

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

THE POSTMODERN PET: IMAGES OF COMPANION ANIMALS IN
CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEO

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Art History

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my companion animals who gave me their own special viewpoint any time I was willing to listen: Tess, Alex, Sebastian, Arabella and Cooper.

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ABSTRACT

THE POSTMODERN PET: IMAGES OF COMPANION ANIMALS IN CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEO

By

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Master of Art in Art,

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In this paper, I examine the use of pet or companion animals as subject matter in contemporary photography and video. I begin with a brief discussion of the current importance of pets to human society in the twenty-first century. I then discuss the mechanisms that have functioned to deter artists from concentrating on this subject matter, as well as the resistance in the critical discourse to generating a meaningful dialog addressing this type of animal content. I outline the formation of the new academic discipline called Animal Studies, which has provided vital critical discourse for the discussion of a number of significant issues about animals and human-animal relationships. I demonstrate that a fundamental shift in our understanding of representations of animals has occurred, a shift that allows us to understand that representations of animals are indicators of societal attitudes toward and treatment of animals themselves. This shift has facilitated a whole new discussion and vocabulary for the discussion of images of animals that would not have been viable before this time. I

discuss two of the most pressing philosophical issues concerning animal representations: the (im)possibility of the “accurate” depiction of animals’ points of view given that we cannot communicate with them via language, and their contested “status” as individuals with agency and resistance.

I point out the confluence between the practice of contemporary pet keeping, the normalization of the practice of photography in Western Society and the advent of modern art in defining early modernity. I examine the evolution of the pet as subject matter in the photographic arts, providing a brief overview of the dominant aesthetic strategies utilized by the majority of artists who have up to this time chosen to photograph pets. I demonstrate that the modernist mode places primary importance on the anthropomorphized use of animals as metaphors or symbols for human subjects. I show that a new postmodern aesthetic in the depiction of animals in the contemporary arts has developed as an alternative to the previous modernist mode. The new postmodern strategies in use by contemporary artists emphasize the agency and resistance of the individual animal being depicted.

I trace the development of this postmodern aesthetic especially as it applies to the depiction of pet animals. Beginning with the influential film and video work of William Wegman and Carolee Schneemann in the early 1970s, there has been a sea change in the ways that artists depict companion animals, especially in the lens-based media of photography and video. I conclude by discussing three artists who have each located a relationship with an animal at the core of the artworks considered here: Belgian-born, Mexico-based artist Francis Alÿs (*El Gringo*, 2003), well-known Los Angeles-based photographer John Divola (*Dogs Chasing My Car in the Desert*, 1996-2001) and

provocative Czech-born, Canada-based artist Jana Sterbak (*From here to there*, a video installation work from 2003). By incorporating actions that animals initiate into their artworks, these three artists allow the animals to act as subjects rather than objects, countering the traditional use of pets as symbolic carriers of meaning, one-dimensional human extensions or mere possessions. I argue that the work of these postmodern artists cannot be dismissed as kitsch or sentimental. Instead, it functions to let viewers reconsider our complicated relationships not only with our pets, but also with all non-human animals.

INTRODUCTION

My life has been enriched by the presence of the pets with whom I share my home. Over the last few years, I have chosen to “rescue” animals in need rather than buy them from stores or breeders. I have had the satisfaction of knowing that many of the animals I rescued would have died had I not taken them in. More importantly, I have received immense joy from the everyday pleasures of living with my animal companions. The number of cats I have rescued has climbed from two siblings who came in need of a home when my neighbor was overwhelmed by the birth of her second child, to the final four that I have now, along with one dog, rescued from a nearby street. During this process, I have observed the reactions of friends and colleagues. Some respond in dismay, while others just nod in agreement as I laugh about being the neighborhood “cat lady.”

Living with these animals and witnessing the varied reactions I receive has made me curious to understand more about human relationships with animals, about the way we perceive and understand the place of animals in the world, and about the ways that domesticated animals differ from “wild animals.” While trying to understand the nature of my pets, I also began to search for art images that reflect the deeply embodied sense of amity I share with them. As artist, art historian and educator, I spend much of my time in the classroom emphasizing the power of the visual image in our culture, so I was especially interested to see how, as a society, we have conceptualized animals through visual imagery. I am a photographer and am particularly drawn to photographic or lens-based imagery. In most cases, a photographed or videotaped likeness of an animal guarantees that at some point in the generation of the image a “real” animal was present

and is being portrayed, as opposed to painted, drawn or sculpted representations of animals.

Photographers often treat pet animals in formulaic ways. They are frequently shown in the same ways we depict children-- treated as sentimental or nostalgic subject matter. (Fig. 13) Cute, non-threatening, cuddly companion animals are portrayed in homes, (Fig. 1) infantilized-- dressed in costumes or baby clothes-- or placed in the role of surrogate children. (Figs. 2, 3) Humor is frequently a component of images involving pet animals. (Fig. 4) Sometimes, these images compare pet to owner, noting the similarities. (Figs. 5b, 6) Other times the images have a more broad reference, pointing out human foibles through the animal's actions. (Fig. 7a) Less frequently, as in the 1971 image by Daido Moriyama, *Stray Dog, Misawa, Aomor*, photographers call on these animals' associations with the wild, the feral or the untamed. (Fig. 7b) Another approach is to use pet animals as indicators of class or economic standing, (Figs. 5a, 9, 45) or to highlight their roles as commodity items, emphasizing their property value. (Fig. 10, 11, 12) Almost without exception these images employ the traditional visual strategy of anthropomorphizing animals. The animal's presence is highly scripted and formally arranged in the image. Such conventional representations of pets do not reflect my own vibrant experience of the active, self-directed, responsive animals with whom I live.

However, there is a contrasting body of artwork, in large part lens-based, which more accurately reflects my own experience of my pets. Rather than use the animal as metaphor, symbol or prop in an extremely directed manner, artists in this second category meet the animals on their own terms. Many photograph animals they already have relationships with or develop relationships with the animals as they work. (Fig. 14) When

they photograph the animals, they allow and encourage them to act from their own agency and incorporate the animals' actions into their imagery without attempting to dominate or control them. (Fig. 15) Because viewers are experiencing actions that are intrinsic to the animals, they are less likely to immediately project their own emotions onto the animal. A space is opened, however briefly, for the viewer to experience the animals without anthropomorphizing them. These two disparate bodies of animal depictions, one which uses animals almost exclusively as metaphors for human experience and the other which allows animals to stand as beings with their own sense of agency and resistance have come to represent, for me, modern and postmodern representations of animals.

In her widely read essay, "Farewell to Modernism," Kim Levin observes changes in the production of contemporary art in the late 1960s, which moved away from the rigid technical formalism of the minimalist movement to the vibrant pluralism of the late 1970s.¹ She posits that a series of transformative events--the Vietnam War and Civil Rights movement among them-- caused significant changes to the societal principles that drove the modernist art movement and initiated a new era: the postmodern.² Levin acknowledges that it is too soon (at the time of the writing of her essay in 1979) for a definitive prediction of whether postmodernism represents merely the swan song of modernism or a true new beginning. She also recognizes that a continuum exists from

¹ Kim Levin, "Farewell to Modernism," In Theories of Contemporary Art, ed. Richard Hertz (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1993) 1-9.

² Kim Levin, 3.

artists producing completely modernist art to those producing postmodern art.³ However, she uses the binary opposition pair that she sets up-- modern versus postmodern-- to examine what she regards to be significant changes in the production of contemporary art in the late twentieth century.

Since that time, critics in such diverse fields from architecture to literature have used the idea of the modern and the postmodern to examine changes that have occurred in the construction of the cultural products with which they are concerned. Likewise, scholars in the emerging field of Animal Studies have also employed the modern/postmodern dichotomy to point out current changes regarding societal attitudes toward animals.⁴ Using Levin's essay as an example, I examine changes in the production of photographic images of pets during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and postulate modern and postmodern stances for the artists concerned. Like Levin, I leave to future readers to discern the eventual validity of the rupture that I perceive at this time in the work of artists concerned with animal subject matter. I also acknowledge that the reality of artistic practice is complex and difficult to classify empirically. Critics create categories as convenient mechanisms to examine the dynamic processes of contemporary art production. However, the artists I examine ultimately refuse categorization and untidily span the continuum between the modern and the postmodern

³ Kim Levin, 6-7.

⁴ See Cary Wolfe, Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species and Posthumanist Theory (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003); Julie Ann Smith, "Review of Academic Conferences" Society and Animals, 9 no. 3 (2001), 22 May 2007 <<http://www.psyeta.org/sa/sa9.3/smith.shtml>>; Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel, eds. Animal Geographies: Place, Politics, and Identity in the Nature-Culture Borderlands (London: Verso, 1998).

without being limited by arbitrary constraints. Further, I recognize the potential danger of uncritically setting up two categories to act in opposition to each other. The energetic interplay between “modern” and “postmodern” ideas and aesthetic strategies can only serve to invigorate, inform and move the critical discourse on its way.

Clement Greenberg was a powerful art critic whose writings were influential in establishing Abstract Expressionism as the preeminent mid-twentieth century contemporary art movement.⁵ In his 1939 essay, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” Greenberg made a sharp distinction between “true culture” and “popular art,” arguing for the elimination of all references to popular culture (or kitsch) from high art.⁶ He prioritized formal aesthetic criteria above narrative or figurative content in a work of art. Greenberg argued that, in order to be great, any work of art must adhere solely to the intrinsic aspects of its media. Thus, painting should be concerned with the application of paint to the canvas, naturally privileging the modernist abstractions he championed. Greenberg’s admonitions against the “rearguard--” “popular, commercial art and literature...magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fiction, comics...etc.”⁷--helped solidify a sharp distinction in the art market between fine art and kitsch or commercial imagery. Although Greenberg does not make specific reference to pet imagery in his pejorative invectives against the corrupting influences of kitsch, it is not a stretch to understand that

⁵ "Greenberg, Clement," Britannica Book of the Year, 1995. 2007, Encyclopædia Britannica Online, 21 July 2007 <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9115480>>.

⁶ Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” In Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003) 539-549.

⁷ Clement Greenberg, 543.

commercially produced depictions of cats and dogs were highly stigmatized by the kind of thinking he articulates in this article. Modernist photographers themselves, like Alfred Stieglitz, were some of the most insistent voices in maintaining the schism between high and low art and between fine art and commercial imagery.⁸

From its inception, the medium of photography has been subject to questions about its authenticity as a “true” art form.⁹ Photography relies on a mechanical device-- the camera-- instead of the hand of the artist, for the formation of its imagery. Since its invention in 1839, supporters of photography have made ardent pleas for its inclusion as a legitimate participant in the fine arts discourse. It was not until the 1980s that photography was fully accepted as a “valid” medium in the museum and gallery world, and many photographers today continue to be sensitive about and protective of their roles as artists. Photographers in general and those using animal subject matter, particularly pets, have suffered from a long history of being maligned as artists, both because of their chosen medium, photography, and for the perception that their imagery is too commercial or kitsch.¹⁰

At this point in time, many of the artificial bifurcations that have plagued the art world with their exclusionary tendencies have been eliminated. Levin’s postmodernist artists of the 1970s reincorporated many of the forms that Greenberg had sought to cull

⁸ Robert Hirsch, Seizing the Light: A History of Photography (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2000) 217, 321.

