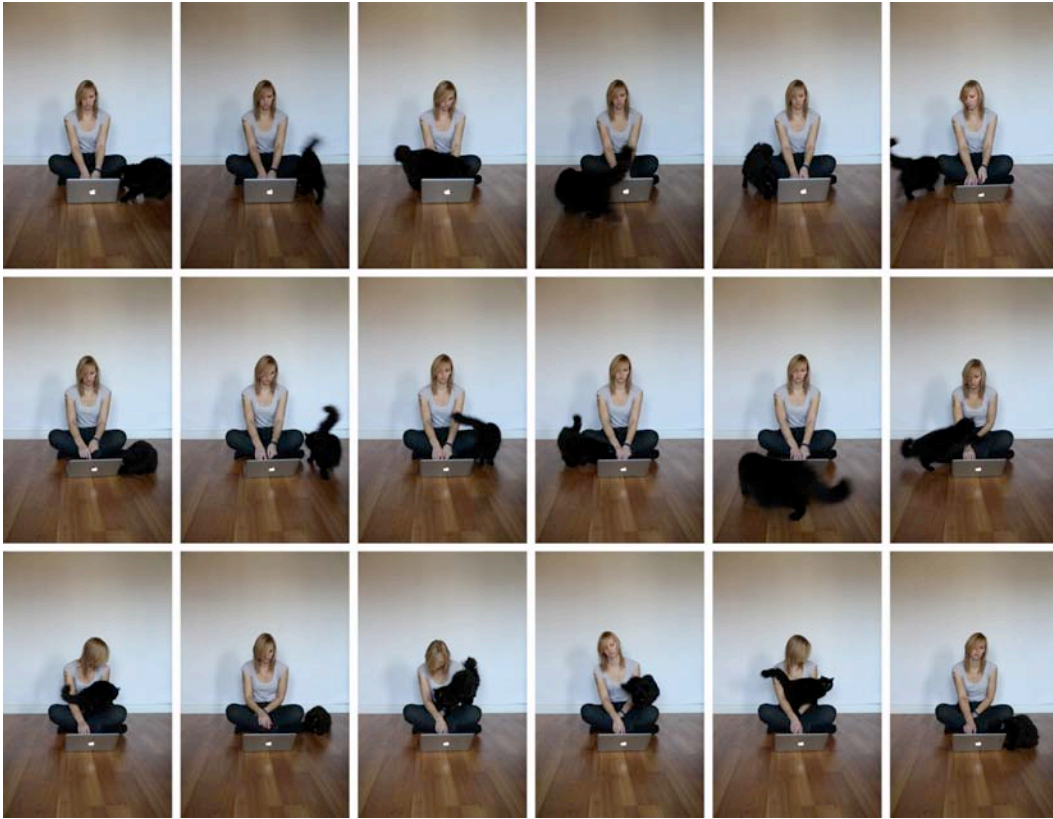


Fig. 20. *Internet Kitteh*, 2011

ANIMAL SUBJECTIVITY

An example of an honest, transmitting animal can be found in philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-85; 1961). In a style of writing which combines fictional literature and theory, Nietzsche introduces talking animals that reveal to the protagonist Zarathustra secrets of eternal return. These animals specifically choose Zarathustra, among all other humans, to bear witness to the secrets they tell. In Nietzsche's text, these animals are spectral and supernatural beings. Rather than comforting companions, completely in opposition to Haraway's companion species, these animals seek to disturb Zarathustra by revealing secrets that only he can

know, causing Zarathustra's loneliness and isolation to increase. In knowing the secrets of the animals in combination with his human understanding and emotion, Zarathustra becomes isolated in his revelation (Lippit 2000: 70). This knowing is "being with": it is knowing that which formerly was unknowable. This alternative method of communication, which is phenomenal, opens up the possibility that there is a deep connection transmitted across species. For example, my close, admittedly obsessive and reciprocal relationship with my cat Sushi may be a result of these strong signals. I believe that Sushi chooses to transmit (to the degree that she does), and I am making conscious or subconscious decisions to receive these transmissions. Regardless of how it is understood, it is an everyday phenomenon to note the connection that humans feel to the animal species.

