Florence Fitzgerald-Allsopp
Utrecht University, Netherlands

Becoming-with-Animal

An Ecofeminist Performance Practice

Another world is not only possible, she is on her way.
On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing
—Arundhati Roy

Abstract

Born out of theory that questions human-animal binary opposition, including Deleuze and Guattari's concept of *becoming-animal* and multispecies ecofeminist theorist Donna Haraway's notion of *becoming-with,* the article proposes the concept of *becoming-with-animal.* This concept acts as a lens through which to observe performance practices in alliance with non-human animals, shaping them as necessary healing practices which recognise the urgency of redefining the relationship between human and animal, male and female, dominant and "Other", in times of environmental crisis. Using this concept as an analytical tool, this article argues that human-animal transformation in the performance of religious ritual and contemporary theatre can be conceived of as empowering and healing in the context of a Western society that is dominated both by a hetero-patriarchal and anthropocentric logic.

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Introduction: Human-Animal Performance

As primal inhabitants of this earth for millions of years before *Homo sapiens* evolved, non-human animals dwell deep in the human imaginary as gods, monsters and mythical creatures, or as John Berger describes, "messages and promises" (2009, 4). In Western art practices, animals hold a symbolic quality that anthropomorphism commonly reduces to a mirror with which to observe our human selves, our own characteristics, our 'inner animal', without seeing them for what they are: sentient, mortal beings. Through our cultural and embodied emulation of these 'divine' beings, animals became integral to the evolution of performative practices.

One of the most archaic forms of human-animal performance can be recognised in the widespread and diverse ritual performance practices of shamanism. The term 'shaman' originates from the Tungusic languages of Siberia describing, as Graham Harvey notes, "a communal leader chosen and trained to work for the community by engaging with significant other-than-human persons" (2003, 1). As Harvey argues, using the term "other-than-human persons" in relation to shamanic practice rather than the misleading and often meaningless term "spirits", makes clear the inclusion of particular types of persons that shamans communicate with in order to fulfil their work, and this includes sentient animals. Harvey notes "actual salmon, seals, caribou, tapirs, bears, jaguars, tigers, and so on are among the significant other-than-human persons with who shamans communicate" (11).[1] This ability to communicate with, and thus transform into an animal, is often developed during the initiation phase of a shamanic rite of passage. During this time the initiand will learn animal language by imitating animal sounds, emulating animal movement, and sometimes wearing animal skins, feathers, masks, or painting their bodies with the markings of an animal.

The Deleuzoguattarian notion of *becoming-animal* as discussed in their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980) asserts "the existence of a very special becoming-animal traversing human beings and sweeping them away, affecting the animal no less than the human" (237-238), yet ardently rejects play or imitation as a means of becoming. Becoming-animal is a relationship of reciprocity, patterned through alliance rather than hierarchy and conjured by "sorcerers" through experimentation. While animal-becomings are "perfectly real," in reality human beings do not become an animal any more than the animal becomes something else. This suggests that it is the becoming itself that is real, not that which something becomes (238). Anthony Kubiak suggests that Deleuze and Guattari seek 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'" (Kubiak 2017, 14). Taking the lead from Kubiak, this essay employs the concept of becoming-animal in a wholly performative sense, dealing with work that experiments with *becoming* through embodied practice. Kubiak (2017) goes on to argue that nowhere is the performance of becoming more powerfully experienced than in shamanic transformation, and supports his argument with the following from anthropologist Carlos Fausto, who in turn cites Viveiros de Castro describing the Amazonian shaman Cunhambebe's act of 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 the object of becoming is imaginary, the becoming

> is real, and the ferocious alterity is a quality of the verb, not its predicate. (Fausto 2004, 157-78, emphasis original)

This suggests that whilst Shamanic initiations often involve 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 conditions allow. The performance's elements therefore only serve as a ritual harbinger for becoming, suggesting that the shamanic performance of becoming-animal goes beyond conventional Western notions of representational performance and towards a form of transcendence which transforms reality and troubles the threshold between human and animal.[2] As suggested by Majorie M. Balzer in her discussion of shamanic transformation within the cultural traditions of Siberia, a key to the acceptance of the claim that shamans can transform into animals is belief in the shamanic ability to "manipulate, bridge, and change cultural boundaries and symbols" (2003, 254). This transformation of cultural boundaries and symbols is at the heart of this essay.