⁹ See Terry Barrett’s section entitled, “Aesthetic Concerns: Is Photography Art?” for a discussion of photography’s status as a fine art medium since its inception and its eventual acceptance as an art form in the 1980s. In Criticizing Photographs: An Introduction to Understanding Photographs (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2006) 173-189.

¹⁰ See chapter 2 for an extended discussion of this topic.

from art production in the 50s and 60s.¹¹ Maintaining strict distinctions between commercial and fine art imagery as a way to insure the “purity” of the contemporary art market no longer seems to be a valid concern. Nonetheless, the consequences from the fairly recent history of these practices are still fresh enough to influence our views today.¹² In chapter 2, I will examine the modernist preoccupation with the distinctions between high art/low art and fine art/commercial imagery as a way to facilitate an understanding of the relative lack of pet imagery in the fine arts today.

Only a few years ago, the idea of doing a master’s thesis on images of pets in contemporary art without concentrating on kitsch or popular culture imagery was unthinkable. More than one well-meaning advisor told me that any fine art images of pets that I encountered would only fit into one category: sentimental, nostalgic, kitsch—not the stuff of serious art-making or art historical research. Even now when I reveal my area of scholarly interest to fellow artists or art-historians, I often have to explain that this is indeed a serious area of study. What has changed, in the last three or four years, to allow me to write this thesis? Two important transformations have occurred, both ultimately motivated by a larger societal change in the way we regard animals. The first has been the development of a new set of assumptions about the importance of animals and their representations. Scholars have come to accept that representations of animals do indeed

¹¹ Levin, 4.

¹² The ongoing symbiotic relationship between fine and popular arts was explored in the influential 1990 Museum of Modern Art exhibition “High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture” curated by Kirk Varnedoe. National Gallery of Art website, 3 August 2007, < <http://www.nga.gov/press/2006/lecture-elderfield.shtm>>.

reflect current societal attitudes and practices toward “actual” animals.¹³ This has facilitated a whole new discussion and vocabulary for the discussion of images of animals that would not have been viable before this time. The second major factor is the ever-increasing production of a significant body of artwork in which animals are seen as individuals with agency and resistance, demonstrating the new postmodern aesthetic. The driving forces behind these changes are the animal rights movement and the burgeoning discipline of Animal Studies. “The fundamental principle of the contemporary animal rights movement is that many nonhuman animals have basic interests that deserve recognition, consideration, and protection. In the view of animal rights advocates, these basic interests give the animals that have them both moral and legal rights.”¹⁴ A growing challenge to the modernist belief that animals are meant to serve humans is the concept that individual animals possess agency, self-directedness and resistance, even if they lack the capacity for language.¹⁵ Pets provide a unique opportunity for city-bound artists to

¹³ See Steve Baker, “Introduction to the Illinois Edition,” Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity and Representation (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001). See also my discussion in chapter 3 of this paper.

¹⁴ “animal rights.” Encyclopædia Britannica. 2007. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 16 May 2007 <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-257091>>.

¹⁵ Susan McHugh discusses “animal aesthetic agency” and the development of “pack aesthetics or collaborative production of art” in “Video Dog Star: William Wegman, Aesthetic Agency and the Animal in Experimental Video Art,” Society and Animals: Journal of Human-Animal Studies 9, no. 3 (2001), 02 August 2007 <<http://www.psyeta.org/sa/sa9.3/mchugh/shtml>>. John Berger discusses the gap of language separating humans and animals in “Why Look at Animals?” In About Looking, (New York: Pantheon Press, 1980) 1-26. The discussion of whether animals are “morally considerable” as Tom Regan asks, without the ability to communicate with us via language is an ongoing one in animal rights and animals studies discourses in Tom Regan, foreword, Animal Others: On Ethics, Ontology and Animal Life (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999) xii. See also Tom Regan, Peter Singer, H. Peter Steeves etc.

develop and depict long-term relationships with animals, and so images of pets, long demeaned, and the idea of pets as a serious theme for artists, long overlooked and belittled, are now being reconsidered as viable and important subject matter for the contemporary artist.

During the course of this paper, I will provide a brief discussion of both the importance of pet animals to humans and the reasons that pets have been so maligned in the critical discourse. I will trace the emergence of the field of Animal Studies and its gradual acceptance of the significance of the study of cultural representations of animals. I will discuss two of the most pressing philosophical issues concerning animal representations: the difficulty of the “accurate” depiction of animals’ points of view given that we cannot communicate with them via language, and their contested “status” as individuals with agency and resistance. I will briefly trace the history of pets as photographic subject matter, looking at several aesthetic strategies used by modernist artists photographing pets. I then anticipate the postmodern chapter with a look at artists who are melding strategies from both camps. I conclude with a discussion of the practices and tactics of a number of contemporary artists who are producing provocative postmodern lens-based images of companion animals.

CHAPTER 1

Why Are Pets So Important to Human Society in the 21st Century?

People keep animals for companionship for essentially the same reasons that people wear overcoats to keep out the cold: because by doing so, they enhance their own health and quality of life...Pet owners, for instance, have been shown to possess fewer physiological risk factors (high blood pressure, serum triglycerides, and cholesterol) for cardiovascular disease than non-owners, as well as exhibiting improved survival and longevity following heart attacks.

James Serpell¹⁶

Both dogs and cats have lived with and served humans for thousands of years.

The estimates on the dates of and reasons for initial domestication vary wildly. For cats, the oldest evidence of cats living in proximity to humans dates from about 9,000 years ago, and their presence is well established by the time of Ancient Egypt.¹⁷ For dogs, domestication estimates range from as early as 150,000 years to a more conservative 10,000 years ago.¹⁸ Recent theories even suggest that humans and dogs coevolved. That is, during the evolutionary process, humans were able to devote room in their brains to develop higher neural processes because they were able to rely on domesticated dogs for their sensory processes of sight, hearing and smell.¹⁹ No matter why or when they

¹⁶ James Serpell, "Anthropomorphism and Anthropomorphic Selection Beyond the 'Cute Response'" *Society and Animals*, 10 no. 4 (2002), 8 June 2007 <<http://www.psyeta.org/sa/sa10.4/serpell.shtml>>.

¹⁷ Alan Edwards, *The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Cats, Cat Breeds and Cat Care*, (London: Hermes House, 1999) 9. "cat, domestic." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 16 July 2007 <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-59411>>.

¹⁸ Ádám Miklósi, "Dog-human relationship in an evolutionary perspective," ISAZ 14th Annual Conference, 16 July 2007 <<http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/CCAB/isaz2005.pdf>>.

¹⁹ Ádám Miklósi, personal conversation, 12 July 2005.

became domesticated, dogs have a long-established presence in human life. However, both cats and dogs have been both revered and reviled at different times and places throughout history. As Professor of Humane Ethics and Animal Welfare James Serpell notes, “The dog-human relationship is arguably the closest we humans can ever get to establishing a dialogue with another sentient life-form.[...]Dogs and cats are also the only domestic animals not requiring physical barriers-- walls, cages, fences or tethers-- to enforce their association with people.”²⁰ Serpell adds, “Although biologically inaccurate to say the least, this overwhelming tendency to ‘personify’ dogs is an inevitable and natural consequence of the kinds of relationships we have with these animals.”²¹

²⁰ James Serpell, The Domestic Dog its evolution, behaviour and interactions with people (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 2, 246.

²¹ James Serpell, The Domestic Dog 2.

CHAPTER 2

Bad Dog!: Why have pets been maligned, belittled or ignored in the aesthetic and critical discourse?

Traditionally, animals have been dismissed as too down home, too trivial, too close to nature for most serious intellectual authorities to consider, even the most avant-garde.

Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel²²

The idea of the domestic animal- and most especially the pet- as an aberrant creature, a living betrayal of its properly animal potential or trajectory, is the one which tends to hold sway.

Steve Baker²³

Beware of pictures of dogs and children, they are not as good as you think they are.

Garry Winogrand²⁴

In order to understand the origins of the prejudices against photographic images of pet animals in the contemporary art world, it is necessary to examine several sources. Both modernist and postmodernist artists in the twentieth century have shared intolerances toward animal subject matter. The postmodernists' bias shifted away from "wild" animals in the 1990s, but has remained more vehement toward pets and other domesticated animals.²⁵ From the early 1900s through the 1990s, modernist photographers maintained inherent prejudices against the perceived sentimentality of subject matter such as pets, through the creation of high art/low art and fine

²² Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel, 16.

²³ Steve Baker, The Postmodern Animal 168.

²⁴ Garry Winogrand, as quoted in A Thousand Hounds: The Presence of the Dog in the History of Photography 1839 to Today by Raymond Merritt and Miles Barth (Cologne: Taschen, 2000) 9.

²⁵ Steve Baker, The Postmodern Animal 166.

art/commercial art dichotomies. A deeper look, though, reveals that these biases masked photography's own struggles with the perceptions of inferiority that had plagued it since its invention. Until recently, general societal prejudices against pets, and their perceived association with sentimentality, nostalgia and the realm of the home, have been reflected in a general lack of academic study about the animals themselves, and about our relationships with them.²⁶

Other types of animals, besides pets, have been exploited in recent fine art production in astonishing numbers.²⁷ They appear in artwork as photographic, sculpted or painted images, or as taxidermied or preserved bodies. The emerging academic field of Animal Studies has effected a remarkable change in our ability to discuss the animal content of recent representations of animals in all aspects of popular culture. Their presence in the work has been considered in the growing Animal Studies critical discourse with sensitivity and seriousness. However, this change is being absorbed very slowly into the larger critical discourse, and I have found that it is still more common for mainstream critics writing catalog essays and reviews to ignore the animal content in an artwork.

According to Steve Baker, the renowned British art historian and foremost scholar concerned with the representation of animals in contemporary art, the inclusion of other

²⁶ A fascinating discussion about the nature of sentimentality as regards images of animals was generated during the 2007 Animals and Society Conference in Tasmania, Australia. According to postcolonial theorist Professor Helen Tiffin, the concept of sentimentality originated with upper class men in the late 1700s (“a gentleman of sentiment”) but eventually shifted to the realm of the home and the woman as the 1800s progressed. Further research in this area could prove illuminating to the contemporary view of companion animals as being worthy (only) of our “sentiment.”