In *Dog Years, Human Fears* (2002), Teresa Mangum discusses this connection, which is amplified in pet relationships. Mangum regards these domestic pet relationships in a discussion of euthanasia, and the responsibility that the human accepts to interpret or project the animal's subjectivity in the case of illness or critical injury. Mangum writes, "at best they (pets) possess accumulated experience rather than 'subjectivity'" (45), denying the animal's capacity to communicate animal emotion. Veterinarian Clinton R. Sanders sheds further light on this by stating, "the emotional intensity of the relationships that often develop between people and their nonhuman companion animals commonly prompt human caretakers to be ambivalent about, or reject entirely, the definition of their animals as mindless, objectified, nonpersons . . ." (1995: 197-98). With this statement, Sanders claims that the human in

the pet relationship, after years of the animal and the human having aged together, experienced connection, and felt emotion across species, are unwilling to accept the notion that the animal does not have autonomy or subjectivity. However, in these instances, the pet owner will often adopt or construct communication across species, projecting an identity on the animal. This strategy, in which pet owners construct animal subjectivity, can be further confounded and complicated due to the animal's silence. As a result of this lack of shared speech, human pet owners have become animal narrators - accustomed to speaking for, and as, their animals (Mangum 2002: 45). But do we love our pets because they cannot speak to us? Because we project the animal's subjectivity and voice, giving us creative license as authors over the animal's subjectivity? Is this because we somehow relate to and see our anthropomorphized version of animal humanity in the animal that references our own experience?

Nietzsche sheds additional light on the possibility of communication between animals and humans. Whereas the animals of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* have language, in continuing the aforementioned theme of deficit, they lack memory. There are a few animals in the text that have overcome this memory disorder: these are the animals that tell the secrets. The animal that Nietzsche writes about is constantly forgetting to speak. Lippit's interpretation of this animal in Nietzsche's text is as a being capable of comprehending language but forgetting a response, inadvertently causing the animal to be locked in a gaze (2000: 71). Lacking memory, the animal also lacks history; without memory or history, death loses its finitude (2000: 39). If the animal is unable to understand, remember, or conceptualize death, death has no impact. Subsequently,

there is no animal death, only animal deaths. Lippit writes that it is not the being that dies, but the moment (2000: 39), and therefore, animals mourn. This is very similar to Deleuze and Guattari's synthesis of becoming-animal; however, rather than moving from the pack to the individual, the only real animal death as Lippit postulates is the death of the individual, the Dog. The animal pack will die only when it becomes extinct, but each individual animal death does not have an impact. (This is obviously an objectionable and reductive understanding of animal death in light of the individual animal, the pet, but suggests instead a lack of individuality for the collective, anonymous, drone). The becoming towards death defines each moment of the animal; for Lippit, in each moment the animal dies and passes into another moment (2000: 68). This theoretical animal survives our human conception of time, constantly returning to the human world.

Our human need to understand animals leads me to believe that we see animals functioning as a medium for introspection and self-awareness. By using the term self-awareness, I am suggesting that we make an attempt to understand our relationships with animals and to see how we are able to love them, to trust the animal to trust in us. Generally, I suspect that animals like me: I speculate that these animals can see my goodness, or my desire to be good, and therefore react positively to me. If a dog growls at me, I am afraid the dog knows something that I do not. Perhaps the dog can see right through me. I believe that animals are hyper-aware. What if the animal can see my deepest secrets, those which no other human could know? I could not keep a secret from an animal, even if I tried. Animals have an honesty that cannot be

hidden⁵⁴, and our relationships and connection to animals become amplified when we find ourselves *with pet*. This concept of an honest animal in our pet relationships is foiled, however, when we look to animal expressions of dishonesty, performance, or deception in nature.⁵⁵

Seeking to understand the animal (to understand ourselves) but also to break down this assumed vulnerability leads us to construct a form of communication across species. Some of this communication is based on presumption. By attributing human qualities to the animal, we can carry on conversations when we catch a glimpse of the animal's engagement with our voice.⁵⁶ A well-known painting entitled *His Master's Voice* (1899) by Francis Barraud embodies this speculation of engagement with voice. In the painting (based on a photograph), a fox terrier, Nipper, sits and looks inquisitively at a phonograph, which Barraud claimed to have been playing the voice of Barraud's brother, recently deceased, and Nipper's former human companion. The painting suggests an attachment that is sensorial and goes beyond an understanding of embodied affection between humans and animals in pet relationships.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ We could also read this as instinct.

