

The Fear of Being Seen and Unseen

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Abstract

The Fear of Being Seen and Unseen is a performance of struggling to speak; to speak of “things” that cause silence. This installation consists of: sounds, carvings, images and shadows that “conceal” and explore my understanding of shame. The presence of animals through: gaze, sound and form are used as a method to speak with greater ease and comfort and they serve to hide and reveal what I hope to discuss one day; thoughts that I wish to examine within a more private setting. This is a pursuit to create an unattainable space; where I am able to freely speak and be.

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You bring great joy to me and force me to proceed and be better. We have both faced turmoil together and we will continue to grow in each other's company. If all the words that I have ever spoken are lost and forgotten; know that I love you my little brother.

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Well ... I guess I should start talking now (opening)

I have always been one who rarely speaks (whether that be through writing or voice), however whenever an instance arises where I must present my thoughts, I try my best to vocalize with as much honesty as I can; while simultaneously “sweetening” the “truth” so that it may be easily consumed by the other. During one of my first year classes as a graduate student, I was involved in a situation where I disregarded my “social filter” and began to spew to my classmates past traumatic events that I experienced as a child and young adult. To be more precise, this particular class was run by a guest speaker; in this case: Peter Morin, who presented us with a question which was veiled in simplicity, but is arguably the most pressing matter in one’s life ... who are you? I don’t intend to sound overly dramatic, but I was (am) dumbfounded by this question. When my name was called, the class seemed to suddenly fall under a cloak of silence which signaled to me to unmute my mic and begin to form (what I believed to be) a series of cohesive sentences; I commenced to struggle and search for a solution that was beyond my reach. My answer verbatim was: “ I guess ... I'm the collection of various experiences and the experiences of others, if you want a general idea of who I am, but that’s nothing specific ... I guess.” I felt disappointed by this answer, since it was far too vague and due to its lack of transparency seemed ingenuine. Thus after class, I began to formulate what I perceived to be a more appropriate response, which was then (with a sense of unrelenting hesitancy) posted onto our class discussion board. In retrospect, this was probably an unwise decision; however I do stand on the truthfulness of my words, just not the space in which those very words were spoken. Unsurprisingly, although the subsequent class began on a fairly awkward note, my classmates and professors were understandably sympathetic and showed a great deal of care towards my response and experiences. Nonetheless, I felt utterly embarrassed by the event and still regret my decision

to speak; I am doubtful that my “confession” would lead me to a satisfying solution and if it was worth contemplating and being “undone” by such difficult thoughts¹. Recently, I tried rewatching this particular class recording; an attempt that ended in failure and consisted of anxiously averting my gaze and closing my laptop screen (minutes after the video began), this was eventually accompanied by my decision to remove my headphones and lower the playback volume. I had revealed to a group of (essentially) strangers, information that induced within me an overwhelming sense of shame and emotional distress; knowledge that was even hidden from my closest friends. From there on a certain phrase seemed to cross my mind whenever I encountered a classmate or faculty member who witnessed my “episode” ... “they know”; and “they” may act as if “they” do not “know,” but their eyes and body language validates my assumption. Although this sensation was further heightened by the “incident,” this mental predisposition has haunted me for quite some time. As a child and until recently, I would participate in a daily inspection of my: clothes, shoes and body of cockroaches; which would consist of frantically shaking my: clothes, shoes and body to rid them of the pest. Unfortunately, this method of deterrence was not always successful and occasionally led to uncomfortable interactions with friends and classmates. As I recall somewhat fondly, one incident involved sitting and listening to a lecture from my sixth grade homeroom teacher; which was then abruptly interrupted by my discovery of an intrusion of roaches squirming around the interior lining of my garments. I began to discreetly grab and tug at my clothing in an attempt to kill the pest; yet I was unsure if my unusual behavior and demeanor was not detected by my classmates. Though I would describe this experience as an event that causes me slight embarrassment, I feel wary to label this as an ordeal that I am ashamed of. My skepticism comes from the fact that I was able to retell such an account with

¹ “I suppose in its most pure form writing shame is the most demanding ethical form, if you like, because at every moment you may feel yourself being undone in ways that you can’t really think about in advance.” (Probyn, 2019, 324)

such ease and clarity; which contradicts the sensation of “confusion in thought and an inability to speak ...” attributed to shame (Lewis 71). It would be reasonable to presume that this tale serves as a deflection from what truly shames me; that being the contents of my response. Yet, how do I speak of such a thing when flowery language and refinement are absent from my palette and only the bluntness of this reality remains. These ... “things” happened and involved living and deceased participants. I must insist that my gripe is not solely with grief; it is with the events that led up to that “horrid day” and continued there on after. When I speak of such matters, I seem to encounter a dilemma; where I am entangled in a cycle of obscuring my thoughts and speech in an attempt to preserve the “safety” (or to be more precise “face”) of myself and others. This system of precaution eventually leads me to the realization that absolute silence is the only appropriate response. Since I am aware that my words may lead to collateral damage, I will proceed with caution and explore my own encounters with shame; while preserving the anonymity of others.

I saw a deer ... it felt nice

To leave one's room, to leave one's room and enter the public space; this is a daunting task. The anticipation of perhaps encountering a moment of unspecified "danger" or worse the perceived ridicule from others; is an unknown that frightens and binds me to this space. Yet, my eventual departure is constantly impending and certain. Whether it be due to hunger or the fulfillment of any other obligation, this door will (and has always been) "open." I do not feel a sense of release or "closure" from this act of "escape," since my withdrawal is but a temporary state; and in due time I will once again be plagued by the thought of leaving. However, I must leave and I must prepare myself to encounter the gaze of others; a form of "address" from where my shame is unveiled (Derrida 9-13; Sartre 408-409). Thus, I proceed into this contentious space with my head down and with headphones on. Despite the fact that I may encounter moments of sudden spurts of fear, I do find these trips of departure to be fairly pleasant and impactful.