²⁷ See Steve Baker, The Postmodern Animal for examples like Damien Hirst, Mark Dion and Olly and Suzi.

types of animals in contemporary art imagery was facilitated specifically by the artists involved taking special care to avoid associations with the sentimental. Baker notes that a “significant development in the 1990s was that artists began to take animals altogether more seriously, and in doing so found ways to avoid the familiar accusation of sentimentality.”²⁸ However, images of dogs and other pets who are not considered “proper” wild animals continue to be demeaned. Baker analyses this phenomenon in his 2000 book *The Postmodern Animal*. He cites anthropologist Edmund Leach’s 1964 paper entitled “Animal Categories and Verbal Abuse:”

Leach argued that language employed animal categories to “discriminate areas of social space” in terms of distance to the human. He proposed the sequence *self*, *pet*, *livestock*, *‘game’ animal* and *wild animal*. Pursuing the thesis that “we make binary distinctions and then mediate the distinction by creating an ambiguous (and taboo-loaded) intermediate category,” and having noted that it is invariably “the ambiguous categories that attract the maximum interest and the most intense feelings of taboo,” he located pets as one such intermediate category, which he designated with the compound term “man–animal.” Leach’s central theme, taboo, was defined by him as that which “serves to separate the SELF from the world,” in those terms the pet was set to figure as an improper or anomalous creature.²⁹

Baker goes on to discuss a number of instances in the critical discourse in which pets are demeaned as being too “safe,” tame and conforming to family loyalty.³⁰ He mentions specifically the postmodern fears of pet keeping. “What does it mean exactly, to say that postmodern artists and philosophers fear pets? It is not that they fear the creatures themselves (though they may feel contempt for them). It is closer to what has been called ‘anthropomorphobia’ – a fear that they ‘may be accused of uncritical

²⁸ Steve Baker, *Picturing the Beast* xxvi.

²⁹ Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* 166-67.

³⁰ Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* 166-90.

sentimentality' in their depiction or discussion of animals. They seem almost unanimous in regarding sentimentality as a bad thing."³¹ Baker acknowledges that the perception of sentimentality can be highly detrimental to the reputation of a serious artist.³² He suggests that a postmodern audience is impatient with animal imagery expressed in a formal vocabulary associated with "sincerity, compassion or directness," preferring aesthetic or formal strategies which reflect "the fractured and inexpert practice of ordinary postmodern domestic life."³³ The distinctions that Baker makes between the former and the latter will prove useful in distinguishing between modern and postmodern depictions of pets.

In the early 1990s, when I was in graduate school at California State University, Fullerton studying photography, one of my instructors had a firm rule in the classroom: "No C, C, Cs... no kids, no cats and no Camaros." Historically, children, pets and cars were seen as insignificant subject matter for the fine arts. Photographic images of pets or companion animals have existed on the periphery of the fine art field along with those of children and motherhood, other subjects similarly maligned for their assumed sentimental, nostalgic qualities. Typically, images of pets function in the same category as velvet paintings or sofa art, that is, as vernacular or kitsch art forms that are not favorably regarded by the larger fine art world.³⁴

³¹ Steve Baker, The Postmodern Animal 175.

³² Steve Baker, The Postmodern Animal 177.

³³ Steve Baker, The Postmodern Animal 181-82.

³⁴ That does not mean, of course, that there has been any paucity in the production of images of companion animals. Our innate societal attraction to companion animals has made them perfect fodder for the endless production of popular imagery for both adults

From its beginning, photography has led an uneasy double life as an art form and as a science: a skill or craft, an art medium and a technology.³⁵ As a medium, it seemingly threatened painting and engraving with the ease with which it reproduced reality.³⁶ Yet that same facility for recording “objective” reality marked it as a scientific, technological tool and not as an aesthetic device to aid artists in the creation of their artwork. Photography’s earliest inventors, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre and William Henry Fox Talbot, immediately recognized the implications for commercial success and patented the processes they formulated.³⁷ As a commercial and technological phenomenon, photography swept across Europe and beyond.

Aware of the technical and scientific prejudices levied against their art form, photographers, like Talbot, realized that the quickest way to align photography with painting was to produce images that resembled paintings.³⁸ Photographic artists modeled their pictures on current painting styles and created techniques to render their photographs like paintings. The dreamy, soft focus image quality of Pictorialist artists like Jane Reece is an example.³⁹ Gustave Le Gray, Nadar (Gaspard Félix Tournachon),

and children. Living with multiple companion animals, I in no way wish to demean connections between adults and pets. However, the relationships which develop between people and animals are much more complex and layered than is often reflected in the idealized or sentimentalized images of pets which exist in popular culture.

³⁵ Mary Warner Marien, Photography: A Cultural History (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002) 25.

³⁶ Mary Warner Marien, 26.

³⁷ Mary Warner Marien, 26.

³⁸ Mary Warner Marien, 30.

³⁹ Mary Warner Marien, 174.

Oscar Rejlander, Peter Henry Emerson and Julia Margaret Cameron were a few of the notable nineteenth century photographers who voiced their support of photography as an art form.⁴⁰ In point of fact, though, painting also borrowed innovative visual techniques from photography⁴¹ and a dialogue was established between the two media that continues today.

However, photography faced pressures that painting and sculpture did not. During the late nineteenth century, the newly formed urban working class had leisure time and income, and quickly demanded more accessible entertainment forms than those appreciated by the upper classes.⁴² Cheap, commercially produced photographs flooded the market, creating a body of easily accessible photographic imagery from which “fine art” photographers had to distinguish *their* work. During the first half of the twentieth century, a gap formed between “high art”—considered elitist by the public—and “popular” or low culture—comprised of advertising, comics, illustrated newspapers, postcards and stereographs.⁴³ According to photography historian Robert Hirsch, “[W]ealthy amateurs discriminated between photographs made for art and those made for commerce” although “individuals whose livelihood depended on photography seldom made these distinctions.”⁴⁴ American modernist photographer, art dealer and publisher

⁴⁰ Mary Warner Marien, 77-78, 152-53, 158, 172.

⁴¹ Impressionism, for example. See "painting, Western." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2007. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 24 July 2007 <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-69594>>.

⁴² Hirsch, 217.

⁴³ Hirsch, 217.

⁴⁴ Hirsch, 321.

Alfred Stieglitz was a prime proponent of the separation not only between high and low culture, but also between artistic and commercial practices.⁴⁵ He required that photographers' artistic careers be kept separate from their commercial pursuits. Artists maintained discrete photographic portfolios for each activity, and usually the images in their fine art portfolios were accorded much more critical acclaim than their commercial images.⁴⁶

The famous modernist photographer Edward Weston produced a little known body of work portraying cats that he and his wife Charis Wilson took care of near their home in Carmel, California, in the early to mid-1940s. The book, with text by Wilson, is called *The Cats of Wild Cat Hill* and was published in 1947 by Duell, Sloan and Pearce.⁴⁷ Unlike Weston's other books, this one faded quickly into obscurity and has never been reprinted. In her memoir about her life with Weston, Wilson discusses the cats and the project they produced together.⁴⁸ Believing that readers might be interested in a real life description of the behavior of a large group of cats, Wilson kept a diary of their activities. She commented, "No book I could find at the time did this—cats in books and magazines wore ribbons and chased balls of yarn."⁴⁹ However, as Wilson quickly found out, the

⁴⁵ Robert Hirsch, 321.

⁴⁶ Robert Hirsch, 321.

⁴⁷ Charis Wilson and Edward Weston, *The Cats of Wildcat Hill* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1947).

⁴⁸ Charis Wilson and Wendy Madar, *Through another lens : my years with Edward Weston* (New York: North Point Press/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, c1998).

⁴⁹ Charis Wilson and Wendy Madar, 328.

publishers were unprepared for the raw reality of her experience with the animals.

Referring to the publishers, Wilson writes:

Their first response to the manuscript was not what I had hoped. As far as they were concerned, a book about cats should be geared for children and grandmothers. They weren't prepared for an unsentimental and occasionally horrifying account of the behavior of real animals. They asked for changes. With plenty of humorous material to draw on, I pruned and rewrote, and ended up with a book that was half and half—half cat behavior and half light entertainment and therefore, in my view, not really satisfactory in either category. Nonetheless, I considered it a great improvement over most cat books of the time.⁵⁰

Wilson continues that the book was widely praised in critical reviews. However, the list of newspapers and popular magazines reviewing the book does not include any art or fine art photography publications. Further, Wilson says that many of Weston's followers did not support his cat endeavor-- blaming her influence or thinking that senility had set in for the artist.⁵¹ Thus, the modernist prejudice against such "kitsch" subject matter as cats was decisively maintained despite Weston's famous name.

As modernism progressed through the twentieth century, these three trajectories continued to develop. Photography struggled to be considered an art form on par with painting and sculpture. Photographers persisted in the preservation of the divide between high art (for an elite audience) and low art (for a popular audience). They also maintained a separation between their artistic activities (designed for gallery sales) and their commercial activities (imagery produced specifically for clients, designed to sell products). Throughout the 1940s and 50s, the writings of Clement Greenberg, in part calculated to purge photography from the realm of high art, contributed to its segregation at the back of the art bus.

⁵⁰ Charis Wilson and Wendy Madar, 329.

⁵¹ Charis Wilson and Wendy Madar, 328.

According to Art Education Professor Terry Barrett, the question of whether photography was an art form was definitively answered in the 1980s.⁵² Photography itself, and artists using photography like Cindy Sherman and Sherrie Levine, were situated “at the center of art discourse and postmodern practice” at that time.⁵³ Clearly today, the boundaries between traditional high art (painting, sculpture) and kitsch (comics, camp, illustrations, tattoo imagery etc.) have collapsed. However, unlike artists who work in other media, many fine art photographers still maintain distinctions between photographic work that they show in contemporary art galleries and work that they produce for commercial clients.

Since the mid nineteenth century, images of pets have provided rich opportunities for the sale of commercial photographs. From the 1880s to the 1940s, millions of commercial images of pets were sold around the world,⁵⁴ and pets continue to be used as icons for the advertising media. Because pets are so readily associated with commercial imagery, the stigma attached to pet imagery has been difficult to shake. In spite of or because of their commercial appeal, however, pets *can* provide a ready point of entrée into the contemporary art world.

The highly successful photography show *Pet Project* ran from December 8, 2006 to February 24, 2007 at the Australian Centre for Photography (ACP), in Sydney,

⁵² Terry Barrett, 174.

⁵³ Terry Barrett, 176.

⁵⁴ See chapter 5 for elaboration.

Australia.⁵⁵ Its subject matter was the photographic depiction of companion animals by contemporary artists. When asked whether she had encountered prejudice in the course of initiating the show, curator Bec Dean replied that she had received some initial criticism for being “a bit populist.”⁵⁶ Dean deliberately situated Yvonne Doherty and Justin Spiers’ *Pet Photo Booth*, one of the more overtly “kitsch” pieces in the show, in the gallery window to attract spectators. Once viewers had entered the gallery, though, they soon encountered what she described as the “darker” work in the show: images by Roger Ballen and other artists exploring themes of isolation and loneliness. Many times, spectators were drawn into the space by the opportunity to have their pets photographed in the photo booth before they even realized they were in an art gallery. According to Dean, the Centre successfully reached out to many members of the immediate community who would not ordinarily visit a contemporary art forum like the ACP.