⁵⁵ Deceptive strategies by animals in the wild include camouflage, auditory deception, hoarding, and stealing.

⁵⁶ With the surge of YouTube and animal celebrity on the Internet, there are countless examples of cats that have been anthropomorphized and presented as more human, more intelligent, more capable of conversation. One of my favourite examples is *Talking Cat* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUzEtLHVoiI>; and the autotune mash-up of this video and other chatty cat celebrities <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nr-SZXIVvuo> (accessed February 24, 2011).

⁵⁷ Barraud attempted to sell his painting as a logo to the Edison Bell Company, the leading manufacturer of the cylinder phonograph, and was denied based on the reasoning that "dogs don't listen to phonographs" (*Design Boom*, <http://www.designboom.com/history/nipper.html>, accessed February 9, 2010).

Moving beyond auditory sensations, are there other forms of human-animal interaction that suggest communication? What about intuitive communication, emphasizing the inextricable bonds of our species relationships? In the book *Technologies of Intuition* (2008), Jennifer Fisher suggests that intuition is central to processes of “coming to know” in practice and experience. A delicate balance exists between clairvoyance, fantasy, foreknowledge, and wishful thinking. Intuition is always contradictory and paradoxical (11). In my thesis project, I connect animals and humans by suggesting that all animals and humans alike are capable of an innate knowing. This knowing transcends both human and animal experience and is brought about through deep human-animal relationships, through “being with.” It is what I feel when I am with Sushi, a feeling that is intensified during our performances. Though this knowing may be benign, it is present in all species and is distinct from animal instinct. This knowing can be expressed as honesty, or as deliberate deception: it is paradoxical. It is sensorial, atmospheric, transcendental. This knowing is read not only as a projection of my reflection onto the animal, but also as the animal’s making conscious decisions to transmit emotions, sense and affect. It is an amplification of intuition, emphasized in close human-animal relationships, that opens up the possibility for this communication.

What if the growling dog knows something that I don’t know about myself; what if my subconscious sent the dog that message? For several years, I have believed that I can communicate with animals through a system that may be telepathic. I have

not been able to prove this, as yet.⁵⁸ I am not a trained psychic, I don't consider myself to be a telepath: but I do feel a strong connection between animals and myself, a connection that is sensorial and sympathetic. By believing that I can communicate with animals, can I? Is my conviction enough? Is it about having faith in animals and in myself, and in our intuitive abilities? Speculative and often unbelievable, the phenomenon of communication with animals⁵⁹ sets an unlikely precedent for human-animal relationships. However, I would like to suggest that intuitive communication is available to all species, humans and animals alike, and posit that this communication can be cultivated with awareness.

We refer to intuition as a human quality and instinct as an animal one; however, this should not imply that these qualities are exclusive, determined by species. It can be asserted that animals have intuition and that there is latent instinct in humans. A clear example of human instinct is the need to procreate, not only for biological reasons, but

⁵⁸ Several years ago I saved a scared puppy. I was driving along a country road in the summer at midday with a threatening sky and drastic winds and temperature changes: a rainstorm was on its way. I stopped my car when I saw a parked van and two middle aged women scrambling around the road, chasing after a small animal (which I eventually realized was a puppy). I opened my door to see if I could help and the dog – I'm not certain where she was coming from – immediately ran into my lap before I could even get out the car. It happened so quickly. I snuggled with the puppy, who was obviously terrified of the approaching storm. Did the puppy know that I had good intentions? Why did the puppy choose me while running away from the other women? This experience has puzzled me for years.

