

Becoming-with-Animal: Cultivating a Feminist Understanding of Human-Animal Transformation in Contemporary Performance Art

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Florence Fitzgerald-Allsopp | Student Number: 6494838

Supervisor: Dr. Sigrid Merx | Second Reader: Dr. Laura Karreman

Animals are noble creatures. If women achieve the status of animals they are lucky.

To be an animal is an assertion of animality, vigour and vitality.

Paula Rego

Abstract

This thesis works to cultivate a feminist understanding of the phenomenon of human-animal transformation in contemporary performance art. Using Deleuze and Guattari's post-structuralist concept of *becoming-animal* as an analytical tool, and ethnographic studies of shamanism and tarantism, I begin by activating the concept in relation to performance, recognising the 'work' of becoming-animal as a form of efficacious healing. By employing feminist perspectives on female hysteria, I create a foundation for an empowered understanding of the performative practice of becoming-animal, which I construct throughout this thesis. I then consider how human-animal transformation manifests in the field of contemporary Western performance art across theory and practice, and to what purpose. Using the work of Joseph Beuys, Marcus Coates, and Simon Whitehead, I argue that the practice of becoming-animal can be understood as a form of social and ecological healing in contemporary society. By embracing the progressive approach of these artists, who all take the animal seriously as living sentient beings, turning towards them for alternative forms of knowledge, I then point to how this might evolve to support a feminist understanding of the practice. Here I use feminist theories of *ecofeminism* and *intersectional feminism* to support an understanding of feminism that extends to all minorities who suffer oppression under Western patriarchal systems, including animals and the environment. From this perspective I then offer a detailed analysis of three works of performance art by female artists. I argue that through the female-animal alliance of becoming-animal they all radically reject the identity categories prescribed to them by Western phallogocentric discourse, thus creating a new environment of 'other-than-identity' through transformation, in which they become visible. Supported by Donna J Haraway's concept of *becoming-with*, I argue that it is through this creation of new environments, in transformative alliance with animals, that we find empowerment of minorities and a form of healing that extends towards our damaged planet. I call this *becoming-with-animal*.

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Introduction

In 2018 human-animal transformation began serendipitously swimming to the surface of my consciousness, catalysed by a surreal short story from Amy Bonnaffons about a woman transforming into a horse¹. This led me to Daisy Johnson's *Fen* (2016), a collection of heady feminist tales where curious metamorphoses take place, including a teenage girl who starves herself into an eel. I then discovered the artist Marcus Coates and was mesmerised by his performative project *Dawn Chorus* (2007) in which he exquisitely transforms humans into birds. I soon realised that this was a subject that I have always been drawn to; I am fascinated by the surrealist painter and novelist Leonora Carrington (1917-2011), a master of metamorphosis, a formidable feminist and a self-declared "female human animal"; I am in awe of Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) who surrounded herself with animals both in life and in painting, often blurring the boundaries between herself and nature; and I revel in the visionary filmmaking of Yorgos Lanthimos who, in his otherworldly film *The Lobster* (2015), transforms those that do not find love into an animal of their choice. I became curious of how this topic manifests in the field of contemporary performance, and sensing a strong feminist resonance with the phenomenon, wondered how the practice of women becoming animal through performance might be understood as a feminist practice.

Human-animal metamorphosis is a well-trodden subject in the field of literature and visual arts, but only recently began to emerge in the field of performance studies. At the turn of the millennium the critical fields of animal studies and theatre began to cross-fertilise, marked by a seminal issue of *Performance Research* in 2000, guest edited by Alan Read, followed by Steve Baker's *Post-Modern Animal* in the same year. Initial research into the subject led me quickly to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'becoming-animal', providing me with rich philosophical ground in which to root my research, and a conceptual tool with which to explore my territory. It quickly became apparent that this fledgling subject, due to its anti-anthropocentric nature, is primarily discussed by performance theorists in the context of ecology, however little could be found regarding feminist perspectives on the subject, thus enabling me to define my research niche. It also became apparent that this is a

¹ Read the short story "Horse" in her book *The Wrong Heaven* (2018).

noticeably male dominated territory both in theory and practice, or at least it is the work of males that is being foregrounded within the field. This lead me to the assumption that due to the historical alignment of women and animals instilled by Western Aristotelian thinking, which is arguably responsible for centuries of female discrimination, theorists have treated the subject with caution so as to avoid any reconfirmation of the woman-nature connection, thus resulting in a lack of theoretical attention. Based on this assumption, it is clear that the cultivation of a new understanding towards the relationship between women and animals is necessary, as is theoretically foregrounding female practices of becoming-animal in performance. This lead me to my central research question: How can the practice of women becoming-animal in contemporary performance art² be understood as a means of feminist empowerment?

0.1 Methodology and Theoretical Framework

In approach to my research question, I used qualitative research methods comprised mainly of literary research from the fields of philosophy, anthropology, performance studies and feminism. These texts were mostly accessed in print via the Utrecht University Library, or as digital online sources via WorldCat. I also requested a personal viewing of two works of performance art held in video format by the Tate collection, London, UK; *Untitled (Blood + Feathers #2)* (1974) by Ana Mendieta and *The Horse Impressionists* (1994) by Lucy Gunning, which I viewed in February 2019. Other case studies of performance art used to support my research were analysed from secondary sources documenting the original works, including articles, books, interviews and online videos.

I begin with a sub-question paraphrased from Steve Baker: What does the performative practice of becoming-animal look like? Chapter 1 addresses this question by firstly presenting an introduction to my central philosophical concept becoming-animal, as discussed by Deleuze and Guattari in their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), specifically in the chapter "Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal,

² I decided to focus my research specifically on contemporary performance art as this is an area of personal research interest, and by defining a specific area within the field of performance I create an environment for a sharper, more focused analysis. As performance art is a contested term, I would like to clarify that my use of the term in the context of this research refers to works of an embodied performative nature presented either live or via media in a fine art context.

Becoming-Imperceptible". Becoming-animal is a concept as mysterious and slippery as a girl transforming into an eel, that invites a radical new understanding of the human-animal relationship. Deleuze and Guattari say, "We believe in the existence of a very special becomings-animal traversing human beings and sweeping them away, affecting the animal no less than the human."³ Through a close reading of this chapter from the perspective of performance studies and feminism, I will craft an understanding of this concept in relation to these fields, which will be utilised throughout my research.

Secondly I initiate the anthropological strand of my theoretical framework defined by two key texts; *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (1951) by Mircea Eliade, which provides a collective study of shamanic ideology including analysis of animal transformations from various shamanic societies, and *The Land of Remorse: A Study of Southern Italian Tarantism* (1961) by Ernesto de Martino, an in-depth ethnographic study of the phenomenon of tarantism manifesting in Southern Italy. Both cultural practices of shamanism and tarantism involve embodied processes of human-animal transformation, thus providing significant historical context for my topic, as well an understanding of what performative practices of becoming-animal might look like in Western and non-Western cultures.

The juxtaposition of these two phenomena, from the perspective of animal transformation, also presents a rift in meaning; in shamanism, a prevalently male practice, the transformation of the shaman is associated with knowledge and power, as opposed to in tarantism, a prevalently female practice, where the transformation of the *tarantata* is associated with hysteria and sickness. This gendered schism allows me to introduce the feminist strand of my theoretical framework. By activating the work of feminist theorists Luce Irigaray, Monique David-Ménard and Hélène Cixous, who argue that hysteria is a form of rebellion against the patriarchal order, and applying this perspective to tarantism, I begin to traverse the gendered schism, arguing that the becoming-animal of tarantism is not a sickness but a powerful healing practice.

³ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Brian Massumi, "Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible," in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone Press, 1988), 237.

Chapter 2 introduces a third theoretical strand which demonstrates the cross fertilisation of animal studies and performance theory. The critical work of Steve Baker, who was at the forefront of 'the animal turn' of performance studies, provides key texts for this section: "What Does Becoming Animal Look Like?" (2002) and *The Postmodern Animal* (2000). Baker is interested in how animals are represented in contemporary art and performance, and how the animal can shape human identity. His activation of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming-animal, in relation to contemporary art and performance, and his discussions of the implications on identity, provides me with theoretical tools to apply to my own case studies. In Chapter 2 I use the theory of Baker, alongside performance theorists such as Anthony Kubiak and Jean-Marie Pradier, to explore three works of contemporary performance art; *Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me* (1974) by Joseph Beuys, *Journey to the Lower World* (2004) by Marcus Coates and *Louphole* (2010) by Simon Whitehead. The discussion of these works exemplifies what the performative practice of becoming-animal looks like in a contemporary context, as well as highlights how shamanic techniques of becoming-animal are used in a contemporary Western context for the purpose of healing modern society.

My second sub-question asks: How can the practice of women becoming-animal through contemporary performance art challenge traditional Western understandings of the relationship between women and animals? The book *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations* (1995) by Carol Adams and Josephine Donovan acts as a key text providing the general feminist perspective from which I approach this question. Adams and Donovan advocate for a broader more radical feminism inclusive of all non-human life forms, in order to eradicate the mentality of domination which has oppressed and exploited women, animals and the natural environment. They argue that the denial of the connection between women and animals is highly hypocritical when, like women, the animal has always also been objectified as 'Other'⁴. Embracing this approach, which I define as 'intersectional

⁴ Here I would like to acknowledge that whilst this research serves to traverse the human/animal divide, I am aware of the problematics of using the term 'animal' because it is symptomatic of this very dualism. By using the word 'animal' as an umbrella term for a multitudinous heterogeneity of species, I am reinforcing the animal as 'Other' which fails to recognise the human species as an animal amongst animals. I try to overcome this by referring to specific animals and advocating for the importance of taking the animal seriously as individual sentient beings, as well as using terms such as non-human species, or non-human animal, but I am aware that further attention is required to overcome this human-centric use of language.

ecofeminism', I then present three central case studies of women becoming-animal in contemporary performance art, which I first contextualise with a brief discussion on feminist performance art.

My case studies, *The Horse Impressionists* (1994) by Lucy Gunning, *Untitled (Blood + Feathers #2)* (1974) by Ana Mendieta and *Hybrid Family* (2016) by Maja Smrekar, present diverse forms of becoming-animal, thus raising different implications when analysed through an intersectional ecofeminist lens. Through analysis supported by feminist theorists such as Rebecca Schneider, Jane Blocker, Donna J Haraway and Vinciane Despret, I cultivate an empowered understanding of these practices that recognises the importance of alliance in order to empower minorities making them visible through transformation. I recognise this as a form of feminist healing that extends towards all minorities including animals and the environment.

Chapter 4 builds upon this notion by engaging the theory of multispecies feminist theorist Donna J. Haraway, and her concept of *becoming-with* as discussed in her books *When Species Meet* (2008) and *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016). Like becoming-animal, *becoming-with* offers a dramatic reconfiguration of the human-animal relationship, but it also encapsulates the intersectional ecofeminist perspective that this research advocates. By placing this concept in fruitful tension with Deleuze and Guattari's *becoming-animal*, I propose a hybrid concept which I call 'becoming-with-animal'. This concept allows me to encapsulate my research findings and embrace the essence of my argument as a means of conclusion. It also provides a tool for the analysis of other case studies of animal transformation in contemporary performance, to support a new empowered understanding of the phenomenon. Finally, in conclusive summary, I offer a brief reflection upon my research process, including its challenges and discoveries, and offer considerations for future research trajectories.

Chapter 1: A Performative Understanding of Becoming-Animal

We are familiar with the human-animal transformations of myth and fable, and magnificent metamorphoses inked by the pen of literary heavyweights. These transformations are etched deep into the canvas of art history and have inspired countless extraordinary works, from Paula Rego's *Dog Woman* series to Leonora Carrington's surrealist hybrids. However, I would like to turn the attention to performance, a field in which the phenomena of human-animal metamorphosis is explored through the medium of the body. This chapter will consider from a historical perspective what the embodied performative practices of becoming animal might look like, constructing a deeper understanding of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of *becoming-animal*.

From the philosophical tapestry of Deleuze and Guattari's chapter "Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible" two threads are woven which I will extrapolate in this chapter for the purposes of this research. The first thread concerns the notion of sorcery. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the concept of becoming-animal dwells in sorcery and magic, resonating with the performative practice of shamanism, a phenomenon in which animal transformations are integral. The second thread emerges only briefly in their chapter and concerns tarantism, a historical-religious phenomenon characteristic of Southern Italy in which the supposed victims of tarantula bites are cured through an exorcism of dance, colour and music, through which they *become* the spider that bit them. Both of these cultural practices not only demonstrate how Deleuze and Guattari's concept can be understood in relation to embodied performance, but also show how the practice of becoming animal can be used as a form of healing.