Sydney-based Stills Gallery specializes in “contemporary photographic and multimedia art”⁵⁷ and represents several of the artists whose work was shown in the *Pet Project* show. When asked her opinion about whether she felt that stigmas against photographic subject matter like animals and children still function, Gallery Director Bronwyn Rennex commented that she had been familiar with those injunctions when she was in art school, but that they no longer hold today.⁵⁸ According to Rennex, the way an

⁵⁵ Australian Centre for Photography website, past exhibitions: *Pet Project*, 16 July 2007 <http://www.acp.org.au/exhibitions/2006/pet_project.php>.

⁵⁶ Bec Dean, interview, 28 June 2007.

⁵⁷ Stills Gallery website, 16 July 2007 <<http://www.stillsgallery.com.au/gallery/>>.

⁵⁸ Bronwyn Rennex, interview, 29 June 2007.

artist handles the subject matter, not the subject matter itself, is what matters in her consideration of the work. She was also quick to point out that there are clear limits. For example, she doesn't want to see an artist's "holiday snaps."

University of the Arts, Berlin, Art History Professor Jessica Ullrich presents a different story. Ullrich writes and curates about the representation of animals and the natural world in contemporary art. When asked whether stigmas still operate in the discussion of animals, pets in specific, in the contemporary arts, Ullrich answered that, particularly in Germany, the prejudice extends not just to pets or animals in art, but to animal subject matter in the whole of academia.⁵⁹

The practice of dismissing or demeaning content based on its association with pet animals is not unique to the field of art history. In the preface to *In the Company of Animals*, published in 1986, James Serpell discusses a similar prejudice in the field of zoology. He talks about his surprise when, as a graduate student, he found almost no relevant research on the subject of Western pet keeping, despite its obvious popularity and the financial resources spent maintaining companion animals. His deductions about the dearth of information echo Baker and Leach's assertions. "Pet-keeping, I soon discovered, is a subject encircled by a great deal of prejudice and misunderstanding. The exact nature of these prejudices varies from person to person, but all of them essentially boil down to a vague notion that there is something strange, perverse or wasteful about displaying sentimental affection for animals."⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Jessica Ullrich, personal conversation, 5 July 2007, Animals and Society Conference, Tasmania, Australia.

⁶⁰ James Serpell, *In the Company of Animals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) xiv.

In 1976, British art historian John Berger wrote an important essay on the representation of animals in popular culture, “Why Look at Animals.” In the essay, Berger briefly traces the history of representation of animals, speaking movingly about their marginalization by humans. However, despite his compassion toward other animals, he still maintains the attitude of suspicion toward pets to which Serpell alludes. While Berger acknowledges that “animals offer man a companionship...companionship offered to the loneliness of man as a species,” he also says that pets become transformed into “creatures of their owner’s way of life.”⁶¹ Berger continues, “in this relationship the autonomy of both parties has been lost...the parallelism of their separate lives has been destroyed.”⁶²

Despite this critical taboo, pet keeping is at an all time high today. According to an American Pet Products Manufacturers Association 2003-04 survey, 62 percent of households in the United States contain at least one pet.⁶³ As contemporary fine art subject matter, pets teeter on a curious ledge. Our familiarity with and love for them can cause us to embrace them privately, while simultaneously distancing our feelings for them publicly. Their accessibility and the sentiment and nostalgia we associate with them can make our involvement with our pets somewhat shameful. The postmodern artists considered here have sidestepped this taboo by “normalizing” their relationships with the

⁶¹ John Berger, 4, 12.

⁶² John Berger, 13.

⁶³ Katherine C. Grier, Pets in America (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006) 9.

animals they photograph. They relate to them outside of the bounds of the typical dominant/submissive, owner/pet affiliations.

CHAPTER 3

Animal Studies: A New Discourse and Emerging Academic Discipline

Our political project is the creation of many forms of shared space. It will not be an easy task. Animals may be the last group to be brought into the circle of morality and subjectivity; no other group has been admitted without bloodshed and strife.

Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel⁶⁴

Concurrent with the rise in the use of animal imagery by contemporary artists since the 1970s has been the emergence of a burgeoning academic field called Animal Studies. The field is a cross-disciplinary endeavor consisting of scholars and scientists from areas as diverse as veterinary medicine, history, art history, philosophy, anthropology, education, disaster management, psychology and sociology. The practitioners are linked by their interest in a growing array of animal issues. These issues concern human-animal interactions and animal-animal interactions in the home, hospitals, educational facilities, the workplace, rural settings and in the wild. The emergence of the field of Animal Studies has been driven by growing concern about a plethora of ethical crises regarding our larger societal responsibilities to animals in a variety of situations-- the environment, factory farms, the slaughterhouse, medical laboratories, zoos and animal shelters-- as well as issues concerning service animals, domesticated animals, pets and feral populations. More recently, representations of animals in popular culture, literature and the fine arts are being considered important indicators of societal attitudes toward animals, and a growing number of scholars in the humanities have turned their attention to animal subject matter. Since the 1970s, several key philosophers have considered the moral implications of our classification of animals,

⁶⁴ Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel, xii.

but their writings on this topic were often viewed as singular pieces from their oeuvres. Their ideas are now being examined as a significant body of work about an important issue. Edited volumes of primary and secondary source materials concerning the animal issue are available for use as textbooks, and new volumes of original thought continue to be issued. Literature in all aspects of this new field of Animal Studies is being published at an astonishingly robust rate, indicating the current level of interest in these new ideas.⁶⁵

Seldom does a new field of academic study have its inception at one point of origin and Animal Studies is no exception. Since the early 1990s, several diverse interests coalesced and have been formalized by the international academic community into a new discipline called Animal Studies. However, its origins reach back into the 1970s, as do those of many of the other disciplines, (e.g. Womens Studies and Ethnic Studies) which are now regarded as working from a postmodern foundation. Animal Studies draws from the animal rights movement, from philosophical interest in “the animal other,” along with renewed interest in the 1970s in scientific, sociological and psychological research about the human-animal bond. In his foreword to Peter Steeves’ *Animal Others*, the renowned animal activist and writer Tom Regan credits the introduction of “the animal question” into the philosophical dialog with the publication of a 1973 literary review in the New York Review of Books dealing with “the moral status of nonhuman animals” by the now legendary animal rights philosopher Peter Singer.⁶⁶ The public response to the review

⁶⁵ Animal Studies Group, *Killing Animals* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Jonathan Balcombe, *Pleasurable Kingdom: Animals and the Nature of Feeling Good* (London: Macmillan, 2006); Marc Bekoff, *The Emotional Lives of Animals* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2007); Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald, *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classic and Contemporary Writings* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).

⁶⁶ Tom Regan, xi.

was so overwhelming that the editors asked Singer to write his own book on the subject. In 1975 *Animal Liberation* was published and according to Regan, it resulted in “an outpouring of focused scholarship, unique to the discipline’s history.”⁶⁷

The “animal question” centers around whether animals other than humans are “morally considerable,” and Regan says that what is noteworthy is not the myriad answers that have been posited to answer that question but “the *centrality* ‘the animal question’ has come to have in contemporary analytic moral and political philosophy [emphasis his].”⁶⁸ Regan continues by listing the influential philosophers who have contributed their thoughts to “the animal question” in recent years, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-François Lyotard and Jacques Derrida being among them.⁶⁹ Philosophers Hélène Cixous, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have also produced significant works about animals.⁷⁰ The outpouring of philosophical interest continues today. Steeves’ *Animal Others* is but one entry on an Amazon.com “Listmania!” list called *Animals in Theory* which lists some twenty-five recent publications on the subject.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Tom Regan, xi.

⁶⁸ Tom Regan, xii.

⁶⁹ Tom Regan, xiii.

⁷⁰ See Peter Atterton and Matthew Calarco, eds. *Animal Philosophy: Ethics and Identity* (London: Continuum, 2004) for a collection of philosophical works on animal subject matter.

⁷¹ Amazon.com, Listmania! 27 May 2007
<http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_ss_gw/104-7037089-9415938?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=animals+in+theory&Go.x=0&Go.y=0&Go=Go>.

In the early 1990s several associations formed to support the emerging research in Animal Studies. The organization PSYETA or Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (which has since reformed into the Society and Animals Forum) was formed in 1981 with a mission to “work with social scientists, mental health providers and other animal protection organizations to reduce the suffering and exploitation of both human and nonhuman animals.”⁷² In 1993 they began publishing *Society and Animals: Journal of Human-Animal Studies*. Their mission statement reads:

Society & Animals is at the forefront of the emerging multi-disciplinary field of Human-Animal Studies, which explores the ways in which nonhuman animals figure in human lives. The journal publishes studies concerning experiences of nonhuman animals from psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science, and other social sciences and history, literary criticism, and other disciplines of the humanities.⁷³

The International Society for Anthrozoology (ISAZ) was formed in 1991 and began publishing *Anthrozoös*, a peer-reviewed publication. ISAZ’s primary goal is to support research in the area of human-animal studies. This is from their website:

Dramatic changes in people's attitudes towards animals and their treatment have occurred in the last 20-30 years. In almost every sphere of animals use - pet keeping, farming, research, conservation, zoos, ecotourism, hunting, and veterinary medicine - people are re-examining and re-evaluating their relationships with animals and the natural world. This process has, in turn, stimulated a growing scientific and scholarly interest in the new field of Anthrozoology: the study of the interactions between human and non-human animals.⁷⁴

⁷² Society and Animals Forum, 2 May 2007 <<http://www.psyeta.org/sa/>>.

⁷³ Society and Animals Forum, 2 May 2007 <<http://www.psyeta.org/sa/>>.

⁷⁴ International Society for Anthrozoology, 2 May 2007 <<http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/CCAB/isaz.htm>>.

While these organizations and publications initially focused on the social and natural sciences, in their introductions to the first issue of *Society and Animals: Journal of Human-Animal Studies* in 1993, both editor Kenneth Shapiro and assistant editor Arnold Arluke mention the need for more attention to be paid to the representation of animals in popular culture and literature.⁷⁵

Steve Baker published *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity and Representation* in 1993. This volume is one of the first in-depth studies of the importance of representation of animals in contemporary culture. It helped usher in an aspect of study, which is now considered integral to the field of Animal Studies: the visual representation of animals. In the introduction to the 2001 edition of the book, Baker comments on the growth of the field of Animal Studies and the gradual recognition of the importance of animal imagery. “Animal Studies, which began to develop and flourish under that name in the United States in the early 1990’s...(as a subfield of the social sciences and, in a sense, as the academic arm of the animal rights movement), has now grown internationally and is also increasingly influential within the humanities.”⁷⁶ Baker’s 1993 edition of *Picturing the Beast* was published on the eve of the current resurgence in the use by contemporary artists of not only animal imagery, but also live animals and animal bodies (in fragments, taxidermied or otherwise) in their work, which first became

⁷⁵ Kenneth J. Shapiro, “Editor’s Introduction to *Society and Animals*,” *Society and Animals*, 1 no. 1 (1993), 28 November 2004 <<http://www.psyets.org/sa/sa1.1/shapiro.html>>. Arnold Arluke, “Associate Editor’s Introduction: Bringing Animals into Social Scientific Research,” *Society and Animals*, 1 no. 1 (1993), 28 November 2004 <<http://www.psyets.org/sa/sa1.1/shapiro.html>>.