⁵⁹ This can include psychic communication, or more analytical communication such as the popular television show *Dog Whisperer (with Cesar Millan)*, National Geographic Channel 2004-present). It should be known, however, that the popularity of the *Dog Whisperer* relies on dominating animals (or dog rehabilitation, solving behavioral problems) and asserting the human as the Alpha, or the pack leader. This emasculates animals into submission rather than nurturing a relationship that is based on respect and affection. Dogs often growl when they are disturbed or feel like their territory is being threatened, and some dog trainers suggest that this aggression will become dangerous if it is not checked by matched human aggression. Barbara Smuts, however, claims that in order to maintain respectful relationships, the human must not assert dominance but adapt to the animal's emotion and animality, giving the animal space, respect, and affection when appropriate (2006).

also for reasons of legacy and culture. But queering these instinctual actions or abilities reflects a current situation in which we choose to be practical, rather than instinctual, suppressing some of our more animalistic tendencies. Particularly in a North American, capitalist context, we are impressed by the need to plan, to be comfortable, and to deny our instincts. When we suspect we are ill prior to being diagnosed, we call that awareness. Humans and animals can be rational creatures and our concept of animals is one of difference, as we understand animals to be led by instinct. However, as Nigel Thrift writes, what is considered animal agency is expanding beyond conventional notions, removing the nature-culture dichotomy, where,

as a consequence, agency is ascribed where before no agency was noticed. So Aristotle included plants and animals in psūchê and nowadays, knowing what we do now, their claim would be even more pressing.⁶⁰ After all, we live in a world in which parrots have been taught large vocabularies and can get an obituary in *The Economist* and in which new Caledonian crows routinely use all manner of tools to forge tools, not just in laboratories but also in the wild. Indeed, rationality is a value that is now being associated with animals as well as humans (2008a: 83).

Thrift claims, based on the results of research on animal behavior and cognition over the past 20 years, that animals are more rational (having cognitive and pre-cognitive capabilities) and that “humans are less rational than was once thought (that is, they have less unique cognitive and pre-cognitive capabilities that are able to be used as a sign of supremacy over animals)” (2008b: 157). Thrift goes on to note that our understanding of instinct is no longer necessarily equal to an understanding of animal: “an animal can have a genetic endowment that makes it behave in a particular way but

⁶⁰ In Greek, psūchê refers to a branch of science that studies the soul.

it is also able to reflect on that behaviour” (2008b: 157). However, it is important to consider where the domesticated animal, an animal that is instinctive yet is a part of, influenced by, and limited by our human lives can fit into this discussion of instinct and rationality. This is an animal that has a modified need for instinct. This animal is fed and cared for, given a place to sleep and frequent exercise. It does not need to hunt or provide for its offspring, and without its consent, the ability to procreate has often been removed or the animal is forced to breed. I suggest that in the case of domestic animals, with the boundaries put in place by domestication, the animal has exchanged an instinctual notion for a more intuitive, sentient way of living.

INTERSPECIES COLLABORATION

In art practice, sentient animals are becoming popular as collaborative agents, and in many cases, it is the animal’s instinct and potential for wildness that create the collaborative framework of the project or performance. The performance by Joseph Beuys *I Like America and America Likes me* has retroactively been considered an example of interspecies collaboration. Lisa Jevbratt first introduced the term ‘interspecies collaboration’; I use the term to acknowledge the possibility of species working together toward representing the goals of an artistic project within a framework of trust and shared communication. However, I am skeptical of the degree to which collaboration may occur, since many interactions and interpretations of animal actions are framed by human assumption and projection. Collaboration across species must not be confused with manipulation, coercion, or extortion of the animal

collaborator and must occur specifically in an art context.⁶¹ By using the term collaboration, we must assume a great deal of intention and awareness (of the artistic stakes) on the part of the animal. In my performances with Sushi, the best that I can do is read Sushi's intention based on our collective experience and my observation of her eccentric tendencies and assume her cognitive and creative input. In this, I reject the notion that Sushi is my collaborator: we are what we are in our performances, and we are reacting to one another, but I am unable to read artistic intention in Sushi. As with my experience with Sushi, Beuys acknowledged that in *I Like America...*, Little John altered and even directed the performance. The animal in that room was the contributing factor to the unknown, with the constant possibility of spontaneity. I position that this is what will happen when we bring an animal to an art project, an animal that is autonomous and has no prior training in performance or the entertainment industry. It is the spontaneity and the unknown that leads and creates the performance, not the animal's collaborative nature.