For instance, prior to my entry into graduate studies and arrival to Toronto, I resided in my hometown of St. Catharines, Ontario; where I would often take leisurely strolls through a local forest trail. Twelve Mile Creek is a delightful strip of land, consisting of: greenery, wildlife and a waterway that runs through the city of St. Catharines. During one of my routine strolls, I encountered a scenario that induced within me a sensation of both familiarity and distance. While walking through the trail, my absent-mindedness was suddenly interrupted by the presence of a being other than my own; veiled behind a thin layer of twigs and leaves, held the "unmanning" gaze of a White-tailed deer². Its body was stern and attentive; it was a being that stood with dominance. I hastily looked down to avoid its sight, but this didn't deter its fixed gaze. Eventually, I was able to regain the slightest sense of composure and concluded that the proper course of action was to "discreetly" walk past the creature. Thus, I

² Both Berger and Derrida discuss what Philip Armstrong would later articulate "that 'man' is unmanned when confronted by the gaze of an animal"(Armstrong, 178)

began to take my first few steps. However, as I attempted to move past the being, I witnessed something intriguing; the deer's gaze was that of surveillance. Its head seemed mounted on a neck that was able to turn with the greatest precision. I was incapable of escaping its field of vision. In this moment a dialogue occurred; or became more discernible. The creature seemed protective of someone or something. During this discourse of "winks" and "glances," I noticed the movement of another participant who gradually began to reveal itself through my peripheral vision; this being seemed to be a young deer-like creature who commenced to emerge from a patch of tallgrass and bushes. At the time, I was unable to sonically perceive the creature's approachment, since my hearing was obstructed by the sound of music. When I determined that this newcomer was in fact the deer's young one; the "guarded" demeanour of this creature became more morally justifiable. Within this confrontation, I was in the wrong. Thus, in an attempt to correct my misdeed, I began to calmly pick up pace and break eye contact with the deer. Once I had established a good distance between me and the other participants, I witnessed the eventual reunion of the two as they gradually faded into the forest's greenery.

As I continued my walk, the "incident" began to resurface throughout my mind and I commenced to reinterpret and examine these moments. The point of initial contact and hence the instance of mutual acknowledgement led to a flash of "heightened" awareness; a recognition that became further enriched with context. Separated from its child, the deer was in a state of vulnerability. I empathised and shared this state of exposure with this creature, however my sense of "nakedness" arose from my fear of being seen; the fear of shame³. I am aware that this is perhaps an act of projection; an assumption that is informed by my western belief that "no animal confirms man, either positively or negatively" (Berger 5). Yet, this belief does not diminish my interest in this encounter; an interest that is incomplete by its

³ "When shame is white-hot it also seems to mingle with fear and terror. Perhaps it is the fear of having to say that we are ashamed." (Probyn, 47)

very nature⁴. Since , this “experience” was one that left a great impression upon my life; an affect that is as “authentic” as my shame.

The exhibition and installation entitled “The Fear of Being Seen and Unseen” is the struggle to create an unattainable space: one that I can easily enter and inhabit. Within this room one will encounter a commemoration of a past event; an experience that I hoped to seek solace in. As the viewer stands before the entrance, they will be confronted by an incomplete absence of light. Here you will find a series of: sounds, images, projections, carvings and shadows that flood the space. This is an installation that aims to create multiple-layers of visibility through my interpretation of the “animal gaze;” a “circle of excitation” of where my sense of self and shame is further explored.⁵ Located on the far-left wall of the room and veiled behind the shadows of their own image, is a diptych acrylic painting that illustrates an abstract scenery of various animal gazes; these creatures are framed within a stylized representation of a “natural” space and ambience. The diptych is positioned through a manner that further complements the overall composition; were the largest and central piece is oriented vertically while the smaller canvas is placed horizontally.

⁴ “... shame is activated by the incomplete reduction of interest, rather than by the heightening of interest or joy or by the complete reduction of interest or joy.” (Tomkins 388)

⁵ “circle of excitation” alludes to Heidegger’s concept that animals are able to reside within a “circle” of “primitive” awareness, yet he insists that this does not suffice as a “gazing” visibility or “higher” sense of consciousness (Heidegger as cited by Pimentel,62-63).



Figure 1.1 Photo of flower vase painting and deer painting

The viewer will notice that positioned to the bottom right corner of the central piece is a depiction of a pigeon; which is complemented by a “golden” bird that occupies the upper-right portion of the corresponding work. The spectator will also notice that the work’s composition is primarily focused on three subjects, specifically the representation of three deers. These figures are arranged hierarchically, although within this triangular formation only one subject is fully “materialized;” a trait discernible by its “finished” appearance. The other two figures exist within an incomplete state; where the viewer is able to perceive their essential image through a series of geometric line drawings. Suspended to the upper right corner of this piece, the observer will find the second painting, which primarily consists of the aforementioned “golden bird” and red vase; a “vessel” that is physically “poured” into the other work. The “contents” of this container holds the essence of an incomplete still life; a condition that is apparent by its equally painted and sketched presence.



Figure 1.2 Detail photo of pigeon painting

Projected onto these painted and “unfinished” surfaces are a sequence of films and shadows that are composed of images and “absences” that repeat certain visual themes found in the painted and carved works. The primary motif found throughout this installation is that of “the deer,” which consists of: initially projecting film of this subject onto its likeness (a deer carving) this subsequently creates a masking object of its own image; a shadow that is then placed on its painted figure. This process of repetition is intended to create multiple points of representation which aims to first elevate and then horizontally distribute the beings “gaze” in relation to the viewers. Another of these motifs is that of “the pigeon” and “the bird;” creatures that are not only evident through visual representations, but are also discernible when the listener becomes more perceptive of the installation's auditory component. These sound landscapes incorporate ambient and experimental aesthetics that are intended to complement and magnify the “aura” of the installation. The voices of birds alongside that of

my own and my father are subtly utilised throughout the composition. These moments of “discourse” are abrupt and obscured by the sounds of: chords, strings, screams and gears. This is a song of disoriented and mixed-emotions.