⁷⁶ Steve Baker, *Picturing the Beast* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001) xxxii.

apparent in the early 1990s. Today, Baker has moved away from the study of the depiction of animals in popular and media culture and concentrates his efforts on the implications of the practices of contemporary artists. In 2001, he wrote, “If contemporary art now seems more relevant to the project of *Picturing the Beast* than it did in the early 1990s it is principally because, in one way or another, so many artists have taken to using live animals in their work.”⁷⁷ Baker talks about the change in acceptance of the idea that animal representations are indicative of societal attitudes toward live animals:

In the mid-1980s I spoke at a conference in Oxford called “Animal Images of Sex, Race, and Class”... When briefly, at the end of my paper, I suggested that animal representations may indirectly reveal something about how a culture regards, and thus treats living animals, the suggestion was considered, to be frank, bizarre. Fifteen years later, at the international conference called “Representing Animals”... many speakers took for granted that the “real” and the representational can no longer be regarded as conveniently distinct realms.⁷⁸

In the introduction to his 2002 publication *Representing Animals*, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee History Professor Nigel Rothfels writes, “The idea that the way we talk or write about animals, photograph animals, think about animals, imagine animals—represent animals—is in some very important way deeply connected to our cultural environment, and that this cultural environment is rooted in a history, forms the fundamental basis of this volume.” In less than twenty years, Baker’s original suggestion has become a standard ideological construct.

The emergence of ideas and critical discourse from the field of Animal Studies has been compared to the reinvigorated sense of conscience which accompanied the formation of Womens Studies and Ethnic Studies departments in academic settings, and

⁷⁷ Steve Baker, *Picturing the Beast* xxvii.

⁷⁸ Steve Baker, *Picturing the Beast* xvii.

the concomitant writings and theories generated by practitioners in those fields.

According to Kenneth Shapiro: “The emergence of an academic field of study has paralleled each of the three recent progressive social movements (Civil Rights, Women’s and Environmental Movements). This strongly suggests the inevitability of an Animal Studies subfield that will parallel the Animal Rights Movement.”⁷⁹ He points out the ways that early feminist art historians were able to influence our view of the traditional art historical canon by reincorporating previously overlooked female artists:

In addition to providing substantive information, these cross-discipline fields also foster changes in sensibility and point of view, and the adoption of a critical interpretive stance. We can no longer read Jansen’s [sic] introduction to the history of art and fail to see that there are virtually no women artists represented there, or a history of the rise of a civilization without being aware of the fall of a habitat, or an experiment in maternal deprivation in primates without registering the consequences to the animals involved.⁸⁰

In her essay “A Left-Handed Blow: Writing the History of Animals,” animal scholar Erica Fudge again compares the work of the early feminists with the work of Animal Studies scholars: “Just as [feminist scholars] Alexander and Davin emphasize the formative role of the women’s liberation movement in the work of women’s history, so it is impossible not to link the recent emergence of histories of animals to the growing centrality of debates about animal rights and welfare.”⁸¹ Fudge acknowledges the complicated issues that the Animal Studies movement faces as it tries to reincorporate

⁷⁹ Kenneth J. Shapiro, “Editor’s Introduction to Society and Animals”.

⁸⁰ Kenneth J. Shapiro, “Editor’s Introduction to Society and Animals”.

⁸¹ Erica Fudge, “A Left-Handed Blow: Writing the History of Animals,” In Representing Animals, ed. Nigel Rothfels (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002) 4.

animals into our history, saying “ the history of animals is a necessary part of our reconceptualization of ourselves as human.”⁸²

Animal Studies continues to evolve as a discipline. In 1999, ethologist and research scientist Jonathan Balcombe wrote an article called “Animals and Society Courses: A Growing Trend in Post-Secondary Education,” in which he reported that “A survey of college courses addressing nonhuman animal ethics and welfare issues indicates that the presence of such courses has increased greatly since a prior survey was done in 1983” and that almost no courses of this nature had existed before 1978.⁸³ In 2002, for the tenth anniversary of the publication of *Society and Animals Journal*, Kenneth Shapiro assessed the field again in his article “The State of Human-Animal Studies: Solid, at the Margin!”⁸⁴ Shapiro asked key players in the field to assess the contributions of their disciplines to the field of Animal Studies. Reviewing their evaluations he concluded that their assessments were not as optimistic as he had hoped.⁸⁵ However, on the positive side, he noted that many gains had been made in the publishing field. He concluded that the field of Human Animal Studies (HAS) would face critical decisions about whether it wanted to develop as a distinct academic department or whether its ideas should be assimilated into extant academic disciplines. While the

⁸² Erica Fudge, 5.

⁸³ Jonathan Balcombe, “Animals and Society Courses: A Growing Trend in Post-Secondary Education,” *Society and Animals*, 7 no. 3 (1999), 17 May 2007 <<http://www.psyeta.org/sa/sa7.3/Balcombe.shtml>>.

⁸⁴ Kenneth J. Shapiro, “The State of Human-Animal Studies: Solid, at the Margin!” *Society and Animals*, 10 no. 4 (2002), 17 May 2007 <<http://www.psyeta.org/sa/sa10.4/shapiro.shtml>>.

⁸⁵ Kenneth J. Shapiro, “The State of Human-Animal Studies: Solid, at the Margin!”

outcome did not match Shapiro's positive hopes for the field, it is possible to see where the ideas surrounding Animal Studies have had an impact on the academic playing field.

Although Shapiro mentions history and other non-social sciences specifically as areas without significant impact for Animal Studies, the curriculum has been positively affected in these areas at schools where faculty committed to animal subjects have had an impact.⁸⁶ The University of Milwaukee at Wisconsin's Dr. Helena Pycior teaches a freshman history seminar entitled: *Man's Best Friend: Human-Animal Relations in History*.⁸⁷ Susan McHugh, a Literature Professor and author of the provocative book *Dog*,⁸⁸ teaches a course called *Animals, Literature, and Culture* at the University of New England.⁸⁹ In many cases, these courses emphasize some aspect of animal life or production that would have been previously overlooked or invisible. For instance, an art history course might not only look at the representation of animals throughout history, but also acknowledge that animals' lives touch art history in myriad ways: everything from the vellum that medieval monks painted on, the brushes they used to paint with as well as the eggs used for the production of albumen photographs all come from animal bodies.

Other organizations have recognized the potential power of college coursework dedicated to the ethical consideration of animals. The Center for Respect of Life and

⁸⁶ Kenneth J. Shapiro, "The State of Human-Animal Studies: Solid, at the Margin!"

⁸⁷ University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Fall 2006 schedule of classes, 16 May 2007 <<http://www.uwm.edu/schedule/Fall2006/HIST.html>>.

⁸⁸ Susan McHugh, *Dog* (London: Reaktion, 2004).

⁸⁹ Susan McHugh website, 14 May 2007 <http://faculty.une.edu/cas/smchugh/courses_index.html>.

Environment maintains a website listing of Animal Studies-related college courses in the United States, and each year they recognize innovation in these courses with an award program.⁹⁰ The field of Animal Studies is also involved in the current growth of on-line learning. The University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work offers an on-line certificate in “Animals and Human Health: Animal-Assisted Therapy, Activities and Learning.”⁹¹ Cambridge e-Learning Institute offers an on-line certificate in animal ethics starting this year, which covers concepts of ethical reasoning and rights, animal rights, as well as animal capacities, abilities and moral agency.⁹²

In 2005, I attended a conference in Cologne, Germany, entitled *Animals in History* that was sponsored by the German Historical Institute. There was a vibrant discussion about the nature of the discipline, which echoed the conclusions that Kenneth Shapiro reached in his 2002 article.⁹³ Some conference attendees advocated for the continuation of its status as an inter- or cross-disciplinary department, valuing the sense of scholarly freedom and camaraderie that is gained by having a more fluid system than a traditional rigid academic department. Others bemoaned the lack of monetary and administrative support that accompanies this status. These questions will have to be addressed on university campuses across the country as Animal Studies programs move from being a collection of courses offered in multiple departments to consolidating their

⁹⁰ Center for Respect of Life and Environment Website, 21 May 2007 <http://www.crle.org/prog_courses_main.asp>.

⁹¹ *Anthrozoös*, 18 (4) 2005, 430.

⁹² Cambridge E-Learning Website, 22 May 2007 <<http://www.cambridge-elearning.com/list/AnimalEthics.htm>>.

⁹³ Kenneth J. Shapiro, “The State of Human-Animal Studies: Solid, at the Margin!”

identities into fully integrated academic programs employing their own professors and offering their own degrees.

CHAPTER 4

Images of Animals: The Problem of Representation and the Question of Agency

The animal seems, in effect, to be philosophically unthinkable, and visually unrepresentable.

Steve Baker⁹⁴

The Problem of Representation

Animal Studies has developed from being a discipline primarily concerned with the natural and social sciences to one which acknowledges the importance of the representation of animals in our culture. In 2001, the journal *Society and Animals* published a special issue entitled “Animals, Representation and Reality.”⁹⁵ In his introduction, guest editor Steve Baker discusses several key points vis-à-vis the representation of animals in popular culture.⁹⁶ Baker argues that postmodernism itself has thrown into question the idea of the “real” and our ability to perceive and represent it. In talking about a number of new titles being published at the time, all dealing with representations of animals, Baker states, “Books such as these acknowledge the extent to which human understanding of animals is shaped by representations rather than by direct experience of them. In the language of scientific studies and in the structure of museum

⁹⁴ Steve Baker, Postmodern Animal 190.

⁹⁵ Animals, Representation, and Reality, *Society & Animals*, 9 no. 3 (2001), 10 May 2007 <<http://www.psyeta.org/sa/sa9.3>>.

⁹⁶ Steve Baker, “Guest Editor’s Introduction,” Animals, Representation, and Reality, *Society & Animals*, 9 no. 3 (2001), 10 May 2007 <<http://www.psyeta.org/sa/sa9.3/baker.shtml>>.

and zoo displays, just as much as in the more obvious examples of art, film, literature, and the mass media, many different forms of representation are employed.”⁹⁷

In their book *Regarding Animals*, sociologists and ethologists Arnold Arluke and Clinton Sanders acknowledge that although animals are physical and biological entities, once they come into contact with humans we construct a social identity for the animal based solely on our understanding of them. Human understanding of animals has less to do with any inherent quality in the animal than it does with our own perceptions of the animal.⁹⁸ For scholars and artists concerned with articulating a new way of relating to animals this introduces a vicious circle into their effort: how to conceive of animals as their own beings if we are never able to see them except in relationship to ourselves? The problem with trying to understand the “real” or actual animal is exacerbated by our extensive contact with mediated representations of animals. Opportunities for experiencing real animals have drastically shrunk since the industrial revolution,⁹⁹ and representations have largely become the standard for our contact with animals. In his book *Electric Animal*, Film and Visual Studies Professor Akira Mizuta Lippit postulates that as actual wildlife is disappearing from the natural habitat, it is being replaced for the viewer by images of wildlife in technological media such as film. Western city dwellers encounter animals primarily as pets, “r-selected species,”¹⁰⁰ or as products for

⁹⁷ Steve Baker, “Guest Editor’s Introduction.”