Artist, scholar, and creator of the website *Interspecies Collaboration* Jevbratt suggests that artists, being creatively aware, have an inherent ability to collaborate with animals. As Jevbratt writes on her website,⁶² this ability to read artistic intention in animals is almost supernatural. I am deeply skeptical of placing this confidence in artists. Although it is an admirable notion, that artists are able to complement and encourage difference and acceptance across species, there is no evidence that

⁶¹ I previously mentioned Siegfried and Roy; their tigers and lions can be considered entertainers, performers, and even part of the troupe – employees – but because they are trained for the acts, they are not collaborators.

⁶² See <http://www.interspeciescollaboration.net/>

distinguishes this ability in artists from a human of any other occupation or interest. Jevbratt also frames the artist as capable of achieving increased awareness and breaking down communication barriers, likening artists to shamans or mystics. The difference between this portrayal and Beuys's artist-shaman is that Beuys adopted an identity (and whether or not he believed he was a shaman becomes irrelevant, as a performative identity was deeply embedded in Beuys's practice), while Jevbratt suggests that this ability to break down barriers is innate in artists. The notion that the artist has intrinsic supernatural or extraordinary powers is impossibly romantic. As I mentioned earlier in this text, artists are certainly aware of the conditions in which they live, but not to the degree that they are essentially supernatural or mystic.

Jevbratt continues, however, to position a natural reflexivity inherent in animals, which results in an animal's ability to be an artistic creator. Jevbratt identifies animals as having a creative impulse that is dynamic and deliberate. Birds of paradise, for example, perform and attempt to attract a mate through vibrant displays and choreographed movements. Additionally, there is evidence of creative expression in animals who are communicative, such as Koko the gorilla, who has learned sign language, or elephants in Thailand who have been trained to paint portraits of other elephants. These impulses of performance, artistic expression, and emotion in animals can allow collaborators to infer communication across species. It is difficult to fully accept Jevbratt's interspecies collaboration project without questioning the inherent and elevated status she gives to both animals and humans. If, according to Jevbratt, artists are humans that have been specifically chosen to embody supernatural,

communicative qualities with awareness, as well as creativity and integrity, should we not question her position that all animals, all non-human species, have this same inherent creativity? If artists are only one small subset of the human species, why is it that all animals, in a sweeping generalization, are artists? I believe that Jevbratt places too much faith in both humans and animals, and does not recognize the element of play, deception, or intention that can result in a performance work between humans and animals. In watching documentation of Beuys' *I like America...*, despite the tension and the implied risk, there is playfulness from both the human and the animal, resulting in the legacy of this performance as being humorous, risky, and endearing.

G I F T

Nina Katchadourian's *GIFT* (1998) is a performative project which I believe evokes a (failed) attempt at interspecies collaboration (in which the animal, in this case actually an insect, refuses to collaborate). In the video documentation of a performance, the artist intervened upon a spider's web in a part of the artist's series of works entitled *Uninvited Collaborations with Nature*. This particular video was inspired by a story from a Swedish nature book in which a spider wraps up his prey to present it as a gift to another spider. The artist Katchadourian slowly and painstakingly spelled out the word *gift* in coloured thread in a spider's web, using a pair of tweezers and shaking hands. The frame of the camera was locked onto the spider's web. As the artist finished the words, the spider, aggressive and territorial, quickly sought to recapture its web. Rapidly coming into the framed scene, the spider removed the letters one at a

time, flinging them away in what appears to be anger and disgust. These affected emotions of the spider strongly contrast with the very slow and deliberate, and obviously difficult actions of the artist. In this video, the spider became an unwilling and apparently angry collaborator in Katchadourian's work, despite the artist's seemingly good intentions. In spelling out the word *gift*, we assume that Katchadourian wanted to gift the spider a work of art. One of the critiques of interspecies collaboration is that what may be considered collaboration to some may in fact be merely a reaction on the part of the animal to maintain its autonomy in the face of intervention.⁶³ It is to be expected that any animal, or human, would somehow react to an intervention in its space, like the spider, or a complete disruption through displacement, as in Beuys's coyote, and there is little convincing evidence that the decision-making and direction of the artistic project benefits from mutual collaboration across species.