1.1 Becoming-Animal: Deleuze and Guattari

Since time immemorial, animals have served the human imaginary as symbols, or as John Berger observes, "messages and promises"⁵ which reflect human desire. Traditionally in the arts, animals have been reduced to a mirror with which we observe only ourselves, our own

⁵ John Berger, *Why Look at Animals?* (Great Ideas, V. 80. London: Penguin, 2009), 4.

characteristics, our 'inner animal', without seeing the animal itself; a sentient, mortal being. In their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, French postmodern philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari offer a new and offbeat way of thinking about the human-animal relationship where instead of recognising relations through descent and filiation, as in evolutionism, relations are patterned through alliance; they call this 'becoming-animal'. This concept transcends archetypes and analogical representations, and ventures into "something more secret, more subterranean"⁶ inviting a reconfigured understanding of human-animal relationships not based in Western Aristotelian thinking or science, but somewhat akin to magic, or as Deleuze and Guattari describe it, "an affair of sorcery."⁷ These sorcerers, as they refer to themselves, "believe in the existence of very special becomings-animal traversing human beings and sweeping them away, affecting the animal no less than the human."⁸ Becomings should not be considered as linear, but a rhizome⁹, a non-hierarchical configuration of subterranean connections, entangling all living things, upsetting "filiations and classifications"¹⁰:

A fibre stretches from a human to an animal, from a human or an animal to molecules, from molecules to particles, and so on to the imperceptible. Every fibre is a universe fibre. A fibre strung across borderlines constitutes a line of flight or of deterritorialization.¹¹

This line of flight strung between the borderline of human and animal allows for a 'becoming-animal', for a deterritorialization of speciation and classification, however no one, "not even God" knows whether two borderlines enter symbiosis. Becoming-animal is precarious terrain, so Deleuze and Guattari call for experimentation: "But you don't know what you can make a rhizome with, you don't know which subterranean stem is effectively going to make a rhizome, or enter a becoming, people your desert. So experiment."¹² It is in

⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 237.

⁷ Ibid, 247.

⁸ Ibid, 237.

⁹ For a detailed discussion of the Deleuzoguattarian concept of the 'rhizome' see Chapter 1 of *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone Press, 1988), 3-28.

¹⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 242.

¹¹ Ibid, 249.

¹² Ibid, 251.

this invitation for experimentation that I believe lies the connection to performance; an invitation to *experiment* with becoming-animal through the physicality and materiality of the body. Although Deleuze and Guattari focus on literary becomings-animal, citing Moby Dick and the works of Kafka as the greatest masterpieces of becoming¹³, and have been known to resist theatre and its relationship to becoming¹⁴, many theatre scholars and artists interpret the Deleuzoguattarian concept of becoming-animal as an irresistibly performative trope. Una Chaudhuri and Shonni Enelow describe it as “one of animal philosophy’s most aesthetically productive concepts.”¹⁵ This leads us to the question of what does the practice becoming-animal look like? To explore this I am firstly going to discuss one of the most archaic forms of performative human-animal transformation, and perhaps one of the most recognised “affairs of sorcery”; shamanic shapeshifting.

1.2 Shamanic Transformation

Having inhabited this earth for millions of years before *Homo sapiens* evolved, animals dwell deep in the human imaginary, becoming “gods and monsters, symbols and sorcerers”¹⁶ and through our cultural and embodied emulation of these ‘divine creatures’, became integral to the evolution of performative practices.

Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy (1974) is a seminal historical study of shamanism by Mircea Eliade (1907-1986). Drawing on Eliade’s understanding, shamanism is an exoteric term that describes a complex magico-religious phenomenon that focuses on techniques of ecstasy and trance in which the soul leaves the body, assisted by the invocation of helping animal spirits.¹⁷ The shaman primarily functions as a healer, and this shamanic journey is usually taken on behalf of individuals or communities that are sick. As a specialist of the human soul, which means he “sees” it and knows its form and destiny¹⁸, the shaman diagnoses sickness (or loss of soul), and through techniques of ecstasy can safely abandon

¹³ Ibid, 243.

¹⁴ As discussed by theatre professor Anthony Kubiak in his article “Animism: Becoming-Performance, or Does This Text Speak to You?,” *Performance Research* 17, no. 4 (2012): 56.

¹⁵ Una Chaudhuri and Shonni Enelow. “Animalizing Performance, Becoming-Theatre: Inside Zoosis with the Animal Project at NYU.” *Theatre Topics* 16, no. 1 (2006): 5.

¹⁶ Jean-Marie Pradier. “Animals, Angel and Performance.” *Performance Research* 5, no. 2 (2000): 12.

¹⁷ Mircea Eliade. *Shamanism : Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 4-6.

¹⁸ Eliade, *Shamanism*, 8.

his body in order to transcend worlds in search of the lost soul, which once retrieved, he returns to the body it left, thus curing it.¹⁹

The helping spirits the shaman invokes for his journey are often animal spirits. In numerous shamanic traditions it is believed that in *illo tempore*, or mythical times, humans and animals lived at peace and understood each other's language, "it was not until after a primordial catastrophe, comparable to the 'Fall' of Biblical tradition, that man became what he is today - mortal, sexed ... and at enmity with the animals."²⁰ Animal transformations in shamanism are an integral part of ritual practice, "Chukchee and Eskimo shamans turn themselves into wolves; Lapp shamans become wolves, bears, reindeer, fish; the Semang *hala* can change into a tiger..."²¹ In order to obtain this shamanic power, during the initiation stage future shamans learn a secret language used to communicate with spirits during séances. This secret language is animal language, learnt by imitating the sounds of animals.²² Shaman's will also emulate animal movement, wear animal skins, feathers, masks, or paint their bodies with the markings of an animal. Eliade tells us that through these actions "it is the shaman who 'turns himself' into an animal" and therefore it is not to be confused with possession, but rather can be considered a "new identity" for the shaman who "becomes an animal-spirit". This becoming is a "way of showing that the shaman can forsake his human condition, is able, in a word, to 'die'."²³

This 'death' Eliade refers to is the shaman transcending the limitations of his own body and of humanity itself, entering a new dimension of life; a life of "spontaneity, freedom, 'sympathy' with all the cosmic rhythms and, hence, bliss and immortality."²⁴ By imitating the animal the shaman is effectively re-establishing the paradisaical situation before the divorce of man and animal. By becoming animal the shaman demonstrates the power to become something far greater and more knowledgeable than himself for animals are seen as having superior wisdom.

¹⁹ Ibid, 182

²⁰ Ibid, 99.

²¹ Ibid, 93.

²² Ibid, 97.

²³ Ibid, 93.

²⁴ Ibid, 460.

Let us now consider this performative behaviour of the shaman in the context of Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal. Theatre professor Jean-Marie Pradier compares the shaman to the actor, an "intermediary between imaginary worlds and the 'real' world."²⁵ He cites Roberte Hamayon, a specialist in Siberian shamanism, who acknowledges gestuality as the mode of communication *par excellence* between species with no common language, and the power of the shaman's "act" to bring into contact "worlds that are partners in exchanges of vitality."²⁶ This notion of the 'act' is important because it suggests that it is the *becoming*-animal that is at the crux of the matter not the *being*-animal. Whilst Deleuze and Guattari tell us that becomings-animal "are neither dreams nor phantasies", that they are perfectly real, "human beings do not 'really' become an animal any more than the animal 'really' becomes something else."²⁷ Deleuze and Guattari stress that the reality of the concept lies in the idea that "[b]ecoming produces nothing other than itself"²⁸, it is the becoming that is real, not that which something becomes.

So if becoming is a process that produces nothing other than itself in the here and now, I would suggest that the concept is arguably much like performance.²⁹ Theatre professor Anthony Kubiak argues that Deleuze and Guattari are seeking something in a state of "arising", and it is in the "performance of becoming" that this arising is found. Therefore "becoming can only come into the play through the medium of performance, through the 'act'."³⁰ He goes on to argue that nowhere is the performance of becoming more powerfully experienced than in shamanic shapeshifting, and supports his argument with the following quote from anthropologist Carlos Fausto who cites Viveiros de Castro describing the Amazonian shaman Cunhambebe becoming-Jaguar:

Viveiros de Castro suggests that Cunhambebe's statement may be understood as 'a jaguar-becoming, where 'jaguar' is a quality of the *act*, not of the *subject* ... Even if

²⁵ Pradier. "Animals, Angel and Performance," 12.

²⁶ Hamayon quoted in Pradier. "Animals, Angel and Performance," 13.

²⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 238.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Chantal Pontbriand argues that performance is "seen as a process" which is not dominated by representation of absence (as opposed to text-based theatre) but rather has an "obvious presence...a here/now which has no other referent except itself". See Chantal Pontbriand. ""The Eye Finds No Fixed Point on Which to Rest..." *Modern Drama* 25, no. 1 (1982): 154-62.

³⁰ Anthony Kubiak. "Passing Strange: Becoming Daimon." *Performance Research* 22, no. 2 (2017): 14.

the object of becoming is imaginary, the becoming is real, and the ferocious alterity is a quality of the verb, not its predicate'.³¹

This aligns with Deleuze and Guattari who emphasise throughout that "becoming animal does not consist in playing animal or imitating an animal."³² Whilst Shamanic initiations involve "everyday" transformations through the use of costume, paint, sound and movement, the 'becoming' itself is not found in these elements, but rather in the "quality of the act" for which these everyday conditions allow. Mircea Eliade tells us:

Little would be gained by recording the fact that shamans dressed up in animal skins. The important thing is what they felt when they masqueraded as animals. We have reason to believe that this magical transformation resulted in a "going out of the self" that very often found expression in an ecstatic experience.³³

The masquerade only serves as a ritual harbinger for becoming. The becoming-animal itself, the "quality of the act", transcends mimesis. Deleuze and Guattari themselves corroborate this: "One does not imitate; one constitutes a block of becoming. Imitation enters in only as an adjustment of the block, like a finishing touch, a wink, a signature. But everything of importance happens elsewhere..."³⁴

Having argued that in Shamanic shapeshifting "becoming's very milieu is performance"³⁵, and demonstrated that whilst becoming-animal lies beyond imitation, it is often vital in order to create the conditions for becoming, I will now introduce another historic example of becoming-animal, which instead of being understood as a powerful healing practice, is commonly associated with sickness and hysteria.³⁶

³¹ Carlos Faustos. "A Blend of Blood and Tobacco: Shamans and Jaguars among the Parakanã of Eastern Amazonia." In *In Darkness and Secrecy: The Anthropology of Assault Sorcery and Witchcraft in Amazonia*, ed. by Neil L Whitehead, and Robin Wright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004),173.

³² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 238.

³³ Eliade, *Shamanism*, 469.

³⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 305.

³⁵ Kubiak. "Passing Strange: Becoming Daimon," 14.

³⁶ The Oxford English Dictionary defines tarantism as a "psychological illness". See *Oxford Dictionaries*, s.v. "tarantism," accessed May 20, 2019, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/tarantism>

1.3 Becoming-Spider

Tarantism is a historical-religious phenomenon which developed in the middle ages in the region of Southern Italy and continued for at least five hundred years³⁷. Victims of tarantism, who were predominantly female, would enter a state of crisis after allegedly being bitten by a tarantula. The victim was cured through ritual exorcism which involved music and trance-dancing known as the tarantella. Whilst cases of latrodectism, an illness caused by the bite of *Latrodectus* spiders, were identified in the region, they were very rare, and despite multiple investigations no link to tarantism could be traced.³⁸

Cultural anthropologist Ernesto De Martino (1908-1965) undertook an in-depth ethnographic study of the subject, as documented in his book *The Land of Remorse: A Study of Southern Italian Tarantism*, originally published in 1961 and translated into English in 2005. The book provides an unrivalled comprehensive study of the subject, in which De Martino argues that tarantism is a phenomena of “cultural plasticity” where the bite of a tarantula has been “symbolically remoulded” to unleash a crisis which roughly imitates the real toxic syndrome of latrodectism.

The study tells us that following the “first bite” of the tarantula (*taranta*), the victim (*tarantata*) will spend days in bed “anguished, panting, lacking appetite and eating, slowly, only if forced to.”³⁹ When she⁴⁰ becomes very weak due to the fasting, the ritual setting (at home or outdoors) is prepared; adorned with colourful fabrics, foliage and a pail of water, and musicians are summoned. Dressed in white, she begins her exorcism by walking solemnly around the ritual setting eventually breaking into a dance consisting of wild frenetic movements involving the whole body. These frenzied dances can go on for days in the same succession of movement, driven by fast paced tambourines and guitars. Eventually

³⁷ See foreword by Vincent Crapanzano in Ernesto De Martino, *The Land of Remorse : A Study of Southern Italian Tarantism* (London: Free Association Books, 2005), vii.

³⁸ See Ernesto De Martino, *The Land of Remorse : A Study of Southern Italian Tarantism* (London: Free Association Books, 2005), 22-23.

³⁹ Lodovico Valletta, *De Phalangio Apulo* (Neapoli, 1706), 159, quoted in Ernesto De Martino, *The Land of Remorse : A Study of Southern Italian Tarantism* (London: Free Association Books, 2005), 117.