⁹⁸ Arnold Arluke and Clinton R. Sanders, *Regarding Animals* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996) 9.

⁹⁹ John Berger, 1.

¹⁰⁰ Opportunistic species who have taken over habitats in urban areas. “R-selected species are highly opportunistic. They can rush in, they are highly mobile, they are adaptable, and

consumption. The vast majority of meat-consuming humans no longer have any degree of knowledge about the lives of the animals that they eat or the industry that produces them.¹⁰¹ The growth of cities and the concomitant shrinking of wild habitats has pushed animals into increasingly smaller areas.¹⁰² Because of this, city dwellers' brief and unusual encounters with wild animals (either on home territory, at zoos, wild animal parks or during other tourist encounters) can take on a high degree of unreality or spectacle. Other rare opportunities for actual experiences of the "wild" are also fraught for many by the underlying guilt that goes along with the knowledge of species extinction and environment destruction.¹⁰³ Thus, as Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Social Policy at London's Roehampton Institute Garry Marvin cautions, "Although a living animal never is merely or solely a representation; the animal is, in the moment of our encounter, always a social and cultural animal. There is no social or cultural platform on which we can stand to see an animal as that animal really is."¹⁰⁴

Increasingly the film industry requires animal bodies that can be easily bent to satisfy not only intricate action and script demands but also an ever more visually savvy

they can rapidly reproduce. Some examples of these r-selected species are the common rat, cockroach, the house sparrow, and, finally, plants we choose to call 'weeds.'" Mark Dion and Alexis Rockman, eds. Concrete Jungle. (New York: Juno Books, 1996) 42.

¹⁰¹ Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel, 20, 22.

¹⁰² Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel, 2, 4-5.

¹⁰³ Akira Mizuta Lippit, Electric Animal: Towards a Rhetoric of Wildlife (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) 1.

¹⁰⁴ Garry Marvin, "Guest Editor's Introduction: Seeing, Looking, Watching, Observing Nonhuman Animals." Society and Animals 13 no. 1 (2005), 16 May 2007 <http://www.psyeta.org/sa/sa13.1/garry_marvin.pdf>. Additionally see Baker, Lippit.

audience. Actual animal bodies can no longer accommodate these needs.¹⁰⁵ In her presentation at the *Representing Animals* conference, Jane Desmond discussed the use of animatronics in popular culture: “There is a threshold of realism (constantly rising) that demands that animals look very ‘real’ in order to facilitate their performance of nonrealistic emotive behaviors. These articulate bodies replicate animal movement while at the same time often falsifying it- that is, providing visions of anatomically correct pigs who sing or dogs who weep.”¹⁰⁶

The disappearance of wild animals and the replacement of the “real” animals by mediated ones have rapidly increased since the 1970s and have amplified the discussion of the place of animal representations in contemporary culture. However, there is another vital point to be discussed concerning the “reality” of animal representations. Not only is the question how much of our experience of animals is based on encounters with actual animals and not mediated ones, but also, can the images we create, even if based on encounters with actual animals, *ever* accurately reflect the experience of the animals that they represent? Steve Baker again: “[R]epresentation is never straightforward or ‘transparent.’ The representation, in other words, does not and cannot simply represent the ‘real’ animal. This, as will soon become clear, is where matters start to get really heated.”¹⁰⁷ Baker is acknowledging what is now a commonly discussed principle of animal representation: it is difficult (if not impossible) for humans to view images of

¹⁰⁵ Steve Baker, “Guest Editor’s Introduction.”

¹⁰⁶ As quoted in Steve Baker, “Guest Editor’s Introduction.”

¹⁰⁷ Steve Baker, “Guest Editor’s Introduction.”

animals without projecting themselves into the subject's "shoes." In other words, it *is* always all about us.

Much has been written about our unending need to anthropomorphize animals, i.e., our inability to conceive of animals except from our own point-of-view. Since they lack the capacity for language, animals have become pawns for the projection of our own ideas. Effectively mute, they are unable to refute or reject our many and varied beliefs and feelings about their natures. James Serpell defines anthropomorphism as the "attribution of human mental states (thoughts, feelings, motivations and beliefs) to nonhuman animals," and says that it "is an almost universal trait among companion animal caretakers (pet owners)."¹⁰⁸ Serpell agrees with anthropologist Steven Mithen who argues that without our ability to anthropomorphize, humans would not have initially developed relationships with either domesticated or pet animals.¹⁰⁹ So it seems that our need to anthropomorphize is hard wired, especially into our relationships with pets and other domesticated animals. Kenneth Shapiro ultimately questions whether we will ever be able to overcome this tendency to attribute meaning onto animals and peel back the layers we have projected, or whether in the end these meanings comprise the relationship itself.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ James Serpell, "Anthropomorphism and Anthropomorphic Selection."

¹⁰⁹ James Serpell, "Anthropomorphism and Anthropomorphic Selection."

¹¹⁰ Kenneth J. Shapiro, "The State of Human-Animal Studies: Solid, at the Margin!"

The Question of Agency

Anthropomorphism is often defined as the error of attributing human mental characteristics to nonhuman organisms; people are said to fall into this error because they are sentimental and uncritical. It is a revealing fact about current scientific culture that the opposite mistake—of mistakenly refusing to attribute human mental characteristics to nonhuman organisms—does not have a ready name.

Elliott Sober¹¹¹

Complicating the debate about anthropomorphism is another pressing question about the representation of animals. Just what capacity for emotion, self-awareness, sentience and sapience do animals have? This lynchpin question locates animals' moral value in relation to that of humans, and thus determines the way we feel obligated to treat them. In an essay entitled "Dog" from his book *Why People Photograph*, American landscape photographer Robert Adams tries to explain the appeal of dogs in photographs and of dogs themselves. This appeal exists despite the fact that for Adams, dogs don't possess agency or choice-making skills because they lack our capacity for abstract thinking. Thus, Adams espouses a typical view of dogs: We love things about them, they serve us, but *really* animals aren't like us.¹¹²

In his influential and often-quoted essay "Why Look at Animals," John Berger situates the point of our separation from animals in terms of the lack of language.¹¹³

Berger contemplates an animal and man gazing at each other.

¹¹¹ Elliott Sober, "Comparative Psychology Meets Evolutionary Biology" In *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman, eds. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) 85.

¹¹² Robert Adams, "Dogs," In *Why People Photograph* (New York: Aperture, 1994) 50.

¹¹³ John Berger, 3-4.

“The relationship may become cleared by comparing the look of an animal with the look of another man. Between two men the abysses are, in principle, bridged by language...Language allows men to reckon with each other as with themselves...But always its [the animal’s] lack of common language, its silence, guarantees its distance, its distinctness, its exclusion from and of man.”¹¹⁴

Akira Mizuta Lippit also discusses the great importance of the role of language in establishing human subjectivity. He argues that it goes beyond its capacity as a mere tool for communication and actually defines us as subjects.¹¹⁵ Tom Regan addresses a question that forms a particular point of tension for animal scholars concerned with articulating animal subjectivity. Can animals have “beliefs and desires” if they can’t communicate via language and if they do, how can we ever understand them?¹¹⁶

In the face of global concern about their plight, many scholars despair of our ability to change our practices towards animals if we are unable to envision them except from our own one-sided perspective. Along with the acknowledgement of the seemingly ubiquitous human need to anthropomorphize animals, there has been renewed conversation about the nature of an animal’s subjectivity. Wolch and Emel discuss the changing views of animal subjectivity and agency in the field of geography:

The emergence of new research in social theory and cultural studies led to a profound rethinking of culture and especially a rethinking of subjectivity. Along with many natural scientists, geographers from various intellectual traditions—political economy, post-structuralism, feminism, and science studies—began arguing for animal subjectivity and the need to unpack the “black box” of Nature to enliven understandings of the world. In particular, the focus was animals' role

¹¹⁴ John Berger, 3-4.

¹¹⁵ Akira Mizuta Lippit, 14.

¹¹⁶ Tom Regan, xii.

in the social construction of culture and individual human subjects, the nature of animal subjectivity, and agency itself.¹¹⁷

Native peoples were once thought to lack personal agency or the ability to be self-directed or self-reflexive because they did not possess written language.¹¹⁸ It is easy to laugh at the fallacy of such beliefs today, and yet many animal scholars believe that we are treating animals in the same way we used to consider “primitive” cultures. In the section of her book *Pets in America: A History* entitled “Why Pets Matter,” Material Culture Studies Professor Kathleen Grier says:

Social historians have been concerned with recovering the stories of the “voiceless” members of our society for decades. Animals are indeed part of our communities, and they are profoundly voiceless, something Victorian advocates for animals emphasized repeatedly. Still they are, in their own small ways, the agents of their own lives. Their agency is often weak, especially when they face the power of human societies, but it is there nonetheless.

In his essay in *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, Philosophy Professor Elliot Sober examines the issue on the opposite end of the spectrum from anthropomorphism: “anthropodenial” or our refusal to attribute certain characteristics to animals.¹¹⁹ He points out that many times people are perceived as weak and sentimental if they attribute mental states to their pets.¹²⁰ Sociologist Leslie Irvine addresses the question of the assumptions regarding subjectivity that research sociologists

¹¹⁷ Jody Emel, Chris Wilbert and Jennifer Wolch, “Animal Geographies,” *Society and Animals: Journal of Human-Animal Studies* 10 no. 4 (2002), 17 May 2007 <<http://www.psyeta.org/sa/sa10.4/wolch.shtml>>.

¹¹⁸ Glen Elder, Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel, “Place, Race and the Bounds of Humanity,” *Society and Animals: Journal of Human-Animal Studies* 6 no. 2 (1998), 23 July 2007 <<http://www.psyeta.org/sa/sa6.2/elder.html>>.

¹¹⁹ Elliott Sober, 85.

¹²⁰ Elliott Sober, 86.

continue to make in their work with animals. In her view, researchers' ambivalence to acknowledge an animal's subjective experience has to do more with the struggle to maintain their own anthropocentrism rather than with any lack of evidence to indicate that animals possess selfhood.¹²¹ She goes on to point out that animals' moral status, connected to their selfhood, is related to a number of important "mainstream" sociological concerns.¹²²

Questions of how much or how accurately we can ever know or portray the experience of animals and how much agency, subjectivity or moral value they possess are far from being resolved. Nonetheless, the contemporary artists whose recent work dealing with pets has been accepted in the fine art discourse are those who have circumvented the traditional stances of anthropomorphism and domination, and who have embraced a willingness to consider animals as beings with agency and resistance.