Figure 1.3 Installation photo 1.1

The filmed works reassert this sense of “bewilderment” through its application of colour and light. For instance, a segment from the film depicts a series of glowing blue orbs; a compilation of light sources found in my: bedroom, bathroom, and hallway. This illustration of saturated illumination is accompanied by images and recordings of “blue” deers and “yellow” birds and pigeons; an artistic quality gained through excessive colour grading. There are a total of four carvings; two of which are depictions of a deer-like figure. These serve as a method of “masking” the film, as well as further introducing the creature's “presence” into the space. The other two works display images of birds and other wildlife that are presented alongside carved flowers; a theme that is also apparent in the painted and filmed works.

This is an installation that hopes to draw the viewer's interest and gaze through a process of repetition. This act of "reprinting" is not only discernible through the recurrence of certain animal imagery and sounds, but is further present through the incorporation of actual printing noises and footage of a printer "printing." This constant repetition does not create duplicates, but "incomplete" representations of originals; a condition best embodied by the two deer carvings. This "repetition of the signifier" (the deer; the pigeon; the bird; "shame" and the "self") causes the work to encounter a form of death; a "lifelessness" most apparent through my writing.

Writing would be pure repetition, dead repetition that might always be repeating nothing, or be unable spontaneously to repeat itself, which also means unable to repeat anything but itself: a hollow, cast-off repetition. This pure repetition, this "bad" reissue, would thus be tautological. Written logoi "seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, they go on telling you just the same thing forever (*hen ti semainei monon tauton aei*)" (275d). Pure repetition, absolute self-repetition, repetition of a self that is already reference and repetition, repetition of the signifier, repetition that is null or annulling, repetition of death—it's all one. Writing is not the living repetition of the living. (Derrida, 1981, 135-136)

To write of shame is a sacrificial endeavour; from its death comes forth a renewed understanding of one's shame. This "uncontaminated" shame is what I seek and what I hope to eventually gain; to speak of shame without succumbing to the speechlessness of that very shame. For the time being, the sounds of birds may occupy this "silence."

Pigeon recordings and bird noises

There is something about the sound and presence of birds that intrigues me; a fascination that perhaps originates from our tendency to “interpret the ways animals ‘watch’ us” and impose either positive or negative signifiers to this “gaze” (Heidegger as cited by Pimentel, 62). For instance, within certain Southern African narratives; birds have commonly been portrayed as being anointed with the ability to speak “the language of spirits;” a gift that lends them the capability to communicate with humans (Mda as cited by Woodward, 41). While simultaneously other accounts have described these beings as possessing traits that (when interpreted through an Abrahamic lens⁶) reveals a “fallen” past. Zuze Paraza’s “The talking Raven’s Last Warning” presents such an instance, specifically it states that: “ If you want to admire the beauty of a bird, never look at its feet. The claws of a bird preserve its scaly past, a legacy of creepy-crawling reptiles” (Paraza as cited by Woodward, 39). This alludes to an interesting criticism shared among scholars who explore questions of animality and shame; can discussions of shame be cleansed of its “confessional” past. Derrida, eloquently ponders upon this dilemma through a series of inquiries:

... Can one speak of the animal? Can one approach the animal? Can one from the vantage of the animal see oneself being looked at naked? From the vantage of the animal before evil and before all ills? From within that time frame I am trying to speak to you ... That time would also be that which, in principle, supposing it were possible, separates autobiography from confession.⁷

He further states:

Has there been, since so long ago, room and sense for an autobiography before original sin and before all the religions of the book? Autobiography and memoir before Christianity, especially before the Christian institutions of confession?⁸

⁶ This refers to the three prominent “religions of the book”: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

⁷ Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” 2008. 21.

⁸ Derrida, 21.

One answer to this question has been articulated by various marginalised communities; where their shame can not be deduced as simply a “symptom” of seeking penance for participating in “morally questionable behavior,” but has been manufactured as a method of oppressing these very communities (Weiss 541-542). Ellis Hanson reiterates this response and further presents the utility of shame in the essay “Teaching Shame”:

“Shame is my curse and my oldest friend. It is a sign of my failure to connect with others and my urgent appetite for reparation. Without my shame, I could hardly recognize myself-indeed, I would not have a self to recognize and so to banish shame would be absurd” (137).

Another answer to this matter is situated in acknowledging certain indigenous knowledge, specifically those of traditional African and South African origins that challenge western “hierarchical” perspectives towards the gaze; a sentiment of superiority that Heidegger adheres to, notably when he proclaims that: “Near the bottom of the hierarchy, just one level above that of the opaque gaze of objects, is the gaze of the animal” (Heidegger as cited by Pimentel, 62). Within these cultures, a heightened sense of agency is inherently demonstrated by these creatures; where dualistic and anthropomorphic representations are subverted in exchange of depictions that promote their subjectivity. As an illustration, one instance portrayed birds participating in acts of laughter, particularly Mda in *The Heart of Redness*, describes a scene where a kingfisher shares a laugh with their human companion (Mda as cited by Woodward, 42). Thus, I ask: why does a moment of animal laughter need to be attributed to human interpretation? and if laughter and joy can be shared between these two creatures, why can shame not? Furthermore, if animals are capable of expressing a laughter of joy, they therefore should be able to convey a laughter of criticism.