Contemporary performance practice also offers corporeal opportunities to explore the porous human-animal borders. Towards the end of the twentieth century, Western performance artists began to "take the animal seriously" according to Steve Baker (2000, 188). This meant thinking beyond animals as mere symbols towards human and animal being bound up as living beings, "caught up in each other's affairs, willingly or otherwise" (2002, 69). This shift in attitudes is perhaps most poignantly marked by Joseph Beuys's 1974 performance *Coyote: I like America and America Likes Me* in which Beuys, presenting himself as a German shaman, spends a week living and communicating with a coyote in the *René* Block Gallery, New York, with the intention of healing the fractured relationship between modern and native America (Tisdall 2008, 10). The work of the shaman in many indigenous cultures is often understood as that of a healer; this might be in relation to physical or mental health, relationships (whether between two people, communities, or with 'other-than-human persons'), prosperity or happiness. Several contemporary Western performance artists, including Beuys, have borrowed from the more porous animal/human boundaries found in non-Western shamanic traditions to suggest alternative approaches to the Western paradigm of healing. Take for example the work of Marcus Coates who engages shamanic techniques of becoming-animal in order to address the needs of marginalized communities. In *Journey to the Lower World* (2004), Coates performs a shamanic journey on behalf of the concerned residents of a soon to be demolished Liverpool tower block. Wearing a deer pelt complete with head and antlers and perfectly imitating animal sounds, Coates endeavours to commune with animal spirits in order to retrieve messages for the residents, offering them guidance during uncertain times.[3]

Another example is the ecosophical[4] performance practices of Simon Whitehead who spent a whole winter in Canada learning to track wolves and imitate their howls. In *Louphole* (2010) Whitehead extends this practice to the community by inviting the public to spend an evening howling together in the darkness of the Welsh countryside. He hoped that these public howls might collectively tether the community to the memory of the wolf in order to physicalize and emotionalize a relationship to an animal long absent from our European ecosystem (Lavery and Whitehead 2012, 116).

Figure 1. Marcus Coates, Journey to the Lower World, 2004, 2 channel video, 30 minutes. Image courtesy of the artist and Kate MacGarry London. Watch: https://vimeo.com/76794657

Figure 2. Simon Whitehead, Louphole, 2010. Photo by Ben Stammers, image courtesy of the artist.
Watch: https://vimeo.com/10232997

These practices invite further consideration of the connection between human-animal performance and notions of healing in contemporary Western society. I propose to explore this territory through the lens of feminism. In recognition of the lack of

theoretical attention regarding the subject of women and animals in performance, I will turn my attention towards female practices of becoming-animal. By engaging with ecofeminist and intersectional feminist theory to analyse the work of three female performance artists, the remainder of this essay aims to cultivate a new empowered understanding of women-becoming-animal as an intersectional ecofeminist healing practice: I call this *becoming-with-animal.*

Becoming-with-Animal

The Aristotelian tradition places the human male at the top of a hierarchy of sentient beings. As this legacy plays out in relation to power in Western societies, women and other minority groups, including men of colour, are aligned not with the top of the hierarchy but with non-human animals. This alleged alignment provides justification for their domination and oppression. As observed by Patricia Hill Collins, Black studies scholarship and postcolonial theory assert that "defining people of color 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" (2000, 71). This anthropocentric, patriarchal structure of power also 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. As Anthony Kubiak observes, "[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" (2012, 55) In order to heal our planet a transformative shift in the understanding of the relationship between human (male) and Other is paramount, and performance practice offers an embodied opportunity to explore possibilities of reconfiguring these interrelations.

It could be argued that the notion of women becoming-animal threatens to reconfirm the woman-nature conflation that the feminist movement has been working for decades to thwart. Perhaps this argument is a contributing factor to why the discourse surrounding women and animals in performance studies is seemingly lacking, and white Western male practice is foregrounded, with artists such as Joseph Beuys, Marcus Coates, Oleg Kulik, Xavier Le Roy and Jan Fabre holding much of the scholarly limelight. Whether this holds true or not, it is clear that a transformed and empowered understanding of the relationship between women and animals is urgent. I propose the concept *becoming-with-animal* as an analytical tool to help cultivate this understanding in the context of performance practice. The concept not only engages Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal, but also the theory of leading ecofeminist scholar and one of the founders of the posthumanities Donna J. Haraway and her concept of *becoming-with.*