¹²¹ Leslie Irvine, "The question of animal selves: Implications for sociological knowledge and practice," Qualitative Sociology Review III, issue 1 (April 2007), 31 May 2007 <<http://www.qualitativesociologyreviewreview.org/ENG/volume6.php>>.

¹²² Leslie Irvine.

CHAPTER 5

The Modern Pet

My first picture was of the neighbor's dog, a friendly little animal who wagged his tail at the moment of exposure so that the result resembled a fan where there should have appeared a tail, which pleased me greatly.

Alvin Langdon Coburn¹²³

Pre-Modern Representations of Companion Animals

Although dogs and cats have been regarded differently in different times and cultures, their likenesses have been with us since early visual images. Dogs as “the most domesticated and favored of species” have been especially heavily represented throughout the history of art.¹²⁴ Images of dogs from the Bronze Age are found on walls, burial sites and illustrated scrolls in Europe, the Middle East and in North America.¹²⁵ During the Middle Ages, as breed dogs became the favored possessions of the patrons of artists-- the nobility and those in positions of religious power-- they became more and more visible in paintings and three dimensional works. Medieval hunting treaties featured images of privileged hunting dogs in large numbers, and they continued to be seen throughout the Renaissance and Baroque eras as “incidental background motifs, part of a hunting scene, religious, mythological, or allegorical composition, or beside their masters

¹²³ Alvin Langdon Coburn as quoted in *The Dog Observed: Photographs 1844 – 1983* by Ruth Silverman (New York: Knopf, 1984) ix.

¹²⁴ Edgar Peters Bowron, Carolyn Rose Rebbert, Robert Rosenblum and William Secord *Best in Show: The Dog in Art from the Renaissance to Today* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2006) 1.

¹²⁵ "dog." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 16 July 2007 <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-15457>>.

in portraits.”¹²⁶ (Fig. 16, 17) However, images of dogs have also “reflected a bewildering variety of complex and often contradictory symbols,” from fidelity to promiscuity, as companions of saints and as unclean harbingers of evil.¹²⁷ This ambivalence in our attitudes toward our animal companions certainly reflects our changing views of their sentience and sapience. Our endless need to see ourselves reflected in an animal is usually accompanied by our conflicting need to separate from them and to demarcate clear boundaries between “the human” and “the animal.”¹²⁸ Thus we see the conflicted Renaissance beliefs about the dog walking with both god and the devil mirrored in contemporary contradictions in the ways we treat our pet animals versus the animals we raise for food. They are beloved and cared for family members on the one hand, and treated with no regard to their sentience or moral value on the other.¹²⁹

Seventeenth century French philosopher René Descartes believed that animals could feel no more pain than an inanimate object. Similar views were reflected in the spread of the practice of vivisection in Europe,¹³⁰ and also in the portrayal of animals largely as possessions important only in relation to their owners. However, in his book *The Dog in Art: From Rococo to Postmodernism*, Robert Rosenblum demonstrates that images can become sites for the transmission of shifts in ideas about animals. He locates

¹²⁶ Edgar Peters Bowron, et al, 1-2.

¹²⁷ Edgar Peters Bowron, et al, 5-6.

¹²⁸ See Elliott Sober for a discussion of anthropomorphism and its opposite “anthropodenial.”

¹²⁹ Edgar Peters Bowron, et al, 5-6, Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel, 20, 22.

¹³⁰ "Descartes, René." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 20 July 2007 <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-43355>>.

“a pivotal change” in a painting shown at the 1753 Paris Salon. “Bitch Hound Nursing Her Puppies” was an unusual work from the oeuvre of Jean-Baptiste Oudry, an artist who had spent his career recording animal menageries and royal hunts. (Fig. 18) A mother dog nurses her six puppies in a stable, bathed in glowing morning sunlight. Enthusiastic viewers compared this lighting to that found in images featuring the Holy Family. Oudry’s “bitch” was referred to as “the mother” and seen as a “paragon of devotion.”¹³¹ Rosenblum argues that while Descartes’ views about animals still held sway, other voices were emerging in society, proclaiming that animals did display emotions and intelligence. Oudry created a powerful image through which contemporary viewers were able to take their own feelings about family and maternity, and situate them in an animal, providing a venue for the expression of their changing feelings about animals.

The Confluence of Pet-Keeping, Modern Art and Photography

European society experienced great changes-- generated by Enlightenment philosophy, the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution-- that led to the birth of modernism in the nineteenth century. During the last decades of the 1800s, pet-keeping, modern art and photography all became important hallmarks of this era. In years between Oudry’s painting and the invention of photography in 1839, the economy in Western Europe moved from a rural agricultural base to an urban industrial one, profoundly changing the daily relationship that urban dwellers had with animals. This relationship would continue to change even more radically with the second wave of the Industrial Revolution in the late 1880s. Engines replaced draught animals, wild animals became

¹³¹ Robert Rosenblum, The Dog in Art: From Rococo to Postmodernism (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1988) 17.

more rare, *abattoirs* began to move out of crowded cities to more secluded areas and urban residents had less and less contact with animals.¹³² Zoos grew in numbers and popularity and Europeans were inundated with images of animals.¹³³

As people had less contact with wild and work animals, their contact with pet animals began to increase. The middle class became more prosperous and the bourgeoisie was able to afford to keep non-working animals as pets. Pet ownership increased dramatically.¹³⁴ According to Kathleen Kete in her book *The Beast in the Boudoir*, “Bourgeois Parisians insistently associated petkeeping with modernity and with themselves...Parisian petkeeping restates in another mode the century’s central intellectual ideas—ideas about modernity expressed in literary and artistic representations and in ordinary nineteenth-century lives as well.”¹³⁵

In Europe of the 1800s, we see the genesis of what we regard as contemporary feelings about animals and their sentience. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was formed in 1824 with the philosophy “that animals had feelings different from us in degree rather than kind.”¹³⁶ The RSPCA lobbied for the passage of laws protecting domesticated animals, among them working dogs and farm animals.¹³⁷

¹³² See John Berger, 1, 9, 10-11 for a more complete discussion of the radical changes to the relationships between humans and animals that occurred during this time period.

¹³³ John Berger, 13, 20.

¹³⁴ Libby Hall, *Prince and Other Dogs II* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2002) 5.

¹³⁵ Kathleen Kete, *The Beast in the Boudoir: Petkeeping in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 3-4.

¹³⁶ Robert Rosenblum, 35.

¹³⁷ Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Online, 20 July 2007

The 1880s brought about a series of change in the ways that artists functioned in society. No longer were they patronized by large political organizations like the church and state, nor did their images function to reinforce the values of those institutions.¹³⁸ Their own “subjectivity” became the primary motivation for the output of their artwork, and their images were sold on the open market in commercial galleries.¹³⁹ Between 1850 and 1900, the realism of artists like Courbet and Manet lead to the birth of the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist movements.¹⁴⁰ By the early 1900s, artists associated with these movements were successfully enthroned as the venerated old guard. Successive groups of radical avant-garde artists united by style or ideology dominated the twentieth century art market.¹⁴¹

Photography was also a key trait of modernism. According to Mary Warner Marien, “There was no particular moment in the vast expansion and societal absorption of photography to mark the point at which it permanently altered the experience of

< <http://www.rspca.org.uk> >.

¹³⁸ "art, academy of." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 23 July 2007 <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9009656>>.

¹³⁹ "painting, Western." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 23 July 2007 <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-69593>>.

¹⁴⁰ "art criticism." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 31 July 2007 <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-236408>>.

¹⁴¹ "art criticism." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 28 July 2007 <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-236408>>.

modern life. Instead, the gathering momentum was expressed in multiple, interrelated technological developments during the 1880s...¹⁴²

Early Pet Photography

Photographers have been portraying pet animals since the 1840s. (Fig. 19) However, early photographic exposures often lasted several minutes, and if animals moved during the long exposures their images would appear blurred.¹⁴³ (Fig. 20) The popularity of companion animals as photographic subject matter rose dramatically as the time required to expose an image was shortened. We have relatively few images of pets taken with early processes like the daguerreotype (Fig. 21), but by the 1850s the comparatively inexpensive *carte-de-visite* process was developed.¹⁴⁴ Eight to twelve views were made on a single negative and the resulting print was cut into small images, which were popularly collected and used as calling cards. The *carte-de-visite* and the later cabinet card were overwhelmingly popular in Europe and the United States. Bourgeois families included pedigree pet animals as status symbols in their photographic portraits to emulate the painted portraits once available only to the aristocracy, thereby transferring visual conventions from portrait painting to portrait photography.¹⁴⁵ (Fig. 22) In the late 1880s the popularity of keeping dogs as pets and having their portraits made

¹⁴² Mary Warner Marien, Photography: A Cultural History (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002) 167.

¹⁴³ Raymond Merritt and Miles Barth, 24.

¹⁴⁴ Ruth Silverman, x.

¹⁴⁵ Raymond Merritt and Miles Barth, 25.

was fueled by the British Royal family-- Queen Victoria was an ardent fan (Fig. 23)-- and by celebrities of the time.¹⁴⁶

In 1872, Eadweard Muybridge began his famous multiple image series of humans and animals in motion. Muybridge photographed many dogs, including a large mastiff named Dread, whom he recorded in all stages of motion from walking to running.¹⁴⁷ (Fig. 24) Through his time-sequenced images, Muybridge sought scientific knowledge of motion that was beyond the capacity of human vision. His images were precursors to cinematic photography. By introducing the concept of motion over time into a static photograph, Muybridge's techniques have influenced the ways many later artists depict animals.

With the advent of cheaper, quicker photographic processes such as those used to produce photographic postcards in the early decades of the twentieth century, several genres of familiar imagery featuring pet animals came into existence.¹⁴⁸ Libby Hall has published two collections of postcard images of cats and dogs dating from about 1900 to 1940. In the introduction to her second book, *Postcard Cats*, she and co-author Tom Phillips point out that after the turn of the century, faster, cheaper film and cameras produced a democratic outpouring of images of men, women and children with their pets. Family cats do not travel as easily as family dogs and so were not often seen in studio portraits. However they began to be included in family portraits taken in the backyards of

¹⁴⁶ Libby Hall, *Prince and Other Dogs* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2000) 2.

¹⁴⁷ Robert Rosenblum, 51.