This discourse through a “language of spirits” shares some resemblance to notions found in Shanshui philosophy⁹, in particular Shanshui-thought in experimental music; a term that can be translated as “the ghost and spirit of mountains and waters” (Berque as cited by Wang, 293). In regards to experimental music, Shanshui-thought is distinguished by two characteristics: “Dan” (peaceful and quiet sounds) and “You” (which one may interpret as a reverberated and diminished sonic quality) Wang 298-299. One instance in which this philosophy manifest is through the work of Shen Piji; a mixed-media interdisciplinary artist who in 2015 alongside: Shi Kesong, Li Tingqiu, Qing Miao, Luo Jun, Li Huiming and Wang Liang held a series of concerts and tests entitled “Sound Experiment with Hylarana daunchina” which consisted of playing various sounds and instruments in collaboration with a group of “self-invited ‘guest’;” an ensemble of frogs (Piji, 2015; Wang 293). The work consists of a total of three experiments that explore a wide range of sound making; covering traditional to unconventional methods of animal-human musical collaboration. Notably the second test was the most intriguing, which consisted of first implementing a series of infrared sensors onto the frogs' water tanks; a device utilised to capture the creatures croaks and voice. This subsequently was used to translate the frog's “speech” into a total of five corresponding “high” and “low” frequencies; sounds that were then incorporated throughout the composition (Piji, 2015). Unfortunately, my own exhibition is currently incapable of meeting this standard of reciprocity and cooperation; a condition that hopefully changes through future renditions of my piece. However, both I and Piji do share a few common practices, specifically the act of recording and sampling these “past” encounters. Many of the samples and a substantial amount of the film have been recorded during: routine walks around the city, at local parks and within the confines of my room. This act of revealing and repeating these past “happenings” forms a “haunting” ambience inside the installation; an eerie aesthetic that is most present through the combined use of both film and sound, in

⁹ Shanshui philosophy/ Shanshui-thought has been associated with (but is not limited to) the traditional practice of Chinese Shanshui landscape paintings, which intends to “free the spirit” of both the viewer and art object (Wang 293). Shanshui philosophy transcends modern notions of “perceiving” a landscape; “Shanshui, instead, literally translated as ‘mountains-waters’, is organic and correlational; shanshui perceives” (293).

particular “hauntological” music (Fisher, 18). Derrida in “*Specters of Marx*” describes hauntology as a repetition of the past and a future that has yet to arrive; a manifestation of a haunting (10). He further elaborates on this sentiment by contextualising it in relation to the “specter of communism;” a ghost that will and has frightened “all the powers of old Europe” (46). Hauntological music repeats these principles through its utilisation of certain aesthetics and themes, specifically its use of: crackling, white noise, buzzing and droning sounds; traits commonly associated with the application of tape machines. These sounds are further situated within spaces where time seems “broken” and within a state of indeterminate transition; “non-places” such as: retail parks, airports and I would argue any area that is predominantly occupied through a state of transition and not destination (Fisher 18-19). This region of “incompleteness” is where shame resides.

As I step outside of this room; I eventually enter a space that is riddled with towers of decadence and sounds of industry. Within this area I seem to encounter a familiarity of distance; which manifests most potently when I am confronted by the gaze of pigeons. At first glance, this creature seems to be a being of “virtual animality;” where they seem to “have been immunized to encounter” and the presence of their sight had “ been extinguished” (Berger as cited by Armstrong, 176; Berger 1980, 28). However, this isn’t a “domesticated” being; like Derrida’s cat: this creature is “not a tamed one, not trained, not “domesticated.” (2008, 157). This sentiment seems to share many similarities to traditional South African notions of “ownership,” specifically the “absence” of this concept in animal and human relationships; the Khoikhoi people were among these groups that held this belief (Woodward 170, 24-27). The representation of these creatures in popular literature is vast and occasionally contradictory, for instance: pigeons may symbolize a “yearning for home” while simultaneously embodying notions of disease and death (DiMarco et al, 26; Süskind 19, 23). Personally, I find comfort in these undesirable and “unclean” gazes, since I feel that a sense of community and camaraderie is formed through these encounters; one that is

rooted in shame. Although, others may experience the opposite. I will proceed to explore this “gaze” through the work of Patrick Suskind; an author who contemplates on this connection between pigeons and shame.

Patrick Suskind’s “The Pigeon” is a short story about Jonathan Noel; a bank security guard who on the morning of Friday, August, 1984 encounters a creature described as “the epitome of chaos and anarchy” ... a pigeon (12-13, 19). Jonathan perceives this gaze as “an eye without sight;” a “lens of a camera that swallows all external light and allows nothing to shine back out of its interior” (15). In an attempt to avoid being diseased by this creature’s “filth;” Johnathan quickly turns his security lock and cowards into his room, thus evading the phantom who lingers outside his door (14-16). This event becomes the catalyst of a string of exponential failures that cause Johnathan to experience an existential crisis and a moment of insanity; where even the very sky is painted a “pigeon blue-gray” (91). One of these “failures” consisted of “missing” Monsieur Roedel’s limousine and thus momentarily forgetting to open the bank’s gate for a visitor.

“... you missed it, you’ve failed, you have flagrantly neglected your duties, you’re not just blind, you’re deaf, you’re old and worn out, you’re no longer fit to be a guard” (56).

If “a guard was like a Sphinx;” Jonathan would be a pile of stones (49). This moment of vulnerability causes him to question his identity and the purpose of his labour; Johnathan had spent “one-third of his life standing at the entrance of a bank” ... how could this be a meaningful existence (62)? He justifies this decision by stating that: “ Yes there was meaning. It was indeed very meaningful, for it safeguarded him from baring his rear end in public and shitting in the streets” (62-63). Jonathan, “who his whole life long had been a well-behaved and orderly fellow, unpretentious, almost ascetic, clean, always punctual and obedient, reliable, respectable ...” is now (and may have always been) an utter failure (68-69). How would one react to such revelation? They would proceed to take “action” or “resign” from the ordeal entirely. Thus, Jonathan; a man not of “action” but “of resignation” decides to take his own life (93). On the night of his suicide attempt, Jonathan dreams of an

experience from his past; where he's portrayed hiding and awaiting his parents' safe return (109). After an unspecified amount of time, Jonathan begins to realize his abandonment; the fact that his mother and father were taken to a concentration camp was never revealed to him (3-4). Devastated by this thought, Jonathan recognizes that he "simply cannot live without other people" (109). Following this event, the ending of the novel could be interpreted in a few ways. The first interpretation (and probably the most accurate) is that Jonathan awakes from his dream after finally facing his childhood trauma and discovers that the pigeon has vanished; which is accompanied by "heavenly" imagery, such as: the sound of birds whistling and depictions of "fearlessly" stepping through light (112-115). The second theory is that "he enters the gardens of paradise" after successfully ending his own life; which is consistent with the angelic symbolism alluded throughout the last few pages.