With a PhD in developmental biology, Haraway recognises that as a member of the human species she is entangled in a biological and ecological web with numerous non-human species, including those that live inside her own body. 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. Species do not pre-exist their intertwined existence; rather, they become what they are through interaction with multiple other species.[5] The recognition of these co-constitutive relationships, a curiosity for what the other species is making available, and the respect of difference

across kind, is what Haraway calls the dance of *becoming-with*. Becoming-with can be understood as a necessary worlding practice that works powerfully against anthropocentrism, a crucial perspective for maintaining a habitable earth in these environmentally troubled times. Haraway argues, "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" (2004, 3). By "elsewhere" I believe that Haraway does not mean another planet, but another earthly reality, a healed world created through ideological and thus social reconstruction.

Together these concepts offer a radical rethinking of the human-animal relationship that transcends dualisms and rejects hierarchical thinking. By gesturing beyond the threshold of the self and towards the other, both concepts "make a mess out of categories" (Haraway 2008, 19) and work against anthropocentric ideas of the individuated subject, towards rich, queer multiplicities.[6] My hybridised concept of becoming-with-animal acknowledges the aesthetic pull of Deleuze and Guattari's fantastical concept, which has been interpreted as an irresistibly performative trope and "one of animal philosophy's most aesthetically productive concepts" (Chaudhuri and Enelow 2006, 5). It also embraces the ecological and intersectional approach of Haraway's becoming-with, which, grounded in science, recognises the reciprocal interconnectedness of all species.

Intersectional Ecofeminism

Before performing my analyses on the three selected cases of female-animal performance, I first wish to unpack what I mean by the terms 'ecofeminism', 'intersectional' and 'healing' in this context. In their book *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations* (1995) Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan advocate for a radical cultural feminism inclusive of all animals. They argue that historically feminism has either rejected animality in favour of rationality, in the case of liberal feminism, or denied that there is any connection between feminism and animals at all. Both approaches serve to affirm the human-animal binary. Adams and Donovan draw on arguments from feminist scholars such as Marylin French and Rosemary Radford Ruether, who link the exploitation of women and animals to Western male ideologies of transcendent dualism and the patriarchy. This hostility towards and devaluation of the natural animal body, or what feminist philosopher Elizabeth Spelman calls "somatophobia" (Adams and Donovan 1995, 2), 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" (1995, 3):

> [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 (1995, 7).

This approach can be broadly understood as characteristic of ecofeminism, a branch of third wave feminism that spanned the 1990s and early 2000s, which brings together ecology and feminism and explores the interconnection between male domination over both women and the environment both in cultural ideology and social structures (Radford-Reuther 1992). Ecofeminism also crosses over into intersectional feminism, a contemporary branch of feminism introduced in 1989 by black feminist scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw that recognises the interlinked and overlapping nature of various forms of human oppressions, including those based on gender, race, class, sexuality and physical abilities. Crenshaw argues that the experience of women of colour leads to overlapping forms of racial and sexual discrimination, and these forms of discrimination should not be considered mutually exclusive by feminist or antiracist practices. The Western feminist movement has been long criticised for being primarily concerned with white, middle-class, cis-gendered women's issues, thus suppressing the intersectional experience of women who do not conform to all of these identity categories. In her book *Neither Man nor Beast: Feminism and the Defence of Animals* (1995) Carol J. Adams argues that critiques that object to the introduction of animals into resistance politics is symptomatic of the analogical thinking that sees oppression as additive "rather than comprehending the interlocking systems of domination" (1995, 84). Ecofeminism extends this intersectional thinking towards nature and non-human species by recognising them as victims of interlinking oppressions.

Healing, in this context, borrows from Rosemary Radford Ruether's concept of *earth healing,* which understands the work of ecofeminism as healing the relationship of domination between both men and women, human and non-human. She suggests, "such healing is possible only through recognition and transformation of the way in which Western culture, enshrined in part by Christianity, has justified such domination"(Reuther 1992, 1). The destruction caused to this planet cannot be healed simply through technological fixes, but through the "work of transformative eco-justice" (9), which requires a new symbolic culture for the interrelations between men and women, humans and the earth, humans and the concept of God, as it has been shaped by Western religious traditions (4). The climate crisis substantiates a renewed and critical urgency for this form of healing.