⁴⁰ I acknowledge that there were also some male *tarantato* (victims of tarantism) but as the phenomenon was prevalently female my writing focuses on the female experience.

the *tarantata* collapses exhausted, falling into a melancholic state “as if a thousand troubles weighed upon her soul.”⁴¹ After she awakens the exorcism is completed and the *tarantata* is restored to her full vitality, she is cured. Although the specifics of the phenomenon vary case by case, De Martino argues that “what is stable in tarantism is certainly the mythical-ritual symbol of the *taranta* and the exorcism of dance, music and colours.”⁴² :

The poisoning *taranta* can have various sizes and colors, and she has preferences for this or that color; she is sensitive to various melodies, and her bite itself is melodic; her dance follows the rhythm and melody congenial to her; her bite communicates corresponding inclinations to the victim.⁴³

It is in these symbols and the mythology surrounding them that we find a resonance with Deleuzoguattarian becoming-animal. Firstly this notion of poisoning, of contagion through the bite of a spider, chimes with Deleuze and Guattari’s specificities around becoming-animal. They stress that becoming-animal does not occur through filiation or heredity, but rather through “the contagion of the pack”⁴⁴, which suggests multiplicity. Often *tarantism* afflicted multiple people at once, sometimes members of the same family. This idea also applies to the multiplicity of the spiders; “the demon functions as the borderline of an animal pack, into which the human being passes, or in which his or her becoming takes place, by contagion.”⁴⁵ We shall examine further the notion of the pack and the contagion of the pack in Chapter 3, but what is also striking about the previous passage from De Martino is his description of the spider’s synergy with rhythm, melody and colour that “communicates corresponding inclinations to the victim”. Much like in shamanism, this tells us that rather than possession being at work, it is instead a form of communication. The female is not controlled by the spider, rather she is communicating with it through the mediating poison in her veins. De Martino describes the *taranta* giving orders to the *tarantata*, sharing dialogues and making deals with her⁴⁶, a two-way dialectic between

⁴¹ De Martino, *The Land of Remorse*, 117.

⁴² *Ibid*, 116.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 124.

⁴⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 243.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 247.

⁴⁶ De Martino, *The Land of Remorse*, 124.

human and animal. We are reminded that to enter into a Deleuzoguattarian becoming-animal, both the human and animal are “swept up” in that becoming, “affecting the animal no less than the human.”⁴⁷ In *Land of Remorse* we hear of an experiment which exemplifies this two-way affect, in which a *taranta* is placed on a piece of straw in a jar and a musician is called to play for it, arousing the same reaction as in the women, “[A]s soon as the musician began to play music in harmony with its humor, the little beast not only acted as though it were dancing by jumping on its legs and shaking its body, but it even danced in earnest, in keeping with the tempo.”⁴⁸

This suggests that the “melodic” bite of the spider establishes a line of communication, or a “line of flight”, between spider and human through which they enter together into a becoming-animal. De Martino describes this as an “irresistible identification” in which “it is necessary to dance with the spider, indeed be the dancing spider”⁴⁹, whilst the spider becomes the “rhythm, melody, song, dance and colour” which can be “listened to, sung and seen”⁵⁰ by the human. However, whilst there is a certain imitation of the spider by the victim (some tarantati dangle from a rope symbolic of the spider’s web as part of the ritual dance⁵¹), as we observed in Shamanistic practice, it is not in the imitation of the animal that becoming-animal is located. Deleuze and Guattari themselves identify tarantism as a potent example of becoming-animal precisely because it transcends imitation and identification:

But when the victim does this dance, can he or she said to be imitating the spider, to be identifying with it, even in an identification through an “archetypal” or “agonistic” struggle? No, because the victim, the patient, the person who is sick, becomes a dancing spider only to the extent that the spider itself is supposed to become a pure silhouette, pure colour and pure sound to which the person dances ... the becoming-

⁴⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 247.

⁴⁸ Atanasio Kirchner, *Musurgia universalis sive ars magna consoni et dissoni* (Rome, 1650), 219, quoted in Ernesto De Martino, *The Land of Remorse : A Study of Southern Italian Tarantism* (London: Free Association Books, 2005), 95-96.

⁴⁹ De Martino, *The Land of Remorse*, 36.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 129.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 89.

spider of the dance ... occurs on the condition that the spider itself becomes sound and colour, orchestra and painting.⁵²

Tarantism and Shamanism, as observed, both provide compelling examples of Deleuzoguattarian becoming-animal through cultural performative practice and hold many similarities. Both phenomena concern ritual practice or sorcery, in which the animals hold a mythical or symbolic quality, they both foreground communication rather than possession, which indicates the mutual nature of animal-becomings, and both practices involve emulating the animal in question, and yet go beyond imitation. However the juxtaposition of shamanism and tarantism, which exemplify instances of becoming-animal in both Western and non-Western contexts, reveals a gendered schism in their understanding. The remainder of this chapter attempts to overcome this schism through the consideration of feminist perspectives.

1.4 Becoming-(em)Power(ed)

In non-Western shamanic societies, where male practice is prevalent, we have seen that animal transformations are associated with knowledge and power; knowledge of the entire cosmos received through communication with animal spirits, and the power to traverse the human condition into paradisaic realms in order to cure 'soul sickness' in the community. Soul sickness can manifest as any illness, physical or mental, and is believed to be the work of evil spirits that cause the soul to wander. The shaman becomes-animal and, through communication with his helping animal spirits, gleans the knowledge required in order to capture and return the wandering soul to the patient, thus healing them. In the Western, and predominantly female, phenomenon of tarantism, becoming-animal is understood not as a powerful healing practice, but as a crisis, a sickness in itself⁵³ that needs to be "cured".

⁵² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 305.

⁵³ Various forms of Shamanism have also been equated with mental disorders and hysteria. Mircea Eliade convincingly argues against this Western diagnosis using multiple examples, "[T]he shamans, for all their apparent likeness to epileptics and hysterics, show proof of a more than normal nervous constitution; they achieve a degree of concentration beyond the capacity of the profane; they sustain exhausting efforts, they control their ecstatic movements, and so on." For full discussion see Eliade, *Shamanism*, 23-32.

Ernesto De Martino argues that tarantism is a culturally conditioned phenomenon, describing it as “an institution rather than a disease”. He argues that it is caused by “frustrated *eros*” due to the social pressures of the times, through which the ritual exorcism of becoming-spider offers a form of “release and resolution”.⁵⁴ Whilst De Martino doesn't make it explicit, this understanding of tarantism aligns closely with the notion of female hysteria. Hysteria, since the age of Hippocrates⁵⁵ has been repeatedly linked to an unsatisfactory sex life⁵⁶, and two millennia on De Martino also appears to draw the same conclusion about women afflicted by tarantism;

[W]omen of every stratum who were condemned by custom to a harsh regime of erotic frustrations - young girls at puberty, widows, unhappy wives, spinsters with withered loves - found in tarantism's cultural order certain possibilities to release in the symbolic production what the social pressure had confined to the menacing enclosures of the unconscious.⁵⁷

However, if we consider hysteria from the perspective of feminism, I would argue for an understanding of tarantism that rejects “little carnivals of women”⁵⁸ releasing their “erotic frustrations”, and instead, like the shaman, embodies forms of knowledge and power. Feminist theorist Luce Irigaray, in line with her contemporaries Hélène Cixous and Juliet Mitchell, argues that hysteria is a subversive act, a feminist strategy of “cultural subversion” and “counter production” caused by the phallogocentric discourse that women are “forced to mime”.⁵⁹ Irigaray believes that by deliberately assuming the imposed role of the feminine through hysterical mimicry, the female hysteric is trying to “recover the place of her

⁵⁴ De Martino, *The Land of Remorse*, 121.

⁵⁵ The word *Hysterikos* meaning ‘of the womb’ was used by Greek physician Hippocrates (460 - 370 BC) as a collective term for “feminine” complaints.

⁵⁶ Anouchka Grose, “Reclaiming Hysteria,” in *Hysteria Today*, ed. Anouchka Grose (London: Karnac Books, 2016), 15-31.

⁵⁷ De Martino, *The Land of Remorse*, 122.

⁵⁸ Giorgio Baglivi, *Dissertatio de anatome, morsu et effectibus tarantulae*, in *Opera omnia*, Disstertatio V1. (Venice, 1754), 311, quoted in Ernesto De Martino, *The Land of Remorse: A Study of Southern Italian Tarantism* (London: Free Association Books, 2005), 128.

⁵⁹ Dianne Chisholm, “Irigaray's Hysteria,” in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 264-267.

exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it.”⁶⁰ She argues that the hysteric uses her body rather than language as a means of subversion because the masculine construct of language negates the feminine; “Hysteria ... is a display of that which cannot be articulated, not for *lack* of a language but because of the imposition of a linguistic code that subjects every language user to the same phallic norms...”⁶¹ This argument is also echoed by feminist philosopher Monique David-Ménard who, when discussing hysteria says, “[w]hat is played out in the body takes the place of a discourse that cannot be uttered”⁶²

By becoming-spider the female undertakes a radical embodied performance of resistance in order to “get free of the fabric (of discourse), reveal her nakedness, her destitution in language” and “explode in the face of them all”.⁶³ Through the hysterical mimesis of tarantism, not only does a woman subvert the female condition imposed upon her by the patriarchy, but also, like the shaman, transcends her human condition by entering into an exchange with animal, through which she gains alternative forms of knowledge. By articulating this knowledge through the body, rather than through language, she traverses Cartesian mind-body dualism.

In her book co-authored with Catherine Clément *The Newly Born Woman* (1975) Hélène Cixous delights in the explosive, ‘orgasmic’ pleasure of this “festival of metamorphosis”; this “frantic flight” in which women “become spider, cow, lizard, goat”, but mourns at the ephemerality of these becomings:⁶⁴

She is cured ... the celebration is over. Returning to social life, leaving the “natural mode”, the marvellous freedom that is animal and desiring ... it is certainly to leave risk behind - the danger of the body that is finally unleashed; it is to settle down

⁶⁰ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 76, quoted in Chisholm, “Irigaray’s Hysteria,” 268.

⁶¹ Chisholm, “Irigaray’s Hysteria,” 272.

⁶² Monique David-Menard, *Hysteria from Freud to Lacan : Body and Language in Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 3, quoted in Chisholm, “Irigaray’s Hysteria,” 268.

⁶³ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 143, quoted in Chisholm, “Irigaray’s Hysteria,” 275.

⁶⁴ Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996), 21.

again under a roof, in a house, in the family circle of kinship and marriage; and it is to return to the men's world: the celebration is indeed over.⁶⁵

Once "cured" the woman returns to invisibility, disappearing into the "men's world". Earlier in her book Cixous compares the hysteric to the sorceress, positioning her as a rebellious and powerful outsider⁶⁶, an exceptional individual much like the shaman. She argues that both hysteric and sorceress have "touched the roots of certain symbolic structure" and have been "so threatened that they have to disappear".⁶⁷ She then reminds the reader of the reality of this disappearance by referring to the European witch burnings of the Early Modern period, "[w]e almost forget that there were thousands of sorceresses burnt throughout Europe - real disappearance sanctioned by real death."⁶⁸

This notion of "making invisible" is symptomatic of the real sickness of the Western world. A world of dualisms in which women, and all other minority groups including non-human species, are often rendered invisible due to hierarchal heteropatriarchal systems of power. I would argue that the tarantata of Southern Italy were not sick or hysteric, but through the embodied practice of becoming-animal were instead 'making visible' their alternative forms of knowledge as a form of healing directed towards this fundamental schism of Western society. This creates an understanding where the becoming-animal of tarantism, like in shamanism, reverberates with knowledge and power, but in the alternative forms of 'embodied knowledge' and 'empowerment'.

Conclusion

By analysing the historical phenomena of shamanism and tarantism from the perspective of Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal, this chapter has sought to create a more tangible reading of the concept in relation to performance, arguing that becoming-animal comes in to play through the quality of the act. Through the examination of both non-Western and

⁶⁵ Cixous and Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, 22.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Western approaches to becoming-animal, this chapter recognises that in both cases the performative practice of becoming-animal has an efficacious function in regard to healing. By considering feminist approaches to hysteria, I invite a new, more radical understanding of tarantism which rejects associations with sickness and hysteria, and instead proposes tarantism as a healing practice that embraces its own alternative forms of (embodied) knowledge and (em)power(ment), thus overcoming the gendered schism between understandings of becoming-animal in shamanism and tarantism.

By exploring how the concept of *becoming-animal* manifests in contemporary performance art, the next chapter will begin to carve out how *becoming-animal* as a healing practice can be relevant today, and what implications that may have for understanding the practice from a feminist perspective.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ My research will continue to focus specifically on embodied practices of becoming-animal rather than logocentric theatre practice, thus remaining in line with my argument, supported by Jean-Marie Pradier and Anthony Kubiak, that becoming-animal lies in the quality of the embodied act rather than in language, for we do not share a common language with other species.

Chapter 2: Artist-Animal-Shaman in Contemporary Performance Art

Modern western society has been constructed upon a catastrophic fracture between human and animal. This fundamental divide is, in part, a product of the tradition of Abrahamic faiths as asserted in the Hebrew Book of Genesis (c.1450 BCE), and of the influence of later Aristotelian hierarchical thinking (c. 340 BCE) whereby Aristotle's dialectics position the human in direct opposition to the animal. This creates a relationship of domination where man (male) is the highest-ranking animal and all other animals are therefore exploited by man. As theatre professor Anthony Kubiak states, "[t]his tradition, from Aristotle on, has in nearly all of its forms approached the world instrumentally, as something to be conquered, utilized, exploited, tamed, reduced or otherwise depleted for our own ends."⁷⁰ This anthropocentric structure of power extends its destructive force to the environment. Seeing the world as simply a resource for man has led to the cataclysmic effects of the climate crisis and the devastation of animal populations, another example of "real disappearance" as discussed in Chapter 1.⁷¹

Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal offers a way of thinking beyond anthropocentric understandings of the human-animal relationship, inviting a form of political and ecological doing which works to upset the hierarchical structure that Western society has been founded on. They address the "inhumanness of the 'diabolical powers'" and offer the answer of becoming-animal, "to become a beetle, to become a dog, to become an ape, 'head over heels and away'", rather than remaining submissive.⁷² This chapter will explore how the field of contemporary Western performance art has embraced Deleuze and Guattari's invitation in order to glean alternative forms of knowledge. By employing techniques of becoming-animal rooted in shamanism, contemporary artists ask how this practice can be used as a form of healing in the context of the modern world.