I have some objections towards the author's interpretation of trauma and shame, specifically the "ease" at which it vanishes during the conclusion; the pigeon (the embodiment of his troubles) and its shit is "wiped" away following his revelation (115). Shame does not "disappear" like Jonathan's pigeon and its droppings; it can resurface when you least expect it.

Years later I remembered my shame, and what more spectacular way is there to remember shame than to feel it again, to reawaken a past you thought was safely behind you, to experience all of a sudden the shocking fragility of years of so-called progress? And can such a memory possibly be a good thing? I think it can. (Caron, 120)

Despite these criticisms, Suskind's novel asserts an intrinsic attribute to shame; that being its origins in a failed love. Sara Ahmed examines this link between: love, desire and shame; a "witnessing" where one fails to "live up to" an idealised self through the other's gaze (Ahmed 107).

If we feel shame, we feel shame because we have failed to approximate 'an ideal' that has been given to us through the practices of love. What is exposed in shame is the failure of love, as a failure that

in turn exposes or shows our love. (Ahmed 106)

Jonathan's admission that he "simply cannot live without other people;" confirms his failure to obtain love. This acknowledgment is further substantiated by the fact that he encounters an existential crisis from failing to "live up to" his notion of a "guard;" a masculine embodiment of stoic: obedience, reliability and respect (Suskind, 68-69).

My work is "witnessed" by a repeated gaze, fashioned of: sound, image and form. This process of constant observance aims to coat this room of a "haunting;" a layer of paint akin to Jonathan's "pigeon blue-gray" (Suskind, 91). To be entranced within this "sight," to be confronted by a language of presence is to acknowledge a certainty; that this is a space of love ... a love that is incomplete and unattainable. This "spectacle," this "tribute" held in this room is shadowed by its own image; a stain that asserts its dominance over my work and conscience.

Figure 2.1 Installation photo 1.2



A safe space of shadows

At my “lowest point” I recall quietly stumbling towards a darkened corner; where I commenced to shrink and twist my body into a ball of cowardice. My ears began to ache by the tight squeeze I had placed upon them, while the soreness of my neck was becoming rather tiresome; bowing my head was my act of penance. I wondered why “this” had happened and if my actions had led to this conclusion. I heard the muffled voice of my youngest sister ask if “he’s okay” as I continued to hibernate through this dwindled form. The air and ground I sat upon was tainted with the stain of my presence. In this moment, I had lost my greatest: critic, enemy and friend; how else would one react? This was an instance where I wished to be relieved of my sense of sound and sight. In this state I desired to become engulfed within an empty void; to become a shadow.

The dark mass that obstructs the surface of these paintings and walls are of a deer; a casted body ingrained through the flesh of carved wood. My journey into the art of wood carving is one that is relatively recent and began when my friend and mentor Angelo Kalum Cavagnaro, gifted me a beginner’s carving tool set. From there on, Angelo and Veronica Waechter (a Gitx̱san carver and friend) began to generously set aside some of their own time to teach me the fundamentals of the craft; which consisted of learning to properly maintain and sharpen my knives, along with understanding the importance of reading and following the wood’s grain. I am a novice carver; which becomes fairly apparent when you set my work alongside those of my advisors. However, despite my current lack of ability I still find this practice to be greatly enjoyable. This subtractive dance of “undoing” and freeing a renewed external and internal form causes a fairly therapeutic sensation within my body. This tranquil act of stripping and smoothing this body of wood releases and “carves” something beyond the chips that lay upon this floor; that being my attempt to gain completeness. I recall throughout my various lessons, Angelo would constantly remind me that my perception of a “mistake” was flawed and that I should view these “failures” as part

of the process and a piece of who I am; an obvious notion to those of experience, but becomes distant and obscured when one is humbled to the role of a novice and pupil. He also insisted that these “failures” and “mistakes” are not always evident and that their solution may reside in first distancing oneself away from the work and observing elements adjacent to the “problem;” once again I must reiterate that this seems straightforward in retrospect, but not in practice. During one of my carving sessions, I encountered what appeared to be a moment of failure manifesting through my sculpted work, specifically I assumed that I made a “mistake” on my deer’s neck geometry. When I presented this “error” to Angelo, he held my sculpture and began to observe the piece for a minute or so. After his thorough inspection, he quickly grabbed his blade and carved a chunk of the deer’s left shoulder. As he turned the creature towards me, I was utterly amazed; he “fixed” what I couldn’t see. I was too fixated on my “failure” to see the solution. Yet, to position oneself beyond their failure or to embrace these very same flaws is to accept a “truth;” a fact that will continue to haunt me. My shame is unpronounced to the visitor, therefore the installation is not solely possessed by the contents of its space, but is further imposed by an external force. Although, the “Fear” within “The Fear of Being Seen and Unseen” indicates this shame; for that this “anxiousness” is rooted in “the fear of having to say that we are ashamed” (Probyn 47).

This notion of amateurishness and novelty is further explored through the series entitled “*Suddenly This Overview*” (1981-2012) by Peter Fischli and David Weiss; an artist duo that created a total of six hundred unfired clay sculptures that embodied a “subjective encyclopedia” of human knowledge (Trotman). Specifically, the piece entitled “Popular Opposites: Theory and Practice” presents to the viewer a roughly rendered depiction of two figures alongside a set of tools. The subject located to the right is presented bending over and grasping the legs of the other; while the figure positioned parallel to the ground pushes their body off the floor as they stare onward. Placed directly underneath these two is the word “THEORIE” which is adjacent to an engraved rendering of the word “PRAXIS;” a

phrase complemented by the presence of a wheelbarrow filled with debris and bricks (Chin). This presumably is a criticism of how theory and practice do not always translate well from one to the other; although they are still inseparable, which is indicated through the “plus” sign placed between the two words. This sentiment is further represented through the works' unpolished appearance; where one will notice that the sculpture lacks smoothness and that the artist's fingerprints are still discernible through the clay.