The following three analyses, performed through an ecofeminist lens, serve to exemplify how the woman-animal relationship can be understood as radically (and symbolically) reconfigured through transformative practices in performative intersection with animals. I argue that these female performance practices can be conceived of as empowered and healing, rather than denigrated, in the context of a Western society that is dominated by both hetero-patriarchal and anthropocentric logics.

Becoming-with-Horse: Lucy Gunning

In Western culture, despite powerful images of the female-horse relationship including Joan of Arc and the prevalence of females in most areas of equestrianism, the human/horse relationship emerges as strongly gendered in popular imagination, with male figures predominating. The heroic male warrior astride his virile stallion and the wild cowboys of the American West are images commonly synonymous with power,

conquest and freedom, whilst relationships between women and horses can often be associated culturally with domestication and feminization (Birke and Brandt 2009, 190). As recognised in Freudian psychology, and explored for example in the work of British performance artist Rose English, the female/horse relationship can also often be sexualised and fetishized.[7] I suggest that the performative video work *The Horse Impressionists* (Gunning 1994) by British artist Lucy Gunning disrupts this gendered lens by challenging society's definitions of femininity through a radical female-horse alliance, thus serving as a potent example of the empowered practice of becoming-with-animal.

Figure 3. The Horse Impressionists, 1994, Lucy Gunning, presented anonymously 1997, video, 7 minutes 13 seconds. Photo ©Tate

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 had shared this hobby 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. As argued by Silvia Battista in her discussion of the work of Marcus Coates, imagination is a key tool for approaching and crossing boundaries between human and non-human, "creating opportunities for comparison, imagining possibilities of communication and translation"

(Battista 2018, 142). The individual performances, shot on Super 8 film, take place in parks and on the streets of London, adding a dimension of exposure to a private practice, thus making it performative and self-consciousness on the part of the performer. For the viewer there is a sense of voyeurism as the women reveal what perhaps is an intimate dimension of their personal lives. The performers 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 finds the activity comforting and even pleasurable. The fourth woman playfully interacts with the camera laughing as she trots around a pavement neighing in delight.

As previously argued, becoming-animal does not consist in playing or imitating an animal, but imitation can serve as a ritual medium for becoming. So whilst becoming-horse "is not a question of imitating a horse, 'playing' horse, or identifying with one" (Deleuze & Guattari 1980, 258), the women in *The Horse Impressionists,* as suggested by the title, experiment with possibilities of becoming through the employment of these techniques. It is the fifth woman in particular who appears to conjure something more numinous than play. Standing in a brick tunnel she smiles shyly at the camera revealing her surprisingly '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. She continues to allow the mysterious sound to emit from her body as if it belongs to someone or something else entirely; we do not see an imitation of a horse but an unbridling of something deep inside.

A shaman's engagement with other-than-human persons has been described both as a form of trance, where the shaman is in control of those persons, and as possession, where it is the shaman being controlled by those persons (Harvey 2003, 9). In the context of this essay I prefer to use the term communication as this suggests a reciprocal engagement in which neither the human nor the other-than-human person has dominance, but instead form a relationship of alliance. In relation to Gunning's work, I believe we are witnessing neither trance nor possession, but instead an alternative form of embodied communication in alliance with animal; a numinous experience, the rapture and rupture of which "changes the order in which things are organized and perceived, and disrupts established hierarchies and power relations" (Battista 1980, 199). In this respect, it is here that we can identify an empowered practice of becoming-with-animal.

This can be understood in part through Ruth Jones's analysis of *The Horse Impressionists* in which she suggests that Gunning's work employs Luce Irigaray's strategy of mimetic identification, and whilst this comes dangerously close to reconfirming the traditional Western women-animal connection, it in fact presents a radical threat to patriarchal culture (2004, 123, 127). Irigaray, along with contemporaries including Hélène Cixous and Monique David-Ménard, argue that

hysteria is a subversive act in which the hysteric uses her body rather than language as a means of subversion because the masculine construct of language negates the feminine. She describes hysteria as "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" (Chisholm 1994, 272). From this perspective it can be argued that the women in *The Horse Impressionists* are undertaking a radical embodied performance of resistance.