⁷⁰ Kubiak, "Animism: Becoming-Performance, or Does This Text Speak to You?," 55.

⁷¹ A 2019 IPBES Global Assessment Report on biodiversity and ecosystem service finds that up to one million animal and plant species are at risk of extinction, many within decades. They have found that the current global response is insufficient, and transformative changes are needed to restore and protect nature. Read the full report here: <https://www.ipbes.net/news/ipbes-global-assessment-summary-policy-makers-pdf>

⁷² Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Dana B Polan, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 12.

2.1 The Animal Turn in Performance

At the turn of the millennium the theoretical fields of animal studies and performance studies saw an exciting cross-fertilisation, or what some theorists have referred to as ‘the animal turn’⁷³, marked by Alan Read’s seminal issue of *Performance Research*. For this special issue titled *On Animals* (2000), Read invited performance theorists to think about theatre beyond the human. The concept of posthuman performance was already at work in regard to the virtual and technological domain but Read was interested in moving towards the animal as a “reminder and remainder of human boundaries”. He says, “Animals imply a provocative and welcome subtraction of sophistication, ethically enhancing and intellectually problematizing any context within which human animals performing might be reconsidered.”⁷⁴ Read’s provocation received a heterogeneous response, exemplifying the promising potentiality of the subject and fuelling a new discourse within the field.

A key contributor to this burgeoning discourse is Steve Baker, who released his book *The Postmodern Animal* (2000) in the same year. Baker’s work activates Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming-animal as a tool to consider the “poetics and politics” of the animal in contemporary art and performance. Baker suggests that, “[b]ecoming-animal’s importance lies in the opportunity it offers to think differently about humans and animals, and that different thinking will take unpredictable forms”⁷⁵, but contemporary performance practice goes one step beyond ‘thinking’ and explores the possibilities of becoming-animal through ‘doing’. Performance maker and theorist Nicolas Salazar Sutil says, “No word or method can fully describe the force that tethers different species in sensuous co-existence. Theoretical discourse is trapped within representation, which is why sensuous praxis is absolutely necessary as a direct means to grasp matter.”⁷⁶ This supports the notion that becoming comes into play through the ‘act’ of performance, a corporeal opportunity to explore animal-becomings.

⁷³ See Una Chaudhuri and Holly Hughes, *Animal Acts : Performing Species Today* Critical Performances (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2014)

⁷⁴ Alan Read, “Editorial: On Animals,” *Performance Research* 5, no. 2 (2000): 3-4.

⁷⁵ Baker, *The Postmodern Animal*, 132.

⁷⁶ Nicolas Salazar Sutil, “Jism for Schism: Turning the Animal On,” *Performance Research* 22, no. 2 (2017): 2

I will now present the work of three contemporary Western artists whose work embraces the concept of *becoming-animal* through embodied performance practice, whilst also employing non-Western Shamanic techniques as a form of healing. The influential German artist Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) is likely the most cited artist in the territory of becoming-animal in relation to performance art. His piece *Coyote: I like America and America Likes Me* (1974) can be viewed as a seminal work which paved the way for contemporary artists working with the subject, as well as the notion of artist as shaman. Highly influenced by Beuys', and arguably the most prominent Western artist engaging with the concept of becoming-animal today, is British artist Marcus Coates. A keen ornithologist and naturalist, his work often involves shamanic techniques of animal communication in order to address societal issues of marginalised communities. Finally I will discuss the work of another contemporary British artist, Simon Whitehead. Although less familiar, Whitehead provides further insight into how shamanic techniques of *becoming-animal* through performance can be understood as a form of ecological healing.

2.2 Healing the Western Mind: Joseph Beuys

Towards the end of the twentieth century artists began to “take the animal seriously”⁷⁷, which meant thinking beyond animals as messages and promises, towards human and animal being bound up as living beings, “caught up in each other’s affairs, willingly or otherwise.”⁷⁸ This shift in attitudes is perhaps most poignantly marked by Joseph Beuys’ 1974 performance *Coyote: I like America and America Likes Me*, in which Beuys spends a week living and communicating with a coyote in the René Block gallery in New York. Arriving in an ambulance wrapped in felt, bringing with him a selection of symbolic objects⁷⁹ and a repertoire of movements, Beuys presented himself as a German shaman; a representative of the world of ‘man’, (or a Deleuzoguattarian ‘anomalous being’) who has come to make a reckoning with the coyote. In line with Deleuze and Guattari, Beuys believed that by engaging in a dialogue with the coyote, also an ‘anomalous being’, he would also be

⁷⁷ Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (London: Reaktion, 2000), 188.

⁷⁸ Steve Baker. “What Does Becoming-Animal Look Like?,” in *Representing Animals*, ed. Nigel Rothfels (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 68-69.

⁷⁹ These objects included two lengths of grey felt, a pair of brown gloves, a walking stick, a flashlight, a triangle and a pile of the Wall Street Journal. All of these objects have appeared in earlier works by Beuys, and Caroline Tisdall describes them as ingredients of Beuys’ language.

communicating with the whole species. Art critic Caroline Tisdall describes the piece as a long, calm and concentrated public dialogue between representatives of two species, observing that Beuys “never took his eyes off” the coyote.⁸⁰

In *Coyote: I like America and America Likes Me* Joseph Beuys draws together the roles of shaman and artist in an evocative exploration of the psychic melding between human and animal. By combining ancient, non-Western shamanic techniques with Western contemporary performance art, Anthony Kubiak argues that this early work posited becoming-animal as a serious and shamanic, worldview.⁸¹ Tisdall, quotes Beuys describing his engagement with shamanic methodologies:

I take this form of ancient behaviour as the idea of transformation through concrete processes of life, nature and history. My intention is ... to stress the idea of transformation and of substance. That is precisely what the shaman does in order to bring about change and development: his nature is therapeutic ... so while shamanism marks a point in the past, it also indicates a possibility for historical development ... so when I appear as a kind of shamanistic figure, or allude to it, I do it to stress my beliefs in other priorities...⁸²

Here Beuys is making a progressive suggestion that the artist can utilise the therapeutic nature of shamanism to bring about “transformation” in the modern world. Beuys believed that art could be used as an instrument to cure the ‘sickness’ in Western society, for example *Coyote: I like America and America Likes Me* addresses the fractured relationship between modern and Native Americans. Beuys believed if a reckoning was made with the coyote, a respected and powerful god for the Native Americans, lowered to the status of ‘pest’ and subject to persecution by European settlers, “only then can this trauma be lifted.”⁸³ However Steve Baker suggests that the enduring power and fascination for Joseph Beuys’ performance lies not in its political address, but rather in the week-long “confrontation of human and animal” through which “the roles of man and coyote were

⁸⁰ Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys : Coyote* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008), 6.

⁸¹ Kubiak, "Animism: Becoming-Performance, or Does This Text Speak to You?," 54.

⁸² Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1979), 23

⁸³ Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys : Coyote*, 10.

immediately exchanged". Baker, quoting Beuys, argues that this exchange between human and animal allowed Beuys to "edge closer to that which 'the human being cannot understand'" and that the power of this work "lies in the idea of the artist slowly giving up preconceptions and learning something of what the animal has to offer him."⁸⁴ This quest for alternative forms of knowledge was important for Beuys as he believed that it was imperative for Western man to move towards the next evolutionary stage, beyond the domination of nature towards ecological survival. In his article discussing *I like America and America Likes Me*, art critic David Levi-Strauss argues that, "Every art action Beuys made looked to a future in which our continued survival will depend on our ability to adapt, and to marshal senses and powers of intelligence now lying dormant."⁸⁵

This artistic approach, as well as his environmental activism⁸⁶ laid the foundations for understanding 'the work' of becoming-animal in contemporary performance today, which is to create an alliance between human and non-human species in order to adapt. By bringing together the roles of artist, shaman, environmentalist and educator, Joseph Beuys has been hailed as "the foremost environmentalist in the art world"⁸⁷ and the 'act' of becoming-animal is now widely understood by performance makers and theorists today as, what Carl Lavery refers to as, "ecological doing", or perhaps undoing...⁸⁸

2.3 Healing the Community: Marcus Coates

Like Joseph Beuys, Marcus Coates also well known for his engagement with shamanism, and many of his performances employ shamanic techniques of becoming-animal in order to address the needs of marginalised communities. In *Journey to the Lower World* (2004)

⁸⁴ Steve Baker, "Sloughing the Human," *Performance Research* 5, no. 2 (2000): 72-74.

⁸⁵ David Levi Strauss, "American Beuys : 'I Like America & America Likes Me'," *Parkett* 26 (1990): 126-128.

⁸⁶ Joseph Beuys was an ecologist and environmental activist, his manifesto "Aufruf zur Alternative" (Appeal for an Alternative) is widely cited as a catalyst for the policies of the future Green Party.

⁸⁷ Steve Baker quoting visual artists Olly and Suzi in *The Postmodern Animal*, 13.

⁸⁸ In the introduction to a 2016 issue of *Green Letters*, a journal about ecocriticism, Carl Lavery asks how contemporary theatre might be understood as a form of ecological doing. He goes on to argue that with the notion of "doing" there must always be "undoing". Lavery identifies theatre an art of weakness where theatre's role is "not to produce the real, it is to corrode it, to make the world problematic, multiple and complex." See Carl Lavery, "Introduction: Performance and Ecology - What Can Theatre Do?" *Green Letters* 20, no. 3 (2016): 229-36.

Coates undertakes a transformative shamanic journey on behalf of residents of a tower block in Liverpool UK, soon to be demolished. By communicating with animals Coates retrieves messages for the residents, offering them guidance during uncertain times.

The performance takes place in a resident's living room and Coates begins with some preparatory actions; He hoovers the carpet, ties bunches of keys to his shoes, rinses his mouth with water from a tea mug and spits it on the carpet, puts on a deerskin complete with head and antlers attached to a bicycle helmet, and then uses a CD player to play a fast paced drumming track. Through these seemingly quite ridiculous actions, accompanied by chuckles from the audience, Coates is acknowledging and making light of his Westernised appropriation of shamanic ritual. However, when he begins his "journey to the lower world" and starts speaking in animal language by convincingly mimicking the sounds of British wildlife, the room falls silent. Upon his return from his trance, an apparently physical ordeal, Coates describes his journey to the residents and the animals he met along the way. He describes his exchange with a sparrow hawk, who told him that the protector of the residents is the closeness of the group, and therefore it is important to try and keep the community of residents as close as possible. Despite the humour and the absurdness of his actions, the residents take the advice very seriously, touched by his efforts on their behalf.

By moving beyond conventional strategies Coates fuses everyday reality with otherness, opening up possibilities for the consideration of alternative forms of knowledge and access to 'more than human' worlds. Like the shaman, he uses his practice of becoming-animal on behalf of others to heal problems within the community. Whilst his shamanic ceremony is amateur and humorous in its oddity, Coates still manages to captivate his audience through the sheer earnest and authenticity of his intentions, thus creating performance that expertly "braids" together the efficacy of ritual and the entertainment of theatre.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ See Richard Schechner's notion of "the efficacy-entertainment braid" as elucidated in his book *Performance Theory*, first published in 1988.

2.4 The Body as Ecological Resource: Simon Whitehead

Another artist with a focus on collectivity is Simon Whitehead, a British movement artist and choreographer who lives and works in rural West Wales, UK. His work explores the interface between ecosophy⁹⁰ and performance practice, with the belief that the body is a major ecological resource that holds great potential beyond our current understanding. He is interested in work that “troubles the boundaries between species”⁹¹ and animals are often central to his practice, he believes that “the body is both home and place of symbiosis - a reaching beyond, a becoming porous, a crossing over into the animal world.”⁹² Following a residency in Canada in which he learnt to track wolves, his piece *Louphole* (2010) involved Whitehead spending a whole winter learning to howl like a wolf, like in shamanic initiation where the neophyte learns to imitate animal voices⁹³. He then brought the research to the public realm by inviting the local community to spend an evening howling together in the darkness of the Welsh countryside. Whitehead states, “In the public ‘howls’ I was wondering about how we might find some memory of the wolf in a collective voice and body, a memory that might allow us to physicalize and emotionalize a relationship to an animal long absent from our ecosystem.”⁹⁴

In *Louphole* the public are led on a night-time procession through the local town out into the surrounding countryside. They are accompanied by a brass band who create sounds akin to howling. Once the group reach the top of a field which overlooks the town below, they stop and begin collectively howling. As is apparent from the video, and echoed at the end by a participant, the poignancy of this piece doesn't necessarily manifest in the collective howling, but rather in the silences that follow it. It is in these silences that there appears to be a sense of expectation, as if through the darkness there might come a reply from the wolf. Of course no reply comes as wolves have been brutally hunted to local extinction

⁹⁰ Ecosophy or ecophilosophy is a term coined by Felix Guattari which concerns the interconnectedness of social and environmental spheres. It is a philosophy of equilibrium in which human subjectivity, the environment, and social relations are intimately interconnected.

⁹¹ Carl Lavery, and Simon Whitehead, "Bringing It All Back Home: Towards an Ecology of Place," *Performance Research* 17, no. 4 (2012): 116.

⁹² Lavery and Whitehead, "Bringing It All Back Home: Towards an Ecology of Place," 116.