Figure 2.2 Peter Fischli and David Weiss, Popular Opposites: Theory and Practice (2013), unfired clay.

This sense of incompleteness is also apparent in my carvings; a consequence of not sanding and oiling my work. Additionally, due to my inexperience I have encountered “mistakes” that consisted of unintentionally removing an excessive amount of my carving material, thus leaving one deer more disfigured than the other. Despite my knowledge of sculpture and drawing, my lack of practice causes me to happen upon moments of “failure” more frequently and with greater severity; this places my work within a constant state of “unfinishedness.”



Figure 2.3 Installation photo 1.3

The shadows that envelop this space are of two distinct conditions; one that is nearest to “completeness” while the other is a body that is overly whittled and deformed. These two personas comprise a single figure; “the deer.” This veil of casted limbs and torsos obscure the image of three deer subjects; where one is closest to proper materialisation. Some may argue that the shadows within this space seem still and unresponsive, but in fact they are responding to an ever-changing sequence of lights and images; a discourse that occasionally reveals representations of their own likeness not only through light, but ingrained onto the surface that it illuminates. Among these projections are clips portraying three deer figures grazing the land; while another portion of the film presents a deer traversing an ambient blue terrain. Another artist that experiments with the medium of projection and shadows is Kara Walker, in particular through their work “Salvation” (2000). This piece presents a black cutout figure that is placed upon a wall alongside the projected image of a swamp (Walker). The person portrayed seems to be partly submerged within this

wetland and maintains many of the aesthetics associated with Walker's work; notably their tendency of utilising racial caricatures and black stereotypes as "characters" within her work (Sharpe 133). However, her cut-outs are images without a "caster;" these are "flat" shadows that are null of any light or absence (132). This "shadow" of mine reacts and responds to its abstracted form and its projected image; a dialogue that prompts further investigation into questions of language.



Figure 2.4 Kara Walker, Salvation (2000), cut paper on wall & projection.

Derrida explores this problem of language in relation to animal-human discourse, through the relationship between a perceived “response” and “non-response;” an analysis that is critical of Emmanuel Levinas’s sentiments on whether all animals have “faces” and if these facial expressions are equal to that of humans¹⁰.

Death is not for him, in the first instance, a passage from being to nothingness, an annihilation, but, as he often says, the moment when the other no longer responds. Well, this nonresponse of the face, of the corpse as facial corpse, would have no affinity with animal nonresponse and nonresponsibility. Everything seems to hinge here on these two understandings of nonresponse, at the heart of the disturbing analogy between them ... The corpse of the face doesn’t return to being animal the moment when, like the animal, it doesn’t respond. The nonresponse of this “he doesn’t respond” of the dead face means “he is no longer responding” there where “he will have responded,” whereas the animal’s “it doesn’t respond” means “it has never responded,” “it never will respond,” “it would never have responded,” ... Thus, at one and the same time the animal is deprived of the power and the right to respond, of course, and therefore of responsibility (and hence of the law, etc.), yet it is also deprived of nonresponse, of the right of nonresponse that is accorded the human face by means of secrecy or in death. (Derrida, 2008, 111-112)

This dialog (or lack thereof) draws many parallels to Heidegger’s notion of “Sight” which states that humans possess a distinctive and sophisticated manner of “seeing;” where we can acknowledge “that we have eyes” unlike animals who are incapable of such awareness (Heidegger as cited by Pimentel, 59). Thus, if such recognition was proven; this would be an act of “response” and may indicate a “higher” sense of consciousness.

¹⁰ “I cannot say at what moment you have the right to be called 'face'. The human face is completely different and only afterwards do we discover the face of an animal. I don't know if a snake has a face. I can't answer that question. A more specific analysis is needed.” (Levinas’s response as transcribed by Llewelyn, 65)

.. until fairly recently, only humans were credited with the ability to follow another animal's gaze. In Michael Tomasello and his colleagues expanded our view of gaze following in a series of experiments that showed that some close relatives to humans—other primate species—could follow gazes of their own species (Tomasello et al., 2008). Couched in the exploration of animals close to humans was the implicit assumption that gaze following requires special cognitive insight that only a human-like animal could have. In the two decades since the primate data became public we have come to understand that gaze following is common among many types of animals, including birds, fish, and reptiles in addition to mammals (Breed 219)

During his time, Heidegger proclaimed that the question of animal cognition was still a “riddle” and that “neither metaphysics nor science has yet succeeded in fathoming their nature;” I believe we are slowly approaching this answer (Heidegger as cited by Pimentel, 62). However I do not believe that this is simply a question of “proving” the worth of these creatures with science, since this would simply continue the tradition of modern science of reducing these beings “to a series of two-dimensional planes;” were their “worth” is measured under “the dissecting gaze of the natural philosopher” (Armstrong 181-182). To flatten their image onto a plane; to reduce their gaze to solely ocular “spectacle” is to objectify and deprive these beings of life, yet with corpses comes forth “hauntings.” Through this ghostly shadow the gaze is never “resolved;” it echoes and amplifies endlessly (Tuck 642). Yet, with reverberation arises the possibility of frequency cancellation; thus there is as much a presence as there is an absence. This is the domain of where my shame lingers.

On April 12th 2023, the final adaptation of “The Fear of Being Seen and Unseen” was properly materialized. This “completed” rendition of the work introduced significant alterations to the installation when compared to its prototypes. For instance, the four carved works are placed upon a series of plinths which both aid to heighten the work and properly position the pieces in relation to the projected video and sounds. Furthermore, the viewer will notice that the two carved relief panels have been “finished” which is indicated through its oiled (but not sanded) appearance. This presence of “completeness” is complemented by the “incomplete” state of the two deer carvings.