Female identity has historically been dictated by phallocentric western society: the obedient domesticated wife, the self-sacrificing mother, the sex object, and subordinate. Through the hysterical mimesis of becoming-horse, not only does the woman subvert the female condition imposed upon her by western patriarchal tradition, but also transcends her human condition by entering into an exchange with animal, thus gaining alternative forms of knowledge. By articulating this knowledge through embodied performance, rather than through language, or at least human language, she ruptures her prescribed female identity by becoming ambiguous, elusive, and fearsome.

Ruth Jones observes that the women in *The Horse Impressionists* appear to be sharing an incomprehensible language of their own (2004, 125). I suggest that this incomprehensible language is in fact horse language expressed through a combination of voice and gestuality, perfected from a young age through strategies of imaginative imitation during which the women have developed a relationship and attachment to the horse species. The final woman in the video is not possessed, but is communicating with horses in order to form an alliance between two groups rendered minoritarian by the patriarchal system of domination. By entering into a transformative alliance with horses the woman is becoming-with-animal and is thus paving the way for a new symbolic culture regarding the relationship between women and animals, human and Other. By presenting this practice as a public performance, as opposed to a private hobby, the women in Gunning's video are making visible their alternative forms of knowledge through self-representation[8] and public intervention, actively addressing the cultural structures of power that render women and other minorities subordinate. This public display of an experience familiar to so many women is not only healing for those taking part, but also for those spectators in whom it stirs something deep inside; not simply a childhood nostalgia, but a memory of the "rapture and rupture" in female-animal-becomings.

Becoming-with-Bird: Ana Mendieta

Deleuze and Guattari describe "sorcerers" of becoming-animal as anomalous beings, existing on the borders and haunting the fringes (1980, 246). It is these anomalous beings who are able to string lines of flight between human and animal necessary for a becoming-animal. This line of flight allows for a deterritorialization of speciation or classification, or to put it more simply, a means of going out of the self and towards the Other. This notion of deterritorialization suggests a spatial dimension to becoming-animal, becoming "no longer of this world" (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 283). This enters into dialogue with Donna J. Haraway's "elsewhere"; Becoming-animal is about occupying a space between human and non-human animal, a space of ambiguity in which a new reality is created.

The Cuban born performance artist Ana Mendieta (1948-1985), like Deleuze and Guattari's sorcerer, exists on the margins. As a non-white, female artist living in exile from Cuba in the predominantly white U.S state of Iowa, Mendieta was intersectionally minoritarian and therefore faced marginalization or exclusion from a variety of discursive sites, including her country of birth, the Iowa community, the predominantly white middle class US feminist movement, and the white male-dominated art world (Blocker 1999).[9] Even critics marginalized and feminized Mendieta's work and her engagement with nature; Jane Blocker gives the example of art critic Donald Kuspit who in reference to Mendieta's work has made such statements as, "Mendieta preferred to have narcissistic intercourse with Mother Earth than sexual intercourse with man" (1999, 12-16). In her work Mendieta uses her body to demonstrate an aesthetic of what has been previously understood as disappearance (Schneider 1997). Often working with natural materials including soil, mud, sticks, snow, fire, water, blood, feathers and flowers, with which she either enshrouds or imprints her body, Mendieta offers a reminder of the organic materiality of the body which like other natural materials, is also subject to death and decay. This serves as a key intimation of the human relationship with the earth, as one of the same, just matter. Unlike the public urban setting of *The Horse Impressionists*, Mendieta's performances mostly take place in the natural environment, often in solitude, and are sparsely documented through photographs or video. This, combined with the fact that her work borrows from the ritual practices of the Afro-Caribbean tradition Santería, offers a different perspective around the notion of spectatorship and who these healing performances are intended for. If ritual is a communicative occasion involving metaphor where art, magic and religion meet (Choi 2003, 170), then perhaps Mendieta's ritual performances are a way of communicating with other-than-human-persons on behalf of healing both herself and her human spectators, productively combining ritual efficacy and the aesthetic eloquence of performance.

Untitled (Blood + Feathers #2) is a performance captured on Super 8 film which takes place in Old Man's Creek, Iowa in 1974 (Mendieta 1974). Mendieta stands on the sandy shore of the creek, the water and a jutting cliff face masked with green foliage as her back-drop. Her hair is tied back and sunlight bathes her naked brown body, her race and gender highly visible as she looks towards the camera. Beneath her on the white sand is a pile of white feathers, and 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 common to many religions. She then falls to her knees, dropping her body face-first into the soft feathers, and begins to roll slowly, pushing herself into the feathers and sweeping her arms alongside her. 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, bent at the elbows 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.