⁹³ See Eliade, *Shamanism*, 97.

⁹⁴ Lavery and Whitehead, "Bringing It All Back Home: Towards an Ecology of Place," 116.

across most of Europe. As a persecuted species “made invisible”, they are another stark reminder of real disappearance. Perhaps it is in this lack of reply from the wolf that Simon Whitehead achieves the physicalization and emotionalization he seeks; a moment in which this absence becomes tangible in silence, tethering the human to the memory of the wolf. Perhaps in this collective embodied experience we find ecological work at play.

Conclusion

This chapter has foregrounded three contemporary Western performance artists who all employ shamanic techniques of becoming-animal to suggest alternative approaches to the Western paradigm of healing. The work of Joseph Beuys, Marcus Coates and Simon Whitehead exemplifies how the practice becoming-animal may be understood as a form of ecological, or more accurately ‘ecosophical’, healing. By turning towards the animal for new forms of knowledge, and by presenting shamanic techniques in a Western context, the artists seek to stimulate the transformation necessary to heal the great divide between human and non-human species.

The artists discussed are representative of a territory in which white, Western males appear to be dominating both in theory and practice, or at least are being foregrounded by the literature. Other examples belonging to this pattern include; the controversial becoming-dog of Russian performance artist Oleg Kulik, Michael Bianco the “Human Honey Bee”, the choreographic practice of Xavier Le Roy, Jan Fabre and Martin Nachbar, the “GoatMan” Thomas Thwaites or the “being a beast” of Charles Foster. This work has made an important contribution to the discourse, especially in the realm of ecological healing, and I acknowledge that these white Western males also represent a minority because they are artists. However the remainder of this thesis will focus on how we can develop this understanding of becoming-animal as an ecosophical healing practice even further, by evolving towards an intersectional feminist understanding of the practice, which not only serves to empower women, but all minority groups including non-human species.

Chapter 3: Approaches to Women Becoming-animal in Contemporary Performance Art

The category of animal has historically served as ideological justification for discrimination against other humans. From Aristotle on women have been appropriated to animals⁹⁵ as justification of their alleged inferiority.⁹⁶ Due to this historical alignment of women and animals instilled by Western Aristotelian thinking, which is arguably responsible for centuries of female discrimination, it could be argued that the notion of women becoming-animal threatens to reconfirm this woman-nature connection, a connection that the feminist movement has been working for hundreds of years to destroy. Perhaps this is a contributing reason towards why the subject has been seemingly sidestepped in performance theory, and why white Western males seem to be the most engaged in the performative practice.⁹⁷ This research recognises the urgent need to cultivate a new ecosophical understanding of the relationship between women and animals, which transcends hierarchical Aristotelian thinking and instead crystalizes ideas of a more rhizomatic nature. This urgency stems from the catastrophic effects that the climate crisis is having on our planet, including the destruction of animal populations, due to the anthropocentric system of domination. The following chapter serves to offer a step towards the cultivation of this understanding in the context of contemporary performance art, asking how can the practice of women becoming-animal be understood as a means of feminist empowerment that extends towards all minorities, as well as towards the environment? Although this chapter focuses specifically on women becoming-animal in performance, my intention is that it performs as a tool towards constructing an intersectional feminist understanding of the phenomena.

⁹⁵ This is also the case for both women and men of colour. Patricia Hill Collins tells us that “defining people of colour as less human, animalistic, or more ‘natural’ denies African and Asian people’s subjectivity and supports the political economy of domination that characterized slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism.” See her book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000).

⁹⁶ Carol J Adams, and Josephine Donovan, eds., *Animals and Women : Feminist Theoretical Explorations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 1.

⁹⁷ The stark gender gap in the western artworld is also likely to be a contributing factor towards the prevalence of males in this practice. According to a 2017 joint study by Artnet and Maastricht University only 13.7 percent of living artists represented by galleries in Europe and North America are female: <https://news.artnet.com/market/art-market-study-1179317>

3.1 Intersectional Ecofeminism

In their book *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations* (1995) Carol J Adams and Josephine Donovan advocate for a radical cultural feminism that moves beyond anthropocentric theory by being inclusive of all animals. They begin by describing three feminist approaches to the historical alignment of women and animals. The first is the liberal feminist approach which encourages women to reject their animality as an “affirmation of their rationality”. Historically the female body has been seen to encroach on rationality, thus excluding women from the ‘men’s club’ of moral authority because rationality is the prerequisite for membership of the club. By stressing that women are intellectuals with rational minds, “like men and unlike animals”, Liberal feminism rejects the materiality of existence and therefore serves to affirm the divide between human and animal. This form of feminism is often criticised for encouraging the absorption of women into male-created structures; however Adams and Donovan do recognise this approach as perhaps a “necessary phase in the transformation of cultural ideology about women”.⁹⁸

Another approach, and probably the most common, is the outright denial that there is any connection between feminism and animals. This approach becomes implicit through the vast absence of feminist theory that directly engages with any issues concerning animals, failing to recognise the interconnectedness of feminism and animals at all. Adams and Donovan serve to rectify this by foregrounding a third approach, one that refuses to reject the women-nature connection and instead proposes a broader feminism that embraces all forms of life. They draw on the arguments of feminist scholars, such as Marilyn French and Rosemary Radford Ruether, who link the exploitation of women and animals to Western male ideologies of transcendent dualism and the patriarchy; ideologies in which man positions himself as the highest ranking being, distinct from and superior to women and animals⁹⁹ thus denying the human-animal connection in pursuit of his divine nature. This hostility towards and devaluation of the natural animal body, or what feminist philosopher

⁹⁸ Adams and Donovan, eds., *Animals and Women : Feminist Theoretical Explorations*, 1-2.

⁹⁹ Alongside non-white men and the natural environment.

Elizabeth Spelman calls “somatophobia”¹⁰⁰, is linked to the mind-body dualism of Western philosophy and is arguably at the root of abuse towards women and animals.

Based on these arguments, Adams and Donovan call for an alliance between woman and animal that recognises that they are bonded by centuries of oppression and abuse caused by the mentality of domination, which has “neither favoured women nor other animals”. For feminists to deny this connection is to “support and participate in the oppression of the less powerful” which “is not only hypocritical” but “a profound betrayal of [women’s] deepest commitments.”¹⁰¹:

[W]e believe that women, as themselves victims of objectification and exploitation, must not abandon other victims of such treatment in their rush to be accepted as "persons" entitled to equal rights. Women must not deny their historical linkage with animals but rather remain faithful to them, bonded as we are not just by centuries of similar abuse but also by the knowledge that they - like us, often objectified as Other - are subjects worthy of the care, the respect, even the reverence, that the sacredness of consciousness deserves.¹⁰²

This approach can now be broadly understood as characteristic of ecofeminism, a branch of third wave feminism that spanned the 1990s and early 2000s, which argues for the interconnectedness of the oppression of women and the destruction of the environment. As illustrated by Carol J Adams, ecofeminism also crosses over with intersectional feminism; a contemporary branch of feminism that recognises the interlinked and overlapping nature of various forms of human oppressions, including those based on gender, race, class, sexuality and physical abilities.¹⁰³ In her book *Neither Man nor Beast: Feminism and the Defence of Animals* (1995) Adams argues that critique against animals being introduced into resistance politics is symptomatic of the analogical thinking that sees oppression as additive “rather

¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth Spelman cited in Carol J Adams, and Josephine Donovan, eds., *Animals and Women : Feminist Theoretical Explorations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 2.

¹⁰¹ Adams and Donovan, eds., *Animals and Women : Feminist Theoretical Explorations*, 2-3.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 7.

¹⁰³ Intersectional feminist theory was introduced in 1989 by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, a black feminist scholar who argued that the experience of being black and being a woman cannot be considered independent from one another, and this intersection leads to overlapping forms of discrimination.

than comprehending the interlocking systems of domination.”¹⁰⁴ Ecofeminism extends this intersectional thinking towards nature and non-human species by recognising them as victims of interlinking oppressions. Therefore I will now use the term *intersectional ecofeminism* as an inclusive concept which recognises that feminism must extend beyond white Western cisgender women¹⁰⁵ towards all minority groups including animals and the environment. This chapter will embrace and expand upon this intersectional ecofeminist approach whilst exploring alliances between women and animal in contemporary performance art.

3.2 Feminist Performance Art: Rose English

Performance art emerged in America in the early 1970s as a new approach for the visual arts. As an early manifestation of performance art the 1960s saw pioneering female artists such as Carolee Schneeman and Yoko Ono using their bodies to create radical performance works that challenged the traditional conventions of the male art world, as well as the female body as a site of masculine control. Theatre professor Rebecca Schneider refers to this as “explicit body” performance, which functions as a form of cultural criticism by challenging images of the “appropriate” female body and disrupting the perspective of woman-as-commodity.¹⁰⁶ This was initially met with much controversy, but the rise of the feminist movement the following decade cultivated a climate for women’s performance as a platform of protest in which women could challenge the suppressive conventions that marginalised and disempowered them. In America Judy Chicago founded the first feminist art programme which nurtured artists such as Suzanne Lacy who says, “[p]erformance became the way in which women could deeply explore their identity and be inescapably themselves.”¹⁰⁷ In the UK Rose English was defying conventions by creating performance that explored the portrayal of the female body and fetishization. It is within the context of

¹⁰⁴ Carol J Adams, *Neither Man nor Beast: Feminism and the Defense of Animals* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 84.

¹⁰⁵ The Western feminist movement has been long criticised for being primarily concerned with white, middle-class, cisgendered women’s issues, thus suppressing the intersectional experience of women who don’t conform to all of these identity categories.

¹⁰⁶ See Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (London: Routledge, 1997)

¹⁰⁷ Suzanne Lacy quoted in the documentary “Rebel Women: The Great Art Fightback” directed by Clare Tavenor for BBC4 aired 18th June 2018.

this movement that we can observe examples of women turning towards the animal as a means of exploring identity.

In 1975 Rose English presented *Quadrille*, a performance in which six women trot in formation into an arena at Southampton Horse Show and perform choreography based on classical dressage. The women wear their hair in 'ponytails' tied with red ribbons, leather harnesses are 'saddled' around their waists with real horse tails attached to the back, and they balance on shoes made with real horse hooves. As they trot around the arena, with solemn expressions on their faces, their ponytails swing seductively in time with their horse tails, yet the discomfort of the hoof-shoes limits the women to rigid, restrained movement. This human embodiment of 'the show pony' is meant as an exploration of female objectification and the constraint of gender norms. Taking place at an event typical of conservative high-society, a place of breeding and bloodlines, prize horses and debutants, *Quadrille* invites a comparison between the rigorously disciplined domesticated horses and society's expectation of the 'obedient' woman.

Rose English grew up surrounded by show horses, her sister a competitive rider, and following *Quadrille*, horse imagery and live horses continued to manifest in her work. It could be argued that Rose English turned towards the domesticated horse as an ally to women, an animal in which she recognises a similar plight, but how can the alliance between women and animal be used in contemporary performance art to push beyond simply a comparison of species who face similar oppressions? How can women becoming-animal be understood as an act of empowerment?

3.3 Becoming-Horse: Lucy Gunning

In *The Horse Impressionists* (1994) the British artist Lucy Gunning also explores connections between horses and women. The human/horse relationship is another example in Western culture that often demonstrates a gendered rift in meaning; the heroic male warrior astride his virile stallion, or the wild cowboys of the American West represent power, conquest and freedom, whilst the female/horse relationship is often sexualised, or associated with 'little

girls and their ponies', symbols of domestication and feminization.¹⁰⁸ However, as I will argue, *The Horse Impressionists* disrupts this gendered lens, challenging society's definitions of femininity through ambiguity as a form of empowerment.

As a child, like many young girls, Gunning would spend hours pretending to be a horse, and when she made a public call out for other women who shared this avocation she was overwhelmed with responses. She made a selection of five women based on the fact that they had continued this pastime into adult life. The individual performances, shot on Super 8 film, take place in parks and on the streets of London, adding a dimension of exposure and self-consciousness, some of the women laugh in embarrassment. It can be assumed that this isn't something they would usually do in public, and for the viewer there is a sense of voyeurism as if the women are revealing intimate secrets.

The impressions themselves vary widely in approach and skill. The first woman uses her voice and her hands over her mouth to make neighing sounds whilst laughing and shaking her head in between in embarrassment. The second woman takes the performance very seriously exuding a sense of authority. She whinnies and snorts whilst hoofing the grass, breaking into trot then stopping to rear up her "front legs" by combing the air with her hands. She is completely immersed in the activity barely noticing the camera. The third woman stands relaxed with her hands on her hips, making soft whinnying sounds and then bursting into gallop circling in and out of shot. She has a serene look on her face which suggests that she is comfortable with the activity and even takes pleasure from it. The fourth woman playfully interacts with the camera laughing as she trots around a pavement neighing with delight.

Deleuze and Guattari are insistent that becoming-animal does not consist in playing or imitating an animal,¹⁰⁹ they even refer explicitly to horse imitation, "It is not a question of imitating a horse, 'playing' horse, or identifying with one..."¹¹⁰ However *The Horse*

¹⁰⁸ See Miriam Adelman and Jorge Knijnik, "Gender and Equestrian Sport : Riding Around the World." In *Introduction - Women, Men, and Horses: Looking at the Equestrian World through a "gender Lens"* (Dordrecht : Springer Netherlands : Springer, 2013), 1-14. Also see Lynda Birke and Keri Brandt. "Mutual Corporeality: Gender and Human/horse Relationships." *Women's Studies International Forum* 32, no. 3 (2009): 189-97.