Within this space there is no fixed position of where one should view the work, this installation encourages the spectator to traverse the space through a continuous back and forth motion; witnessing all the works present. As the viewer wanders within this room, they will eventually encounter an unusual patch of tape that occupies the bottom back portion of one of the paintings, specifically the piece that portrays the three deer. This “flaw” was not intentional and was implemented to hide a hole/tear that occupied the bottom back and side of the work. To conceal this I used tape and fabric that complimented the colour scheme of the piece; which consisted of: blue masking tape and a green fabric obtained by cutting up a used Freshco bag. Nonetheless, this “error” was exposed for all to see. This “mistake” in combination with my decision to mount the vertically oriented painting on an easel (notably the same easel that I used throughout the conception of the work) while horizontally hanging the corresponding canvas off a wall, was implemented to further reiterate the relationship between states of process and completion. The wires and technological equipment (brightsign media players, ethernet switch, projectors and etc) that occupy the exhibitions floor were at first meant to be hidden, however due to my lack of cable management expertise and truthfully my disinterest in meticulously organizing and sorting cables, I eventually chose to simply allow this “mess” of wires and plugs to be absorbed into the installation.

Just A few more words

What was “gained” through this “performance?” Was I able to speak of “things” that cause my “silence;” was I able to “freely” speak of my shame. No. The words of others; the “voice” of academia cloaked and abstracted this “shame.” Although, this “intellectualization” did further contextualise this “affect.” Thus, through my words and those of others; one will find the scattered and fragmented “body” of this shame.

If I could “say” anything, I would like to affirm that I feel content with the fact that I “spoke.” Were these words vague and scarce? ... without a doubt, but know this; these sentences and thoughts were written by my hands. This irrevocable act does not bring me joy or closure, but seems to introduce further speechlessness. I tend to stutter and wince at the thought that others will hear my voice; a sound that will be dissected and scrutinised for its worth. Yet, peculiarly enough there is some satisfaction knowing that this pain will be self-inflicted. “I” am the fool who opened his mouth, thus “I” must embrace this role.

Now I ask: what did this accumulation of: sounds, words and sentences amount to? Am I cured? Have I uncovered a greater truth? No, but “I” did speak.

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Appendix A: Documentation of Prototype Install



Figure 3.1 prototype Installation photo 1.1

Photo of February 24th, 2023, prototype.

Figure 3.2 prototype Installation photo 1.2





Figure 3.3 prototype Installation photo 1.3



Photo of November 8th, 2022, prototype.

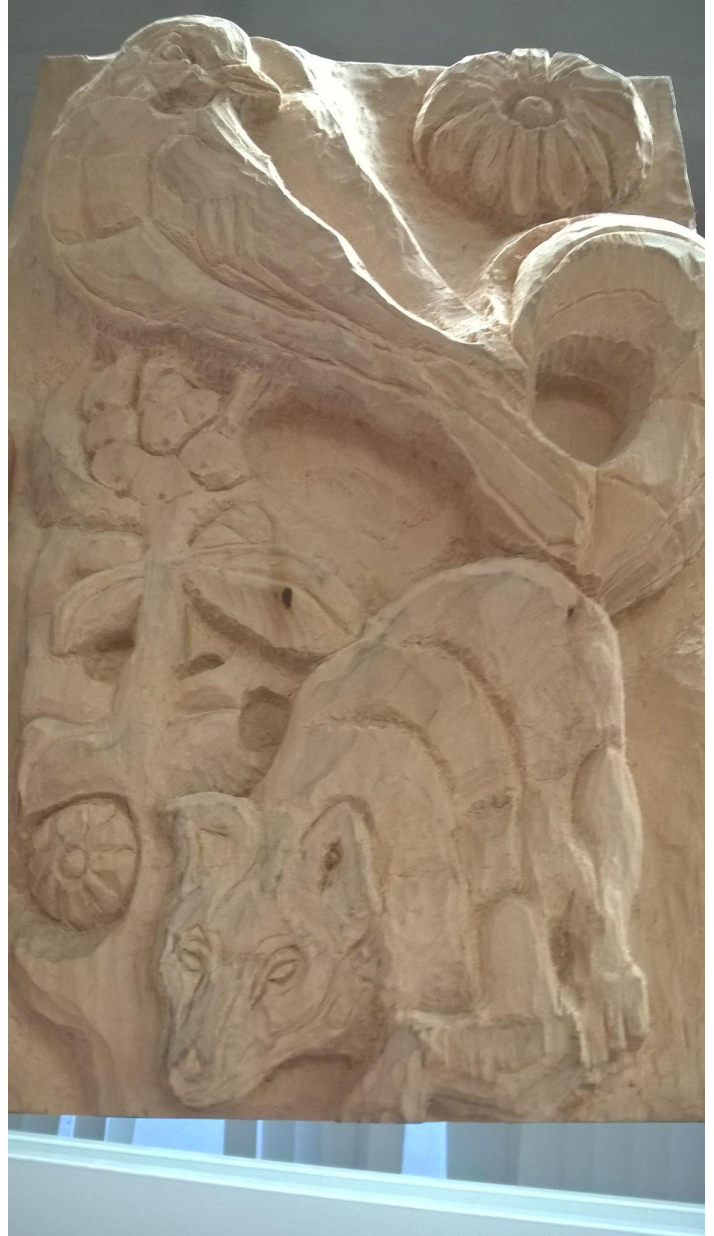


Figure 3.4 Relief Carvings detail

Appendix B: Documentation of Exhibition



Figure 4.1 Installation photo 1.4



Figure 4.2 Installation photo 1.5



Figure 4.3 two relief carvings



Figure 4.4 photo of flower vase painting (detail)