Figure 4. Ana Mendieta, Untitled (Blood + Feathers #2), 1974, colour photograph
© The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC. Courtesy Galerie Lelong & Co.

In *Untitled (Blood + Feathers #2)* ritualistic elements permeate 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.[10] Drawing on the philosophy of the Afro-Cuban religious tradition Santería, and the concept of *ashe,* a divine life force manifested in all elements of nature, Mendieta expresses that her art is grounded in a belief in a universal energy

that entwines all living things, “from insect to man, from man to spectre, from spectre to plant, from plant to galaxy” (1988, 72). She describes her performances as the “irrigation veins” through which this energy travels, making the connection between human and Other explicit. This recognition of a web of connections between heterogeneities allows Mendieta to experiment with creating lines of flight for a becoming-with-animal. Blood, which is also attributed to *ashe* in Santería and offered to the spirits as part of animal sacrifice (for food), serves as a medium for Mendieta’s becoming-with-bird. Through the act of pouring chicken blood over her human body Mendieta contaminates human and non-human animal, the blood acting as an adherent to conjoin feathers and skin.

In discussing Mendieta’s famous *Silueta* series, works created between 1973 and 1978 in which she 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” (1999, 18). Mendieta understood this as an anthropomorphism of nature: she said that “[t]o anthropomorphize the earth is to endow it with sentience, desire and identity” (quoted in Blocker 1999, 18). I would argue that this statement, as well as the general understanding of anthropomorphism, seems too 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 which *gives shape* to humans” (2009, 237), 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 they allow her to challenge her own intersectional female identity through an alliance with nature. Rebecca Schneider suggests that by presenting the female body and then removing it, Mendieta reveals her female identity by “making the body explicit as vanished” (1997, 117). I suggest however, that the body is not vanished but transformed through a becoming-with-animal in co-shaping alliance with nature, and thus so is her intersectional human identity as marked by society.

As Mendieta raises herself up from the ground, she looks down at her unrecognisable body; her skin is no longer brown, but ambiguous as it is flecked partially with white feathers destabilising not only her race but her species. The plumage transforms her woman’s body, destabilises her gender, and by merging her body with that of a bird and raising her arms like wings, she embodies the freedom of flight. In becoming-with-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 she makes herself elusive; she performs her “exile broadly so as to interrogate nationality, colour, ethnicity and gender” (Blocker 1999, 27), 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 (1980, 275). With the help of significant other-than-human persons, Mendieta locates herself in a realm of other-than-identity. Like the shaman, she has safely abandoned her female human body and has transcended worlds on a healing quest. By ‘performing’ the healing ritual of becoming-with-bird, she extends these ecofeminist healing qualities to her audience through the symbolic gesture of ritual performance.

Becoming-with-(m)Other: Maja Smrekar

Maja Smrekar (b. 1978), a contemporary Slovenian artist, also recognises becoming-animal as a form of homecoming. As a result of the East-West transition of Slovenia during the 1990s, Smrekar's family lost their home, land, and business, and consequently Maja Smrekar's father committed suicide partly due to the trauma. "Therefore I feel like a minority, like a refugee […] an economic migrant searching for its secondary home ever since. I feel deterritorialized" (Smrekar 2015a). Using both her own body and the bodies of her canine companions, her series of performance projects, *K-9_Topology* (2014-2017), explore the possibilities of hybridity in a multi-species world as, Smrekar describes, a "radical intimate action of 'returning home'" (2016). But where or what is this home Smrekar refers to? Felix Guattari tells 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" (2000, 41-42), and this includes the 'nationality' of becoming-animal in which "one is deterritorialized" (Deleuze & Guattari 1980, 291). If deterritorialization is understood as the 'nationality' of becoming-animal, then this notion of homecoming can be further understood in relation to performance through Simon Whitehead's concept of the third-home, as 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. (Lavery and Whitehead 2012, 114)

This 'third home' may be what Smrekar is seeking through her interspecies performance, however she understands it as not something new, but rather a place or state to return to.

K-9_Topology examines the relationship between canines (specifically wolves and domesticated dogs) and the female human. For *Hybrid Family* (2016) 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 breastfed as part of a series of public performances. 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.