¹⁰⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 238.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 258.

Impressionists appears to allude to something that runs deeper than play. The fifth woman stands in a brick tunnel smiling shyly at the camera; she is young with a blond bob and rather “horse like” front teeth. All of a sudden the most unexpected and extraordinary guttural noise wells up inside her and expels from her mouth, a sound completely indistinguishable from that of a horse. She appears taken aback and shakes her head saying “I don’t know” in embarrassed disbelief that the sound is coming from her own body. She continues to allow the mysterious sound to emit from her body as if it belongs to someone or something else entirely. Here I do not see an imitation of a horse; I see an unleashing. Like the spiders of tarantism, together the horse and the woman become pure sound.

Deleuze and Guattari tell us that becoming-animal involves both human and animal entering into composition with one another through the emission of “corpuscles” which enter into a relation of movement and rest, it is this alignment of particles that constitutes a becoming-animal, “You become animal only molecularly. You do not become a barking molar dog, but by barking, if it is done with enough feeling, with enough necessity and composition, you emit a molecular dog.”¹¹¹ Through this emission of sound we are witness to a woman becoming molecular, multiple, intense, terrible. In true Irigarayan fashion she “explodes” in a dramatic shattering of the self, emitting rhizomic molecules which cross thresholds and enter into composition with a horse, each one deterritorializing the other. In this destabilization of the self, what Mircea Eliade refers to as a “going out of the self”¹¹² or Steve Baker refers to as “unselfing”¹¹³, we locate a radical act of female resistance. Female identity has historically been prescribed by Western society; the obedient domesticated wife, the self-sacrificing mother, the sex object. The phallogentric Western discourse renders the female “identity” subordinate, whilst the white “rational” male identity is apparently dominant, majoritarian and fixed. Through the act of becoming-horse, the woman resists this prescribed female identity by becoming multiple, ambiguous and precarious. By becoming-animal she locates herself in other-than-identity thus disrupting gender-based expectations and upsetting binary classifications.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 275.

¹¹² Eliade, *Shamanism*, 459.

¹¹³ Baker, “What Does Becoming-Animal Look Like,” 68.

Although this individual displays a potent example of becoming-animal, another aspect of this work concerns the collective. Deleuze and Guattari tell us that becoming-animal is a phenomenon expressed in minoritarian groups. They specifically refer to oppressed, prohibited groups “always on the fringe of recognised institutions” and suggest becoming-animal as a form of revolt which ruptures established central institutions.¹¹⁴ They recognise the white Western man as a majoritarian group, a paradigm of reason and morality, “the molar entity par excellence”¹¹⁵ and therefore state that all becomings must begin with the opposite of man, they must first go through a becoming-woman¹¹⁶. The notion of the group or “the pack” runs deep in Deleuze and Guattari’s theory, they tell us that “[a] becoming animal always involves in pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity. We sorcerers have always known that.”¹¹⁷

The Horse Impressionists, similar to Rose English’s *Quadrille*, focuses on women as a minoritarian group. By selecting only women for her project, Gunning establishes a sense of female collectivity, which is then reinforced by the childhood pastime of “playing horse”. Although the women are filmed individually, the sense of multiplicity and connectivity is tangible, expanding beyond the five women in the video towards all the women who share this common childhood experience. This notion of women as “pack” lends to something more fearsome, more threatening and more political. Deleuze and Guattari differentiate the pack from familial relations or conventional structures of government by referencing underground societies, “war societies, secret societies, crime societies”¹¹⁸ and remind us that “any animal is fundamentally a band, a pack”¹¹⁹. So in Gunning’s work we witness the alliance of two minoritarian groups, women and horses, that transcends the recognition of similar oppressions and works towards something more actively political, more radically feminist, in order to “rupture the central institution” of the patriarchy. By forming an

¹¹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 247.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 292.

¹¹⁶ Then, to surpass binary opposition, they must pass through other becomings (becoming-animal) in order to become events existing in the intermezzo, the spaces in between.¹¹⁶ Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of ‘becoming-woman’ is a highly contested subject in the context of feminist theory, with some thinkers reading it as a possibility to think beyond subjectivity and identity, and others as a form of domestication and subordination. See *Deleuze and Feminist Theory* (2000) edited by Ian Buchanan and Claire Colebrook.

¹¹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 239.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 242.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*.

alliance between two minoritarian packs, by becoming-animal, becoming multiple, the women in *The Horse Impressionists* take part in a secret exchange with horses, an alliance in which they compose a more powerful and fearsome body.¹²⁰

3.4 Becoming-Nature: Ana Mendieta

In a community, a pack, we can always find a borderline. Whilst the shaman is an integral and efficacious part of his community, performing the function of healer by commanding the techniques of ecstasy¹²¹, he holds an anomalous position. During initiation periods he often lives out in the wilderness away from his village, dwelling in the forest or the mountains, sometimes for years, seeking to obtain shamanic visions.¹²² As a master of “soul flight”, the shaman also exists on the periphery between cosmic regions; sky, earth and underworld. Mircea Eliade tells us that shamans are often separated from their community “through the intensity of their own religious experience.”¹²³

Deleuze and Guattari describe sorcerers of becoming-animal as anomalous beings, existing on the edges and haunting the fringes,¹²⁴ but still in alliance with the pack. It is these anomalous beings-of-the-borderlines who are able to string lines of flight, of deterritorialization, in order to become-animal:

[T]he Anomalous, the Outsider, has several functions: not only does it border each multiplicity ... not only is it the precondition for the alliance necessary to becoming, but it also carries the transformations of becoming or crossings of multiplicities always farther down the line of flight.¹²⁵

The Cuban born performance artist Ana Mendieta (1948-1985), like the sorcerer, exists on the margins. As a non-white, female artist living in exile¹²⁶ in the predominantly white U.S

¹²⁰ Ibid, 257.

¹²¹ See Mircea Eliade. *Shamanism : Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974)

¹²² Eliade, *Shamanism*, 100-101.

¹²³ Ibid, 8.

¹²⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 246.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 249.

¹²⁶ In 1961, at the age of twelve, Ana Mendieta was forcibly exiled, along with her sister Raquel, from Cuba to the United States as part of “Operation Peter Pan”; a Catholic anti-Castro support project in which over 14,000 unaccompanied Cuban minors immigrated to the United States.

state of Iowa, Mendieta was intersectionally minoritarian and therefore marginalized or negated from a variety of discursive sites¹²⁷. Her tragic death at the age of thirty-six remains shrouded in controversy, many still believing that her fall from the 34th-floor of a New York apartment block was at the hands of her husband, the sculptor Carl Andre.¹²⁸ In 1992 a demonstration initiated by the Woman's Action Coalition, protesting primarily against the exclusion of women in the art world, took place during the opening of a Guggenheim Museum exhibition featuring four white male artists and only one female artist. The exhibition included the work of Andre, and some banners read "Where is Ana Mendieta?". In her book *Where Is Ana Mendieta? : Identity, Performativity, and Exile* (1999), Jane Blocker argues that this rhetorical question "performatively reproduces her absence" highlighting her dis-location in life as well as in death, thus remaining unmarked.¹²⁹

Mendieta uses her female body to embrace an aesthetics of disappearance. Often working with natural materials including soil, mud, sticks, snow, fire, water, blood, feathers and flowers, she either enshrouds her body with, or imprints her body in, organic matter¹³⁰. The performances¹³¹ mostly take place in the natural environment, often in solitude, and are sparsely documented through photographs or video. The ephemeral nature of these works perforates each layer; the here and now moment of performative creation, the disappearance of the body, the natural erosion of the forms left behind, and the absence or inadequacy of documentation:

The variety and immediacy of these pieces, along with their mediation through photographs and films, make them very hard to stabilize. They seem defiantly to

¹²⁷ Exile was inexplicably intertwined into every aspect of Mendieta's life. She was exploited by political systems which robbed her of her land and culture and quashed her to the laws of others. As a Latina in the U.S. she experienced racism which marginalised her from society as well as from the nation of women; she describes the feminist movement of the 1960s as a white middle-class movement that "failed to remember us". As a woman she was subjected to sexism at every turn, and as a non-white female artist faced exclusion from the white male dominated art world. Critics would often feminize and marginalized Mendieta's work and her engagement with nature, Jane Blocker gives the example of art critic Donald Kuspit who, in reference to Mendieta's makes such statements as, "Mendieta preferred to have narcissistic intercourse with Mother Earth than sexual intercourse with man." See Blocker, *Where Is Ana Mendieta?*, 12-16.

¹²⁸ Andre was acquitted of Mendieta's murder in 1988.

¹²⁹ Jane Blocker, *Where Is Ana Mendieta? : Identity, Performativity, and Exile* (Durham (G.B.): Duke University Press, 1999), 2.

¹³⁰ See Ana Mendieta's *Siluetas* series, created primarily between 1973 - 1978.

¹³¹ Jane Blocker argues that all Mendieta's works can be understood as performance as they all invoke "disappearance, movement, and indeterminacy".

tease us, preying on the limits of our vision, daring us to act on faith, forcing us to accept their disappearance.¹³²

As argued by Rebecca Schneider in her discussions of the “explicit body in performance”, by presenting the female body and then removing it, Mendieta reveals her identity through disappearance, “making the body explicit as vanished.”¹³³ But I suggest that perhaps the body is not vanished at all, perhaps it is transformed by a becoming-nature, and thus so is her identity.

Untitled (Blood + Feathers #2) is a performance captured on Super 8 film which takes place in ‘Old Man’s Creek’, Iowa in 1974. Anna Mendieta stands naked on the sandy shore of the creek, the water and a jutting cliff face masked with green foliage as her back drop. Her dark hair is tied back and sunlight bathes her brown skin as she looks towards the camera. Beneath her on the white sand is a pile of bright white feathers, she holds a conical shaped vial in her hand filled with chicken’s blood, mirroring the shape of her body. She proceeds to pour the bright red blood from the vial over herself as if washing, reminiscent of a bathing ritual. She then falls to her knees, dropping her body face-first into the soft white feathers, and begins to roll slowly, pushing herself into the feathers and sweeping her arms alongside her, her buttocks slightly raised. She lies still for a moment, her head to one side, and then raises herself up to kneeling, the feathers have attached themselves to her body and she is transformed. She carefully stands up, holding her arms out like limp wings and looking down at her feathered body. She takes a few awkward steps towards the camera and remains there, gazing down with her arms outstretched for about fifteen seconds. The film ends.

This performance evokes a becoming-animal that is very different to the case studies previously discussed. Firstly there is a ritualistic element that permeates the work, revealing a religious or spiritual dimension; the bathing evokes the notion of ritual purification and the use of chicken’s blood conjures associations with blood rituals and animal sacrifice. The Afro-Cuban religious tradition of *Santería*, in which ritual ceremonies are prevalent, is pervasive throughout Mendieta’s performances.¹³⁴ Drawing on Santería philosophy,

¹³² Blocker, *Where Is Ana Mendieta?*, 23.

¹³³ Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, 117.

¹³⁴ Blocker, *Where Is Ana Mendieta?*, 18.

Mendieta expresses a belief in a universal energy that entwines all living things. She says, "My art is grounded in the belief in one Universal Energy which runs through everything from insect to man, from man to spectre, from spectre to plant, from plant to galaxy."¹³⁵ She goes on to describe her performances as the "irrigation veins" through which this energy travels. Here we can identify a correlation with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the "universe fibre", in which rhizomatic fibres, or lines of deterritorialization, stretch between the thresholds of heterogeneities allowing for symbiosis, and therefore becomings.¹³⁶

Deleuze and Guattari also exclaim that, "In sorcery, blood is of the order of contagion and alliance."¹³⁷ Through the act of pouring the blood of a chicken over her human body Mendieta contaminates human and animal¹³⁸, the blood also acting as an adherent to conjoin feathers and skin. Perhaps the blood is the medium through which a becoming-animal finds symbiosis. In line with Santerían belief, Mendieta attributes blood to a powerful life force, or *ashe*, and she often used it in her works.¹³⁹ When discussing her famous *Siluetas* series, works created between 1973 and 1978 in which Mendieta imprints her body into the earth and impregnates the impression with various natural materials, including blood, Jane Blocker describes these works as "unmistakeably human" because they "breathed fire and smoke, dripped blood, grew, disintegrated, and were reborn."¹⁴⁰ Mendieta understood this as an anthropomorphism of nature, she said "[t]o anthropomorphize the earth is to endow it with sentience, desire and identity."¹⁴¹ It can be argued that this statement, as well as the general understanding of anthropomorphism, seems one directional; the human imposing themselves on to nature. Bruno Latour argues that "*anthropos* and *morphos* together mean either that which *has* human shape or that

¹³⁵ Anna Mendieta, "Anna Mendieta: A Selection of Statements and Notes," *Sulfur* 22, Spring (1988): 72.

¹³⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 249-250.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 247.

¹³⁸ The symbol of blood can also be associated with violation. In an early performance Mendieta responded to the 1972 rape and murder case of a young female student at the university of Iowa by inviting colleagues to a wooded area near the college campus where she lay naked face down in the undergrowth, blood covering her buttocks and thighs. It is important to acknowledge the alignment between the violation of both women and animals represented by blood.