Fig. 21. *GIFT*, Nina Katchadourian, 1998

⁶³ Although, in the case of *I like America...* by Beuys, Little John's space was not being intervened upon, but rather his entire lifestyle through displacement.

Here we can question the role of the animal in these performances. Is the animal a performer? It is by virtue of Katchadourian's decisions that the spider intervened (to reclaim its territory), but through the documentation, and even the very artful and deliberate way that the spider removed the thread, can we now consider this spider as a performer, an artistic contributor? In this work, as in Francis Alÿs *The Nightwatch* (2004), it is important to keep in mind that though the animal's reactions cannot be predicted, the artists' do project an intention, or a narrative, onto the animal's contribution. Therefore, there cannot be honest collaboration across species, even if we can consider the animal as a contributor, as the human artist retains authorship in the presentation of the work.

THE NIGHTWATCH

In *The Nightwatch*, the animal that had been displaced and was being intervened upon was a small red fox. Similar to Little John, this fox was taken from its environment and placed into a gallery setting. The fox appeared to be performing for the sake of this artwork, but in reality the fox just did what foxes will do: searched, sniffed, tried to find an exit. *The Nightwatch* is a single-channel video documenting the fox's actions in the gallery after hours on the internal surveillance system. In Alÿs's video work, the fox moved through London's National Portrait Gallery, blended into the surroundings, and conducted the video of the performance through the space with unprecedented memory and skill. The fox appeared to move with incredible purpose through the space, sometimes returning to retrace his steps or to glance up at some

paintings, and followed a trail that eventually led him to rest on a bench. The documentation creates a sense of voyeurism, of looking with curiosity from above at the beings below. Although it is a simple concept, simply presented by the artist, *The Nightwatch* contained limitless potential. The animal was completely unpredictable, and any number of situations could have taken place. Instead, the fox responded in a way that seemed natural - in a way that I would think a fox would act in any confined space. Because the fox is out of context in the gallery, it is fascinating to watch this animal, to wonder if it is trapped and to be unsure of where it is going.⁶⁴ This animal performer unknowingly contributed to a piece of artwork that enhanced barriers of domestic-wild and interior-exterior while suggesting an invisibility of the animal in everyday life. This animal, often invisible due to its silence or lack of speech, has presence and alternate communication, holds our fascination, and inspires practice and research.

The fox of Alÿs's work embodies a sense of "being with" as I understand it through the reading of Heidegger and Nancy. In this, we understand a sense of emptiness, in considering how we are human, and *The Nightwatch* illustrates that emptiness in the vacant rooms of portraits: human faces staring out at the fox and the audience. Additionally, the video artwork provides us with an opportunity to consider human-animal relationships in light of the unknowable, subjective human and animal *Umwelten*: that which we can perceive but can never know. We can also see in this work

⁶⁴ As an aside, I suggest that this animal performance encapsulates the problematic of urban wildlife. Urban wildlife, like raccoons, squirrels, mice, rats, and even foxes have learned to adapt and evolve their way of living. In this, the natural and the wild become slowly domesticated as we humans develop our own unnatural lives.

another example of “coming apart.” The fox moved around in an environment generally reserved for human traffic, human experience, human concerns. However, by being present in this space, the fox shared a concern for the space, the environment. Therefore, the fox is “being with,” while contained in its animal world, and “coming apart” by existing in its own *Umwelten* while intervening into a space of shared human and animal concern (or perhaps, being intervened upon). Ontologically, the fox can understand the limitations of its being, as can the human audience. Alÿs’s profoundly simplistic artwork, the concept of which is endearingly clever, is layered in an understanding of human-animal relationships, human and animal worlds, and connections - physical or phenomenological - across species.



Fig. 22. Francis Alÿs, *The Nightwatch*, 2004

CONCLUSION

Animals in the Room began as an investigation of an interspecies relationship and continues as one. This project has captured only one small glimpse into the possibilities of communication between species in a speculative consideration of theoretical and ideological frameworks. It is based on the daily actions and affections of a human-animal relationship that is ongoing: the multiple phases, stages, moments, feelings, and ideas that are contained within this thesis are still under development. My relationship to Sushi continues, alongside possibilities of “becoming with,” “being with,” and “coming apart.” I continue to consider the conditions under which communication in our relationship could be amplified. I strive to further reflect and meditate upon terms like species, posthuman, hum-animal.