Figure 5. Maja Smrekar in collaboration with Manuel Vason, K-9_topology: Hybrid Family, Berlin, 2016. Photo by Manuel Vason. Image courtesy of the artist. Watch: https://vimeo.com/249653631

Becoming-animal explicitly rejects Oedipal relationships defined by patrilineal thought and filiation, and rather is the product of unnatural participations and contagion (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 241). Through regular systematic pumping, Smrekar triggers her pituitary glands to secrete prolactin which acts on her breasts to induce milk production. The subsequent release of the hormone oxytocin evokes empathy and is therefore beneficial for intimate bonding. Through her breastmilk, similarly to Mendieta's use of blood, 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, Smrekar explicitly ridicules the sexist Western social taboo of breastfeeding in public. She uses her body to make the "personal political" (Schneider 1997, 49) and by breastfeeding a non-human infant, challenges the social and ideological instrumentalization of women's bodies 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. Smrekar performs what she refers to as "(m)Otherhood" which embraces Adam and Donovan's intersectional ecofeminist approach inclusive of all non-human species (Smrekar 2015b).

Postmodern and poststructuralist feminism holds that women should understand the desire for mothering and caring as a strength rather than an anchor point for subordination (Neyer & Bernardi 2007, 167). The notion of care is one that can be found across intersectional eco-feminist theory. Diane Antonio advocates developing an "ethic of care respect" towards non-human animals as a feminist obligation (1995, 213). 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" (1995, 215). More recently Donna J. Haraway also echoes this ethic of "care respect" in her book *When Species Meet* (2008). In her discussions of companion species, Haraway understands the care of another species as a curiosity of "what the animal might actually be doing, feeling, thinking or making available" (2008, 20), and this ties into the act of respect, which is to treat animals in due regard across difference, and respond courteously to these signals. To care for and to respect are therefore mutually exclusive in this context, as we cannot care for the needs of non-human species without respecting that those needs are often different from human needs.

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" (2004, 130). In "The Body We Care For: Figures of Anthropo-Zoo-Genesis", 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" (2004, 125-128). She argues that both the "experimenter", who involves their knowledge, responsibility and future with the animal, and the animal itself, "are active and both are transformed by the availability of the other" (2004, 130). These notions of care and respect also provide a perspective on the issue of consent in human-animal performance practice. Whilst it could be argued that consent is based in human language and therefore there can be no consent outside of that language, Despret's concept of human and non-human bodies making themselves available to one another arguably suggests that one can also sense embodied expressions of consent. This is echoed by Laura Cull in her discussion of interspecies collaboration in performance:

> [A]nimals are perfectly capable (as are infant humans) of expressing their interests to us by other means (although this may also depend upon the adult humans involved learning how to 'hear' those expressions). But clearly it is also that human–human collaboration also occurs through non-linguistic means of communication, understanding and consent. (2015, 30)

In line with Antonio, Haraway and Despret, Maja Smrekar exercises a relationship of care respect towards the other-than-human; 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 respect. She rejects the fixity of motherhood, rendering it ambiguous by becoming (m)Other, therefore providing an understanding of Haraway's controversial ecofeminist slogan, "Make kin not babies!" (2015, 161) as an anti-anthropocentric, ethical and environmental plea for (m)Otherhood.

These three different approaches to becoming-animal demonstrate, 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 patriarchy, but also offers an opportunity to resist those oppressions by disrupting fixed identity categories. By turning towards the animal in performance, Lucy Gunning, Ana Mendieta and Maja Smrekar all undergo a transformation in which they discover, or return to, a third home that exists beyond the realm of dualisms in the porous threshold between human and animal. This third home is a site of resistance in which they challenge oppression, expectations and demands based on gender, and

reclaim the woman-animal association through transformation. By producing and being produced by new identities, they experience a new way of being human. Despret describes this ambiguous state as “experiences making bodies and bodies making experiences” in which signs wander and hesitate to fix themselves (Despret 2004, 127). In the ambiguity of their becomings they find empowerment, and in the empowerment of women and animals we find a form of ecosophical healing that reaches beyond the individual or the community towards our damaged planet.