Figure 4.5 Installation photo 1.6



Figure 4.6 Installation photo 1.7



Figure 4.7 Detail photo of deer painting

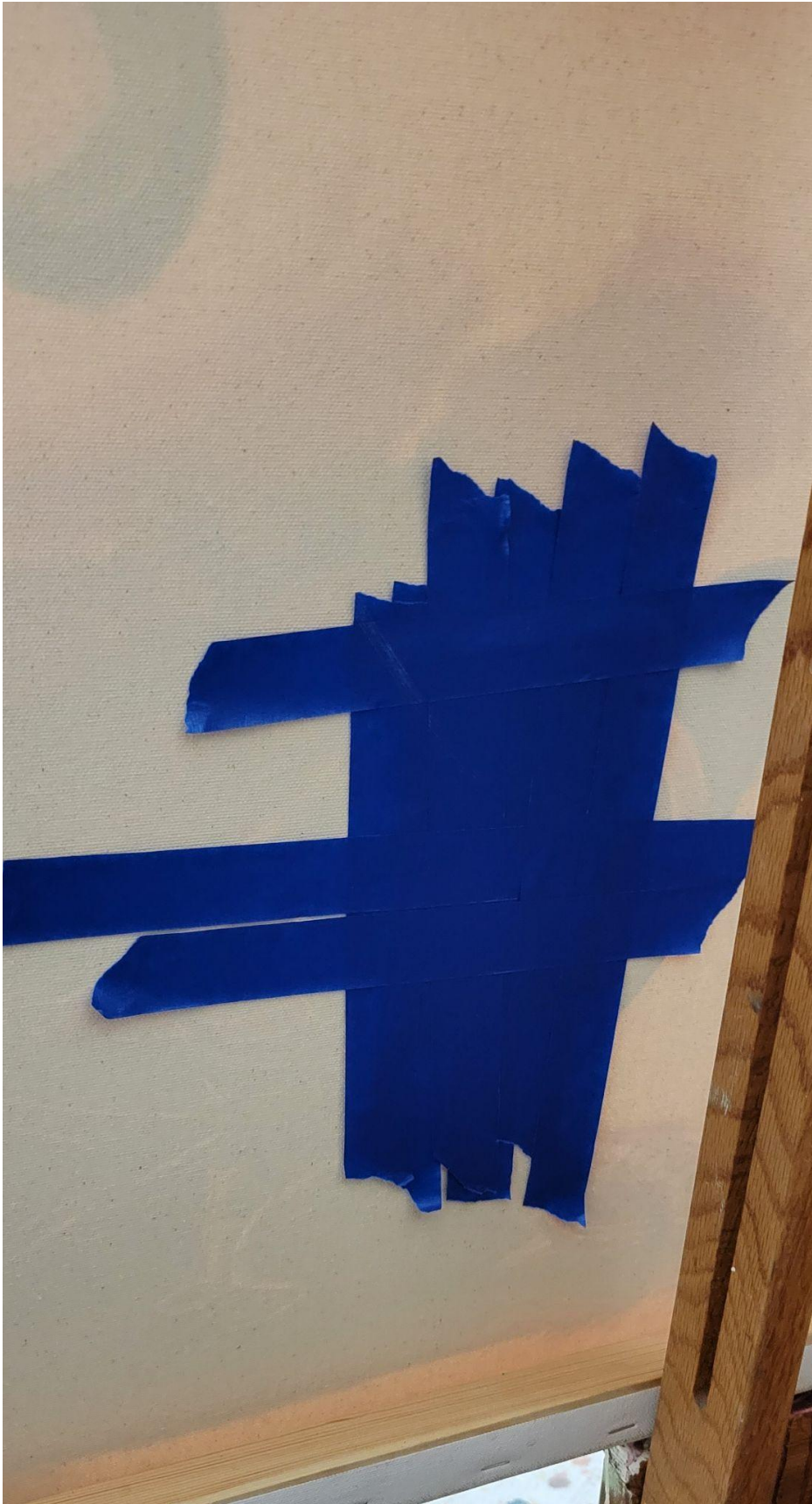


Figure 4.8 image of tape patch



Figure 4.9 Installation photo 1.8

Appendix C: Documentation of Videos/Sounds

▶ **"The Fear of Being Seen and Unseen" by Ahmed Bader**

▶ **DSC 6424**

▶ **DSC 6422**

▶ **DSC 6423**

▶ **DSC 6427**

▶ **DSC 6421**

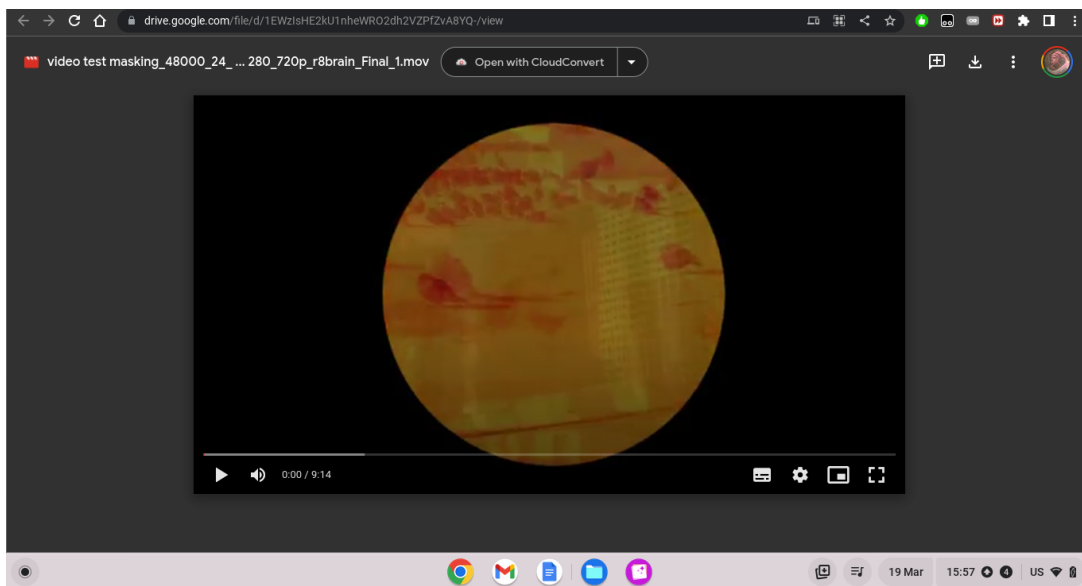


Figure 5.1 Image of Video masking test

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EWzIsHE2kU1nheWRO2dh2VZPfZvA8YQ-/view>

Appendix D: First day of Carving



Figure 5.2 Images from my first day of carving and sharpening (June 27, 2022)