In the process of writing and performing *Animals in the Room*, I have formed an emergent methodology and ideology in posi-postmodernism, which is still undergoing development and conceptualization. In this ideology, I have opened up the conditions to consider a speculative and ambiguous connection between concept and process and between action and research in artistic practice. I have built a bridge of possibility for understanding human-animal relationships in a posi-postmodernist light. This ideology, paired with the theoretical lens of posthumanism, reflects the interdisciplinarity of the project, spanning discipline, definition, and production in a resultant non-hierarchical and non-specific thesis project.

Animals in the Room is a thesis and artistic project that has led me to consider the conditions under which I strive to understand my own humanity, and in this way, my relationship with Sushi has also been placed under investigation. The original

inspiration for the project was to discover and develop a concept of animal autonomy in performance art; however, as the project developed, I shifted the focus toward the human and the resulting human-animal relationships. In our performances together, Sushi and I have come to terms with the differences inherent in our species and the insurmountable barriers and the continuous optimism that these same barriers bring into focus. "Coming apart," which is my conceptual development of the contrasting, yet complementary, nature of Haraway's concept of "becoming with" and Heidegger's "being with," acknowledges that humans and animals live in their own respective worlds. However, in "coming apart," we can perceive the differences of these worlds without loneliness or anonymity. Instead, we continue just to "be." We "come apart" because we are not able to "be with," which is to know, another human, an animal, or ourselves. This acknowledgment can create new possibilities of searching, asking questions, and hopefulness.

My research has included a dialogue of human-animal communication and relationships that has led me to examine speculation and ambiguity in light of contemporary performance art. This dialogue has considered the ethics and politics of evaluating human-animal relationships, as well as a theoretical consideration of animal language, the animal gaze, and animal affect. Paired with the process of performance and experimentation in my artistic project, this thesis project has therefore been informed by theory, lived experience, practice-led research, and conceptual notions of our human and animal worlds. With the *Animals in the Room* thesis, by asking questions about human and animal relationships, I have contributed valuable research through a

process of thinking through questions and possibilities. This research can lead into countless areas: animals in performance art, the ethics of animals in art and practice, telepathic communication between human and animal worlds, domestic relationships, death and loss, animal emotion, projection in artistic practice - this list could be further expanded upon. I note here that all of these areas of study are integral to understanding how humans regard animals in our daily lives, as humans and animals are vitally connected.

Animals in the Room identifies a crucial moment in the field of interdisciplinary - and 'animal' - studies, a moment of clarification and identification. This is a moment of truth for the consideration of animals in human lives, animals in animal worlds, and animal and human cross-interference into one another's worlds. What do we consider when we consider the animal? In this thesis, I have acknowledged the weight of ethics and animal autonomy while maintaining that human language and projection forms the conditions of our understanding - how we connect with and communicate to animals. It is important to note that animals are more often than not given a voice through human projection, and very little is known about animal emotion. This project identifies some hope and optimism: in using human terms such as 'respect' and 'trust', we can acknowledge the animal within the animal world without infringing upon what we can only presume is the animal's intention and well-being.

Having completed this body of work and thesis I can look toward bringing my art practice with Sushi into further experimentation: of dimensionality and material, of concept; creating deliberate limitations but expanding beyond time and space. As Sushi

and I age together, I've noted changes in our relationship. In a way, we have both settled into a comfortable place of working with and living with one another as companions, with some eccentricities and spontaneity. Expanding upon our performances, Sushi and I will continue to cultivate possibilities of communication in our daily relationship, attempting to condition our non-verbal communication. Sushi continues to inspire me to challenge the assumptions of her species.

Finally, as this project is one that captures a brief moment of a human-animal relationship, it is one that will continue to be developed and expanded upon. I also suggest that my research and speculation in this project can be applied to other human-animal relationships in considering what "coming apart" can mean. *Animals in the Room* is therefore fleeting and sensorial but monumental, confident, and assertively suggesting the removal of the barrier of our species and the possibility of posthuman and posi-postmodern frameworks in this dialogue.