¹³⁹ See footnote 20 in Notes to Chapter 2 in Jane Blocker, *Where Is Ana Mendieta?*, 142.

¹⁴⁰ Blocker, *Where Is Ana Mendieta?*, 18.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*.

which *gives shape* to humans,"¹⁴² thus providing an understanding of the anthropomorphisation of Mendieta's works where there is a symbiotic relationship of reciprocity, in which nature also "gives shape to" the human. Therefore, not only do Mendieta's works allow her to explore identities of non-human entities, but in return allow her to challenge her own identity through an alliance with nature. Both in her *Siluetas* and in *Untitled (Blood + Feathers #2)* I believe we witness not disappearance, but a transformation of the female body to which nature has 'given shape', a becoming-nature.

Deleuze and Guattari tell us that "[t]he search for an existential Territory or homeland doesn't necessarily involve searching for one's country of birth or a distant county of origin.... All sorts of deterritorialized 'nationalities' are conceivable"¹⁴³, and this includes the 'nationality' of becoming-animal in which "one is deterritorialized."¹⁴⁴ As Ana Mendieta raises herself up from the ground, she looks down at her unrecognisable body; her skin is no longer brown, but flecked with white feathers destabilising her race, the shroud of feathers transforms her female body destabilising her gender, and by merging her body with that of a bird and raising her arms like wings, she renders geographical and political borders futile, for she can fly. In becoming-bird, Mendieta thwarts all of the fixed identity categories that have plagued her as a non-white, female artist living in exile. By performing in the limen of becoming-animal she makes herself elusive; she performs her "exile broadly so as to interrogate nationality, colour, ethnicity and gender,"¹⁴⁵ and thus challenges the very hierarchies that forcibly prescribe these categories. To paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari, it is the "being held prisoner" to these categories that allows her to "emit the particles of a bird" and flee down a line of flight of becoming, thus upsetting the oppressive "filiations and classifications"¹⁴⁶ of (hetero)patriarchal and colonial order.

¹⁴² Bruno Latour. "Where are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a few Mundane Artifacts," in *The Object Reader*, ed. Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins, (London: Routledge, 2009), 237.

¹⁴³ Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* (London: Continuum, 2000), 41-42.

¹⁴⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 291.

¹⁴⁵ Blocker, *Where Is Ana Mendieta?*, 27.

¹⁴⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 275 & 242.

3.5 Becoming-(m)Other: Maja Smrekar

Maja Smrekar (b. 1978), a contemporary Slovenian artist, also recognises the act of becoming-animal as a form of homecoming. As a refugee of liberal capitalism¹⁴⁷ she establishes herself in Deleuzoguattarian discourse as a minority who must re-establish her home by deterritorializing it. Using both her own body and the bodies of her canine companions, her series of performance projects *K-9_Topology* (2014-2017), explores the possibilities of hybridity in a multi-species world as a “radical intimate action of ‘returning home’.”¹⁴⁸ Simon Whitehead, in a conversation with theatre professor Carl Lavery about location, ecology and embodiment, describes this as the “third home”, which is discovered through performative practices of the body:

[T]he body is always in the environment. It can't really be separated from it. If we are to understand, fully, how the body can allow us to ‘become’ at home, then we have to find ways of preparing it, working with it so that we can be receptive to our surroundings. In a sense, then, the body is the ‘first home’, and the place or the territory where we live is a ‘second home’, or perhaps something that is made through our heightened sense of awareness to where we are. The ‘third’ home is the home you discover when you start interacting with the assemblage of body and environment to produce something new.¹⁴⁹

K-9_Topology is made up of four projects including *Ecce Canis* (2014), *I Hunt Nature and Culture Hunts Me* (2014), *Hybrid Family* (2016) and *ARTE_mis* (2017), which all examine the relationship between Canines (specifically wolves and domesticated dogs) and the female human. For *Hybrid Family* Smrekar spent three months in seclusion in an empty Berlin apartment with her dog Lord Byron. During this time she subjected herself to rigorous physiological training in order to naturally stimulate the production of breastmilk. She then welcomed new Icelandic Sheepdog puppy Ada to the hybrid family, who she nurtured and

¹⁴⁷ Maja Smrekar's family lost their home on the Slovenian - Croatian border, their business and most of their belongings during the East - West transition of Slovenia in the 1990s. Her father committed suicide as a result of the trauma.

¹⁴⁸ Maja Smrekar, “History of Tears”, *K-9_Topology: Hybrid Family* (Blog), <https://www.majasmrekar.org/k-9topology-hybrid-familyv>

¹⁴⁹ Lavery and Whitehead, "Bringing It All Back Home: Towards an Ecology of Place," 114.

breastfed as part of a series of public performances that took place in the apartment for a small visiting audience. Through breastfeeding Ada, and thus becoming her surrogate mother, Smrekar not only potently experiments with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming-animal, but she also challenges conventional Western notions of motherhood.

Becoming-animal explicitly rejects Oedipal relationships defined by patrilineal thought and filiation, and rather is the stuff of unnatural participations and contagion.¹⁵⁰ Through the stimulation of her breastmilk Smrekar begins a molecular process in which, through regular systematic pumping, she triggers her pituitary glands to secrete prolactin which acts on her breasts to induce milk production. The subsequent release of the hormone oxytocin, which enables the ejection of the milk through the milk ducts, also evokes empathy and is therefore beneficial for intimate bonding. Through her breastmilk, Smrekar emits a molecular 'line of flight' which Ada enters by feeding; sweeping both human and animal up in a symbiotic molecular process of becoming-through-contagion. However, what is important here is not simply the biological exchange of breastfeeding, but the feminist implications that pervade that exchange.

Firstly by presenting this work as a 'public performance', Maja Smrekar explicitly ridicules the sexist Western social taboo of breastfeeding in public.¹⁵¹ She uses her body to make the personal political¹⁵² and by breastfeeding a non-human infant, challenges the "social and ideological instrumentalization of women's bodies"¹⁵³ thus offering alternative understandings of motherhood. This approach has its roots in postmodern and poststructuralist feminist theory, which denies the fixity of the female identity as well as the fixity of motherhood, opening up possibilities for agency and diverse motherhoods; but it also embraces Adam and Donovan's intersectional ecofeminist approach inclusive of all non-human species. Smrekar performs what she refers to as (m)Otherhood.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 241.

¹⁵¹ Breastfeeding in public is an empowering act because it exerts women's control over their own bodies and challenges the male gaze by confirming that breasts are not primarily sexual objects.

¹⁵² Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, 49.

¹⁵³ Maja Smrekar, "Maja Smrekar: K-9_Topology," posted 2018. 4:35. <https://vimeo.com/249653631>.

¹⁵⁴ Maja Smrekar, "Involution of (m)Other", *K-9_Topology: Hybrid Family* (Blog), <https://www.majasmrekar.org/k-9topology-hybrid-familyv>

Here I wish to unpack what (m)Otherhood might mean in relation to this feminist discourse, and to do this I will present an overview of the notion of 'care' in relation to (m)Otherhood as discussed by relevant theorists. Postmodern and poststructuralist feminism upholds that women should understand the desire for mothering and caring as a strength rather than an anchor point for subordination.¹⁵⁵ The notion of care is one that can be found across intersectional eco-feminist theory. Diane Antonio, a contributor to *Women and Animals: Feminist Theoretical Explorations* (1995) by Adams and Donovan, argues for developing an "ethic of care respect" towards non-human animals as a feminist obligation.¹⁵⁶ She defines care as an active moral response to the needs of animals in order to preserve their existence and promote their good, and respect as "an attentiveness to both the mutual interests of and the differences between humans and non-human animals."¹⁵⁷ More recently Donna J. Haraway, a leading ecofeminist scholar and one of the founders of the posthumanities, also echoes this ethic of "care respect" in her book *When Species Meet* (2008). In her discussions of *companion species*, a concept I shall expand upon in the next chapter, Haraway understands the care of another species as a form of curiosity, of "knowing more at the end of the day than at the beginning."¹⁵⁸ This ties in to the act of respect, which she describes as a courteous act of reciprocation between species, "a polite greeting".¹⁵⁹ Haraway also cites Vinciane Despret, a key thinker in the animal studies discourse, who writes "[t]he practice of knowing becomes the practice of caring."¹⁶⁰ In her article "The Body We Care For: Figures of Anthro-Zoo-Genesis" (2004) Despret specifically focuses on embodied practices of caring which moves beyond empathy into a practice in which bodies (human and non-human) are made "available" to one another to allow for "transformation"¹⁶¹. She refers to the "experimenter"¹⁶² who involves their knowledge, responsibility and future with the animal,

¹⁵⁵ Gerda Neyer, and Laura Bernardi, "Feminist Perspectives on Motherhood and Reproduction." *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 36, no. 2 (2011): 167.

¹⁵⁶ Diane Antonio. "Of Wolves and Women." In *Animals and Women : Feminist Theoretical Explorations*, ed. by Carol J Adams and Josephine Donovan (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 213.

¹⁵⁷ Antonio, "Of Wolves and Women," 215.

¹⁵⁸ Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) 36.

¹⁵⁹ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 19.

¹⁶⁰ Vinciane Despret, "The Body We Care For: Figures of Anthro-Zoo-Genesis," *Body & Society* 10, no. 2-3 (2004): 130.

¹⁶¹ Despret, "The Body We Care For," 125, 128.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, 130.

“Both are active and both are transformed by the availability of the other. Both are articulated by what the other ‘makes him/her make’”.¹⁶³

In line with the thinking of Antonio, Haraway and Despret, Maja Smrekar exercises a relationship of care towards ‘Other’; she is the experimenter Despret writes of. Through embodied practices of making herself available to the puppy, Smrekar embraces her maternal desire and extends it beyond the human species in a relationship of care. She rejects the fixity of motherhood, rendering it ambiguous by becoming (m)Other, therefore providing an understanding of Donna J. Haraway’s controversial ecofeminist slogan, “Make kin not babies!”¹⁶⁴ as an anti-anthropocentric, ethical and environmental plea for (m)Otherhood.¹⁶⁵

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the power of female-animal alliance through feminist performance art. By analysing three different approaches to becoming-animal this chapter has demonstrated, from an intersectional ecofeminist perspective, that the alliance of women and animals in performance not only recognises two minoritarian groups that suffer similar oppressions under the heteropatriarchy, but also offers an opportunity to resist those oppressions by disrupting fixed identity categories. By turning towards the animal Lucy Gunning, Ana Mendieta and Maja Smrekar all undergo a transformation in which they are deterritorialized from the identities prescribed to them by Western phallogocentric discourse. Through experimentation they discover a “third home” of dis-location and deterritorialization that exists beyond the realm of dualisms in the porous threshold between human and animal. By producing and being produced by new identities, they experience a new way of being human; “Ambiguous experiences, ambiguous bodies, experiences making bodies and bodies making experience; signs that wander, hesitate to fix themselves: we

¹⁶³ Ibid, 125.

¹⁶⁴ Donna J. Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin." *Environmental Humanities* 6, no. 1 (2015): 161.

¹⁶⁵ The 2019 IPBES Global Assessment Report states that since 1970 the global human population has more than doubled from 3.7 to 7.6 billion (see note 73). This rapid growth puts huge strain on natural resources contributing to the climate crisis, the depletion of animal populations and species extinction. Project Drawdown founded by environmentalist Paul Hawken in 2014, has identified family planning and the education of women as one of the top 10 most important solutions to combat the climate crisis. See <https://www.drawdown.org/solutions-summary-by-rank>

produce emotion and it produces us.”¹⁶⁶ In the ambiguity of their becomings they find empowerment, and in the empowerment of minorities we find a form of ecosophical healing that reaches beyond the individual or the community, towards our damaged planet. The following concluding chapter will elucidate on this claim, as well as engage the concept of becoming-with, coined by Donna J. Haraway, as an evolution of Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal that encapsulates the intersectional ecofeminist implications of the performance practice.

¹⁶⁶ Despret, "The Body We Care For," 127.

Chapter 4 - Transformation

The artists discussed in the previous chapters exemplify a myriad of alternative embodied approaches to becoming-animal within the context of contemporary performance art. Their work collectively responds to Deleuze and Guattari's call for experimentation, the artist taking on the role of sorcerer, and through diverse and mysterious methods, crystalizing new forms of becoming-animal. To paraphrase Steve Baker, these artists devise means of "going along with the animal" by actively performing animal, rather than passively representing animal.¹⁶⁷ Each artist ventures into uncertain and largely uncharted territory, anomalous beings bravely reaching beyond the threshold of the self towards the 'Other'. They demonstrate that becoming-animal goes beyond the anthropocentric search for one's "inner animal" towards a serious recognition of animals as sentient living beings, inextricably entangled in our own affairs. As Nicolas Salazar Sutil states, "[t]here is no animal inside the human. The animal is immanent, it is inside and outside, seamlessly folded into the potentiality of the "humanimal"."¹⁶⁸ It is only through the recognition of this interconnectedness that we can truly explore the potential for transformation.

This concluding chapter will briefly engage the contemporary theory of multispecies eco-feminist Donna J. Haraway, and her concept of *becoming-with*. This will be placed in fruitful tension with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming-animal in order to propose a hybrid concept which I call *becoming-with-animal*. I then draw the chapter to a close with an exploratory discussion of *becoming-with-animal*, and its relationship to healing, before presenting a conclusive reflection on my research.