Empowerment

By becoming-with-animal, the artist ventures 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, saying “I see you”. A trillion eyes look back, some in curiosity, some in fear, others in rage, saying “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. It is 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. 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” (Haraway 2008, 42). It is to make minorities visible in order to resist the oppressive powers that have 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 (2012, 114). 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” (Lavery and Whitehead 2012, 116). Therefore I would argue that to transform oneself is to transform one’s environment, and herein lies the earth-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 non-human animals and the environment, is imperative.

If these oppressions are interlocking then feminism cannot deny its connection with animals or nature. This essay is a call to action for women, non-human animals, and all minorities to turn towards one another in a relationship of alliance as an intersectionally feminist and environmental prerogative, and to make oneself available to the Other by embracing an ethic of care respect in order to achieve transformation. 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" (Haraway 2008, 17). I believe that the practice of becoming-with-animal in contemporary performance, as demonstrated by Lucy Gunning, Ana Mendieta and Maja Smrekar, 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 here on earth through alliance with the Other.

Notes

1. In his introduction to *Shamanism: A Reader* (2003), Graham Harvey argues that whilst the term "spirit" is commonly associated with shamanism, it is often rendered meaningless, directing our attention away from the type of "persons" that the shaman engages with. He tells us that "other-than-human persons" are better understood not as spirits but as nature, environment, life or even neighbours, and thus includes non-human animals.
2. Since the performative turn of the 1960s, normative modes of representation characteristic of traditional Western theatre practice have been heavily challenged. As argued by Erika Fischer-Lichte in *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* (2008), artistic performance since the 1960s can be recognised as an event constitutive of reality, and thus capable of transforming the experiencing subject.
3. For a detailed discussion of this performance in relation to shamanism see Silvia Battista "When the Spirits Are Socially Engaged: Journey to the Lower World by Marcus Coates" in *Posthuman Spiritualities in Contemporary Performance: Politics, Ecologies and Perceptions* (2018).
4. Coined by Felix Guattari, "ecosophy" or "ecophilosophy" 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 (Guattari 2000).
5. This can also be understood through Karen Barad's concept of "intra-action" as part of her theory of agential realism. Often referenced by Haraway, 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" (Kleinman 2012, 77).
6. Haraway vehemently critiques Deleuze and Guattari's discussions of becoming-animal. Triggered by their disdain for the sentimental family pet, the Oedipal animal, and their elderly female owners, 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" (2008, 30). This may serve as an example of the intersection between sexism and speciesism, in which domesticated animals are often feminised whilst wild animals are masculinised and therefore perceived to have higher status (Adams and Donovan, 1995).
7. British feminist artist Rose English explores the portrayal of the female body and fetishization through her work. *Quadrille* (1975) is a performance in which six women trot in formation into an arena at Southampton Horse Show and perform choreography based on classical dressage. 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 bloodlines, prize horses and debutants, *Quadrille* invites a comparison between the rigorously disciplined domesticated horses and society's expectation of the obedient woman.

8. Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins argues for the power of self-definition as the key to individual and group empowerment in her book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000). 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.

9. 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. 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 subjected 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" (Blocker 1999, 62). As a woman she was subjected to sexism at every turn, and as a non-white female artist she faced exclusion from the white male-dominated art world.

10. The symbol of blood is also associated with violation. In an early series of performances Mendieta responded to the 1973 rape and murder case of Sarah Ann Otten, a female student at the University of Iowa. In *Untitled (Rape Scene)* (1973), Mendieta invited colleagues to her apartment in which she was laid over a table, blood covering her exposed buttocks and thighs as the murder case was reported. Mendieta performed two more similar actions in different outdoor locations nearby the university campus during the same year. It is important to acknowledge the alignment between the violation of both women and animals represented by blood.

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About the Author

Florence Fitzgerald-Allsopp is a creative producer of contemporary art and performance based in the UK. She recently graduated Cum Laude from Utrecht University, Netherlands, with a Master's degree in Contemporary Theatre, Dance and Dramaturgy. Her research areas include visual art, performance, curation, feminism, ritual performance practice, transformation, animals and ecology. Her MA thesis, entitled "Becoming-with-Animal: Cultivating a Feminist Understanding of Human-Animal Transformation in Contemporary Performance Art", proposes the concept becoming-with-animal as an ecofeminist performance practice which aims to cultivate a new empowered understanding of the relationship between women and animals. She has been awarded a PhD Studentship supervised by Laura Cull at the University of Surrey, commencing in October 2020.