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APPENDIX A: ARTIST STATEMENT

Artists are not real people. There's this Jerry Saltz lecture somewhere online where he's talking about the sublime and during the lecture he makes an analogy about how non-artists are like dogs in that they deal directly with the world: you ask a dog to come to you and it will. Whereas artists are like cats, y'know, you call for a cat and that cat is not fucking coming to you; they'll take a stroll around the fucking room, rub up on a bunch of shit, then rub your tiny ankle and be off. And then Saltzer, he said artists are like that in that they have an indirect way of dealing with the real world, through the making of art, artists create this system of occupying the world in this indirect, yet very distinct way.

Hennessey Youngman, *Art in America: International Review*. March 24, 2011.⁶⁵

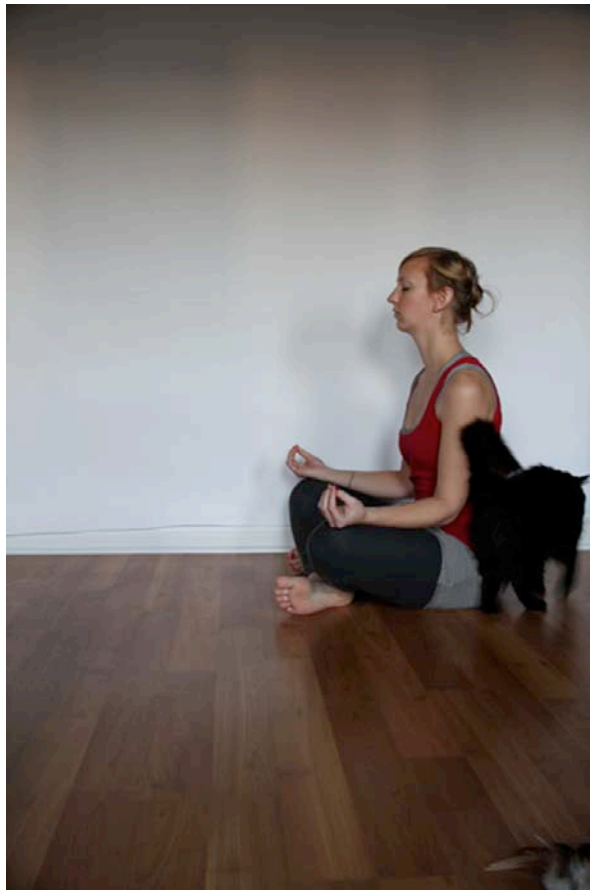


Fig. 24. *Meditation (Fail)*, 2010

⁶⁵ Boucher, Brian. "Ali G With an MFA: Q+A With Hennessey Youngman". *Art in America: International Review*. March 24 2011. Available at <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-opinion/conversations/2011-03-24/hennessey-youngman-youtube/>

In my artistic practice, I investigate relationships and expand upon the conditions and stakes of relationships. My artistic practice is both performative and autobiographical. Each tone, expression, limitation, and suggestion in my art practice is performative. I am interested in queering the limitations of expectations for ourselves and for each other.

My practice is not limited to any one media, and it challenges traditional concepts of craft and performance through quilting, stop-motion documentation, drawing, writing, photography, and installation. I engage with research methodologies that emulate or parallel academic practice in order to juxtapose the immeasurable and ambiguous with data, analysis, and logic. In my practice, through the use of written text and performance, I confuse the voice of the author by using statements such as the individual "I," the accusatory "you," and the communal "we." Weaving a pseudo-fictive narrative into the artwork, I subtly effect a subversion of the viewer's assumptions. I provoke compelling dialogue that questions accepted notions of normativity and the everyday. I use speculation as an artistic trope. I am interested in collaboration, collective experience, collective memory, group dynamics, and social repair.

I am currently working on an ideological framework with genealogical roots in Postmodernism and Existentialism and combining Romantic Conceptualism and Posthumanism. This framework is called Posi-postmodernism. Posi-postmodernism considers the current state of our emotional understanding to take into account shifting approaches to social interactions and relationships.

APPENDIX B: ANIMALS IN THE ROOM QUICKTIME

This appendix is a QuickTime video file of the *Animals in the Room* stop-motion video. The file name of this video file is "animals in the room.mov".