4.1 Becoming-With: Donna J. Haraway

Donna J. Haraway describes herself as a "creature of the mud not of the sky."¹⁶⁹ As a scientific scholar with a fascination for developmental biology, she recognises that as a member of the human species she is entangled in a biological and ecological web with

¹⁶⁷ Baker, "Sloughing the Human," 79.

¹⁶⁸ Salazar Sutil, "Jism for Schism: Turning the Animal On," 3.

¹⁶⁹ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 3.

multitudinous non-human species, including those that live inside her own body. As her self-description suggests, she thinks beyond animals as messages and promises, and instead recognises their vitality as caught up in and co-shaping of our earthly, muddy, existence.

Similarly to Deleuze and Guattari, Haraway favours non-hierarchical rhizomic thinking. She refers to this as the game of *string figures*, which is about “giving and receiving patterns”, a game that can be played by many species, “on all sorts of limbs”.¹⁷⁰ She describes string figures like stories which “propose and enact patterns for participants to inhabit.”¹⁷¹ Much like becoming-animal, this concept is one of practice and process, of experimentation that allows for co-constitutive multispecies interactions, or to quote feminist theorist Karen Barad, intra-actions¹⁷². The players caught up in this game of reciprocity are what Haraway calls companion species, “who are enmeshed in partial and flawed translations across difference.”¹⁷³ It is the obligation of companion species to recognise these entanglements and become curious of what the other might be “making available”; this is what Haraway refers to as the dance of *becoming-with*.¹⁷⁴ Becoming-with is the recognition that “to be one is always to become-with many”¹⁷⁵, companion species do not pre-exist their intertwined existence, they become what they are through intra-action with other species¹⁷⁶. In human-animal worlds, companion species are ordinary beings in encounter, knotted in the “subject and object-shaping entanglements” of becoming-with.¹⁷⁷ Haraway advocates becoming-with as a necessary worlding practice. Through response and respect where actual animals and people look back at one another in reciprocal curiosity, one becomes-with many, thus gaining new forms of knowledge. These multispecies partnerships created through the practice of becoming-with work powerfully against anthropocentrism, which is crucial for

¹⁷⁰ Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble : Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016) 10.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Feminist theorist Karen Barad proposes the key concept of “intra-action” as part of her theory of agential realism. The concept of intra-action works against ideas of individualism by recognising that entities do not precede their interaction, but rather are formed through their acting upon one another. In an interview with Adam Kleinman, Barad says, “[I]ndividuals do not pre-exist as such but rather materialize in intra-action.” See Karen Barad, “Intra-actions.” Interview by Adam Kleinman. *Mousse Magazine*, Summer 2012.

¹⁷³ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 10.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 20, 27.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 4.

¹⁷⁶ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 12-13.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 13.

maintaining a habitable earth in these environmentally troubled times¹⁷⁸. She tells us, “There can be an elsewhere, not as a utopian fantasy or relativist escape, but an elsewhere born out of the hard (and sometimes joyful) work of getting on together in a kin group ... working for earthly survival.”¹⁷⁹

In *When Species Meet* (2008) Donna J. Haraway offers an explicit critique of Deleuze and Guattari’s becoming-animal, describing it as “a symptomatic morass for how not to take earthly animals - wild or domestic - seriously.”¹⁸⁰ Whilst she initially expects to find allies in Deleuze and Guattari, due to their common mission of disrupting patrilineal thinking and traversing human/animal dualisms, Haraway instead finds “scorn for all that is mundane and ordinary” and a “profound absence of curiosity about or respect for and with actual animals”.¹⁸¹ Triggered by Deleuze and Guattari’s disdain for the sentimental family pet, the Oedipal animal, and their elderly female owners,¹⁸² Haraway remarks “I’m not sure I can find in philosophy a clearer display of misogyny, fear of aging, incuriosity about animals, and horror at the ordinaries of the flesh.”¹⁸³

Adams and Donovan argue that there is an intersection between sexism and speciesism; domesticated animals are often feminised whilst wild animals are masculinised and therefore perceived to have higher status.¹⁸⁴ Whilst Deleuze and Guattari appear to fall in to this trap, and allude to some prejudices, I do not see it as productive to position them in opposition to Haraway. Instead, for the benefit of this research, I propose a symbiosis of concepts, a transformation through hybridity, that I shall call *becoming-with-animal*. By creating this hybrid I wish to embrace the progressive commonalities of the concepts as well as their differences. Together both concepts offer a radical rethinking of the human-animal relationship that transcends dualisms and sloughs hierarchical thinking. By gesturing beyond the threshold of the self and towards the ‘other’, both concepts “make a mess out of

¹⁷⁸ See note 67.

¹⁷⁹ Donna J. Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 3.

¹⁸⁰ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 72.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 27.

¹⁸² Deleuze and Guattari stress that becomings-animal lie in opposition with sentimental relations, stating that “*anyone who likes dogs and cats is a fool*”. Here they specifically refer to little dogs and cats owned by elderly women. See *A Thousand Plateaus* pages 240 - 244.

¹⁸³ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 30.

¹⁸⁴ Adams and Donovan, *Animals and Women*, 6.

categories"¹⁸⁵ working against anthropocentric ideas of the individuated subject, and towards rich, queer multiplicities. The hybridised becoming-with-animal acknowledges the aesthetic pull of Deleuze and Guattari's fantastical concept, which has inspired countless artists to experiment with the sorcery of becomings, but it also embraces the ecological and intersectional approach of Haraway's becoming-with, which grounded in science, recognises the reciprocal interconnectedness of all species. Overall becoming-with-animal offers a more contemporary and relevant understanding of the performative phenomena discussed, and by extending towards all species and recognising the importance of taking the animal seriously, it encapsulates the intersectional eco-feminist thinking necessary for transformative change.

4.2 Becoming-with-Animal: Cultivating A Third Home

By becoming-with-animal the artist dances beyond the threshold of the body into the unknown, making herself available, vulnerable. Through experimentation she makes a gesture of alliance, an extended hand reaching out across the cavernous divide between human and animal, "I see you". A trillion eyes look back, some in curiosity, some in fear, others in rage, "I see you too." Whether a hoof, a fin, a paw, a microscopic foreleg, will extend in return remains dubious, but that is the risk she takes. Eventually, after many attempts, she feels a tug and is swept away. She finds herself in a new co-created environment, a "third home" cultivated through symbiosis. A place where she is not confined by borders, or defined by gender, race, sexuality or ethnicity, but a place of ambiguity, where she can exist in co-defined other-than-identity, beyond dualisms and hierarchy. By becoming-with-animal she does not disappear but instead makes herself, and the animal with which she has become, visible through transformation rather than representation.¹⁸⁶ To become-with-animal is a co-shaping gesture of alliance, "actual animals and people looking back at each other, sticky with all their muddled histories."¹⁸⁷ It

¹⁸⁵ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 19.

¹⁸⁶ Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins argues for the power of self-definition as the key to individual and group empowerment, see her book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000). I would argue that becoming-with-animal is an act of self-definition whereby one makes themselves visible on their own terms rather than allowing themselves to be defined by others. This act of making oneself visible through self-definition then extends to the 'Other' through alliance.

¹⁸⁷ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 42.

is to make minorities visible in order to resist the oppressive powers that have forever rendered them as invisible - it is to empower in order to heal.

Only by working together in alliance with the 'Other' is transformation possible, and this transformation extends beyond the self towards the environment. As suggested by Simon Whitehead, the body cannot be separated from the environment, one is an extension of the other. To become-with-animal we must learn, or relearn, to be receptive to our extended environment, to recognise that "the body is both home and a place of symbiosis - a reaching beyond, a becoming porous, a crossing over into the animal world."¹⁸⁸ Therefore I'd argue that to transform oneself is to transform one's environment, and herein lies the healing properties of becoming-with-animal.

Becoming-with-animal is both an environmental healing practice and feminist healing practice. As ecofeminism recognises, the exploitation of women and animals are inextricably linked, this is why an intersectional approach towards the oppression of minorities, which includes animals and the environment, is imperative. If all oppressions are interlocking then feminism cannot deny its connection with animals or nature. Becoming-with-animal is a call to action for women, and all minorities, to turn towards the animal as an intersectionally feminist and environmental prerogative. Donna J. Haraway reminds us that "[u]rgent work still remains 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."¹⁸⁹ I believe that the practice of becoming-with-animal in contemporary performance art embraces this approach by making visible the transformative change necessary to heal the damage caused by centuries of domination and exploitation, to begin creating a "third home", an "elsewhere" through alliance with the 'Other'. In the words of writer and political activist Arundhati Roy, "Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing."¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Lavery and Whitehead, "Bringing It All Back Home," 116.

¹⁸⁹ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 17.

¹⁹⁰ Arundhati Roy, "Confronting Empire", speech at World Social Forum (Porto Alegre, Brazil, January 27th, 2003)

Conclusion

Towards the beginning of this research I was particularly inspired by Carl Lavery's discussion on how performance may be understood as a form of ecological doing, or as he suggests "undoing", because the role of performance "is not to produce the real, it is to corrode it, to make the world problematic, multiple and complex."¹⁹¹ When I began to explore how animal transformation manifests in contemporary performance I quickly landed upon the concept of becoming-animal, and recognised the performative praxis that embraced it as a form of ecological doing. Excited by the discovery and keen to explore it further I soon realised that this was already well trodden ground within the field of performance theory. However, having voiced from early on an instinct that there was "something feminist" about women becoming animal in contemporary performance, I was encouraged by my professors to follow this instinct, eventually leading to what would become my thesis topic. Initially feminism felt like a divergent direction from ecology, which caused me to treat the feminist and ecological implications of this research as separate entities. However upon the activation of ecofeminist theory I discovered that within the context of becoming-animal they are in fact inextricably linked.

This theme of falling into the trap of dualisms and then discovering how to traverse them became intrinsic to this research, much like the work of becoming-with-animal. Another trap I found myself falling into was a dualistic approach to male and female artists. Initially I presented the work of male artists somewhat in disparity with female artists, applying the feminist aspect of becoming-animal solely to women, however this is where the introduction of an intersectional feminist approach became crucial to this research. Whilst my research foregrounds female practice, because of the lack of theory that does so regarding becoming-animal in performance, intersectional feminism recognises that the oppression suffered by women under the heteropatriarchal system of domination is interlinked and overlapping with the oppression of all minorities. I combined this with ecofeminist theory to demonstrate that this intersectional approach must also extend to

¹⁹¹ Carl Lavery. "Introduction: Performance and Ecology - What Can Theatre Do?" *Green Letters* 20, no. 3 (2016): 233.

animals and the environment. By recognising that intersectional feminism isn't just about the empowerment of women but concerns all minorities, I traversed the male-female dualism in the context of becoming-with-animal by approaching the male artists I reference as allies. By making this alliance I acknowledge the fundamental contribution they have made to the practice in terms of ecology, which as discovered cannot be separated from the feminist aspect, as well as their contribution to the notion of becoming-animal as a form of healing.

This understanding of becoming-animal as a healing practice, as I have traced through shamanism, tarantism, and into contemporary performance in Chapter 1 and 2, was an enlightening discovery that enabled me to grasp what I believe to be the essence of becoming-with-animal; an intersectional ecofeminist healing practice.¹⁹² Through the work of Lucy Gunning, Ana Mendieta and Maja Smrekar, Chapter 3 illustrates that the empowered healing practice of becoming-with-animal can manifest in different ways; in Lucy Gunning's work, we see a collective healing practice embraced by multiple women who are united by a common female-horse relationship. Ana Mendieta's work can be understood as a form of self-healing in alliance with, and therefore extending to, the natural environment, and Maja Smrekar experiments with embodied practices of caring as a radical proposal for alternative forms of motherhood, thus healing through "otherhood".

Through this research I have created an environment where all three case studies of women becoming-animal through contemporary performance art can be understood through the concept of becoming-with-animal; an intersectional ecofeminist healing practice directed towards the empowerment of minorities, including animals and the environment, for the cultivation of a post-patriarchal world created through transformative alliance with the 'Other', thus answering my central research question: How can the practice of women becoming-animal in contemporary performance art be understood as a means of feminist empowerment?

¹⁹² This notion of healing was serendipitously reinforced by performance maker Nicole Beutler when I presented my research to her artistic company in April 2019. Beutler told me that the idea of becoming-with-animal as a healing practice resonated with her because she doesn't make theatre to provoke or criticise, but instead she has always considered the work she creates as a form of healing.

In order to develop this research I propose that further attention is required regarding questions of race and ethnicity. Whilst my research acknowledges the historical alignment of people of colour with animals as justification of oppression¹⁹³, and engages the notion of intersectional feminism as an inclusive concept, its focus remains on women becoming-animal. I am curious of how a shift in focus towards a different (though intersecting) minority group will translate in regard to the concept of becoming-with-animal, and how the phenomenon of people of colour working with animal transformation in performance manifests. I am aware that this research trajectory will come with its own complexities and implications around notions of empowerment and am curious how the engagement of black feminist theory from theorists such as Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins can approach this.

I also would be interested to perform a dramaturgical analysis through the lens of becoming-with-animal in order to put the concept to work.

But for now let us take pause...

...a moment of quiet where we might hear a wolf cry or a new world breathing.

[16,000 words]

¹⁹³ Patricia Hill Collins tells us that “defining people of colour as less human, animalistic, or more ‘natural’ denies African and Asian people’s subjectivity and supports the political economy of domination that characterized slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism.” See her book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000).

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