¹⁴⁸ Libby Hall and Tom Phillips, *Postcard Cats* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005) 6.

homes where the cats lived and were comfortable. (Fig. 25) Photographers often kept cats in their studios to be used as props or featured in setup studio portraits.¹⁴⁹

In addition to pet portraits, Hall and Phillips include a number of categories of popular commercially produced postcard images that were sold in the early 1900s. Variations on several of these genre images—kittens playing, women pictured in their homes with cats, and beautifully coiffed girls and young women conflated with elegant felines (mimicking Salon oil paintings)¹⁵⁰—remain standard tropes in the advertising industry today. (Fig. 26, 27, 28) Often a series of several poses were produced at one time, and frequently the images were hand colored or tinted by low paid female labor.¹⁵¹ (Figs. 29, 30) The cat became reified as a metaphor for the woman’s place in the home, as well as her sexuality. Carolee Schneemann interrogates this linkage in her artwork of the 1970s involving her cats Kitsch and Vesper. (See chapter 6.)

During the two World Wars, armies relied on thousands of working dogs as messengers, sentries, mine detectors and cart dogs.¹⁵² After World War I, “[n]ewspapers, magazines, books, mass-produced postcards, and posters featuring photographs of the real-life ‘hero dogs’ sold out as fast as they could be produced.”¹⁵³ These images

¹⁴⁹ Libby Hall and Tom Phillips, 6.

¹⁵⁰ Libby Hall and Tom Phillips, 6.

¹⁵¹ Libby Hall and Tom Phillips, 6.

¹⁵² Libby Hall, *Postcard Dogs*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2004) 7.

¹⁵³ Raymond Merritt and Miles Barth, 144-45.

proclaimed the worth of self-improvement over “‘breeding’ or class affiliation.”¹⁵⁴ (Fig. 31)

Again animals were used to visually reinforce changing societal values about human economic or class standing. A vibrant torrent of commercial and amateur photographs marked photography’s assimilation into the popular culture of the first decades of the 1900s. Pets were included in myriad ways: in formal and casual portraits, as prized possessions and as humorous anthropomorphized stand-ins for people in tableaux taken by both professional and amateur photographers during this time. (Fig. 32, 33) Almost none of these images-- commercial or snapshot portraits or commercially available postcard images-- would be considered “fine art” photographs by the modernists of the twentieth century. However, contemporary conventions for the representation of pets in the fine arts evolved from these popular and commercial depictions.

Modernist Photography and the Modern Pet

Interestingly, in the *Postmodern Animal*, Steve Baker does not formulate a “modern” animal to stand in opposition to his postmodern animal, since modernist avant-garde artists had, by and large, eliminated the figure from their repertoire. He says, “The modern animal is thus the nineteenth-century animal (symbolic, sentimental), which has been made to disappear.”¹⁵⁵ There are many theories regarding the transition from representational to abstract art in the early years of the twentieth century. The changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution, the birth of photography and World War I

¹⁵⁴ Raymond Merritt and Miles Barth, 144.

¹⁵⁵ Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* 20-22.

certainly all contributed.¹⁵⁶ As the twentieth century progressed, the dominant tendencies in avant-garde modernism became more and more occupied with non-representational imagery. While not immune to the theoretical forces which shaped the modernist art movements of the 1950s and 60s, photography as a fine-art medium has, by virtue of its indexical relationship to the natural world,¹⁵⁷ charted a different course from the formal abstractions which predominated the painting and sculptural media of that time. Most modernist photographers continued to represent the natural world, emphasizing the development of a highly aestheticized, formal, personal style.

Despite their overwhelming success as popular photographic subject matter, pets have not enjoyed the same status in the fine art world. If “form, rather than subject,”¹⁵⁸ is a defining feature of a modernist photograph, then pet animals as subject matter pose a problem for the modernist photographer. It can be futile to expect viewers to ignore their natural neotenus¹⁵⁹ impulse and ask them to concentrate instead on the animal’s aesthetic or formal arrangement in the photograph. While many eschewed this topic, some modernist photographers did complete significant bodies of work concentrating on pet subject matter. In addition, dogs and cats have caught the passing fancy of numerous well-known photographers throughout the twentieth century. Artists from André Kertész

¹⁵⁶ "painting, Western." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 23 July 2007 <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-69593>>.

¹⁵⁷ For a discussion of photography’s indexical relationship to reality see Terry Barrett, 158-161.

¹⁵⁸ Terry Barrett, 184.

¹⁵⁹ See Steve Baker, *Picturing the Beast*, p. 181 for a discussion of our natural “aaah” or adult nurturing response to the physical shape of young children and animals.

to Diane Arbus have included pet animals in singular images throughout their oeuvres. (Fig. 34, 35)

There is a body, albeit a small one, of modernist photographic images of pet animals throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries. A finite set of visual tropes for photographing pet animals is visible in popular published collections of images of dogs and cats taken by fine art photographers.¹⁶⁰ One such trope is the tendency to anthropomorphize animals. Often these anthropomorphized animals add humor to the image. (Fig. 4, 5b, 6, 7a) Pet animals are also used as class markers, demarcating social status, and are imaged as possessions or luxury items. The mutability with which these animals act is remarkable. On the one hand, dogs might indicate middle class status. (Fig. 5a, 9) On the other, they stand in as indicators of gang violence (Fig. 43a, b) and in the image of Andy Warhol's dog take by the photographer Horst, as one among many luxury commodities. (Fig. 10)

Modernist photographers typically photograph with specific camera and film combinations to maintain consistency throughout the body of their work. They often use cumbersome “large format” or “view” cameras in order to produce photographic prints of great depth and beauty.¹⁶¹ Using these cameras makes spontaneity an almost impossible quality in a photograph; instead planning and coordination become the priority. The cameras must be set up on tripods, carefully focused and typically hold only one sheet of

¹⁶⁰ See Works Cited.

¹⁶¹ This practice has obviously changed dramatically with the advent of the digital age. According to Gordon Baldwin, Looking at Photographs: A Guide to Technical Terms (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1991) 83, a view camera is a term “applied to cameras meant for making relatively large-scale negatives, particularly of outdoor scenes.”

film, preventing the photographer from taking multiple shots at one time without reloading the camera.

Photographing with a view camera led to the development of a particular photographic style which emphasized great depth of field¹⁶² or sharpness of focus, tonal variety from dark to light with full range of grays, and clarity of the black and white photographic print. This aesthetic was exemplified by the work of photographers like Edward Weston and Ansel Adams who formed Group f/64 in 1932.¹⁶³ Exposure times for these artists were typically long, preventing them from effectively photographing subjects like animals who tend to move around impulsively, leaving a blur on the image. This *Life* Magazine review of Edward Weston's photographs reflects these technical difficulties: "Before he got interested in cats he used to feel that even a cow was too active for an ideal camera subject."¹⁶⁴

Imogen Cunningham's, *Two Callas*, c. 1929 (Fig. 47a) is an excellent example of the Group f/64 aesthetic. The subject matter itself (the flowers) is secondary in importance to what it can become under "special circumstances controlled by the photographer."¹⁶⁵ Cunningham transformed her flowers into a series of luminous, sensual curves, invoking the form of a woman's body. The desire of photographers like Weston to "reduc(e) a

¹⁶² The sharpness in the image of objects in front of and behind the focused distance falls off gradually. Within a certain range of object distances this sharpness loss is still comparatively unnoticeable. This range is the depth of field. "photography, technology of." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 4 Aug. 2007 <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-36465>>.

¹⁶³ Robert Hirsch, 245.

¹⁶⁴ Charis Wilson and Edward Weston, 331.

¹⁶⁵ Robert Hirsch, 247.

subject to its essential form”¹⁶⁶ regardless of whether it was a toilet or a bell pepper, is at odds with such emotionally loaded subject matter as pets or children. While the photographer struggles to liberate the aesthetic beauty of the subject, viewers instead continually reinscribe the animal in the photograph with their own knowledge of or desire for its dependent, tactile, cute, domestic, subjugated self.

In 1925, with the invention of the Leica camera, photographers were given another option for taking pictures, one which provided much more flexibility than the large format view camera. The Leica, made in Germany, is a “miniature” camera, using fast lenses, which allow the photographer to take pictures with short exposure times,¹⁶⁷ in effect “freezing” the motion of a subject. Since the Leica uses small 35 mm roll film, the photographer can take up to 36 images without having to reload the camera. The quintessential rule in photography is that every technical advantage gained is also matched by a loss. Photographers using the Leica and similar 35 mm cameras gained speed, flexibility and the ability to take pictures quickly and surreptitiously, indoors and out, without a tripod. They gave up the incredible pictorial quality of the large format negative.

The photojournalist Henri Cartier-Bresson became instrumental in defining a branch of modernism that, starting in the 1930s, ran along side of the large format aesthetic popularized by Weston and Adams. Cartier-Bresson developed a theory that a “decisive moment” occurs which an intuitive photographer can wait for and capture on film. He

¹⁶⁶ Robert Hirsch, 245.

¹⁶⁷ "photography, history of." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 4 Aug. 2007 <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-252870>>.

looked for “the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as a precise organization of forms which gave that event its proper expression.”¹⁶⁸ For Cartier-Bresson and other modernist small-camera proponents, photography became about finding rather than staging the scene in front of the camera. The photographer formally composed the elements in that scene through the camera’s lens, and printed the negative without cropping or adjusting it after it had been taken.¹⁶⁹ For artists with a photojournalistic or “street” aesthetic, animals became much more useful subject matter than for the large format photographer. Cartier-Bresson looked for “alliteration and rhyme...juxtapositions of coincidence and disparity...in real-life situations.”¹⁷⁰ An animal adds a gesture or an element of synchronicity. They act as jesters for the visual amusement of the viewer; while the photographer still maintains authorial control over the animals and their meaning in the photograph. The street photographer Garry Winogrand makes use of animals in this manner in *The Animals*,¹⁷¹ published in 1969.

Modernism and Postmodernism: A Comparison

In his book *Criticizing Photographs*, Terry Barrett discusses several key differences between modern and postmodern points of view in the authorship of a

¹⁶⁸ Henri Cartier-Bresson as quoted in Robert Hirsch, p. 305.

¹⁶⁹ Robert Hirsch, 305.

¹⁷⁰ Robert Hirsch, 305.

¹⁷¹ Garry Winogrand, *The Animals*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2004, 1969).

photograph.¹⁷² For the modernists, a work of photography “is singular, speaking in one voice, that of the author or maker, which leads the reader to look for one meaning, *presumed to be the author’s* [emphasis mine].”¹⁷³ Postmodernists acknowledge the multiplicity of influences that contribute to the production of any work of art, or “text,” and believe that it is not possible for a work of art to be perceived in the same way by every reader, consequently encouraging the reading of multiple meanings from a text.¹⁷⁴

Typically, modernist images are highly choreographed or staged, with an extreme eye to formal composition, rather than to depicting an animal’s natural actions. In the images, pets act, not as themselves, but to satisfy first the photographer’s and then the viewer’s visual desire. The work of modernist small camera or “street photographers” like Henri Cartier-Bresson or Elliott Erwitt claims to reveal meaning to the viewer by capturing moments at which significant events occur. Thus they tend to be proscriptive about the implications that they attribute to the animals in their images, and to claim authorship over the actions of the animals. The viewer, looking at a “decisive moment” image, (Fig. 7a) is more likely to say, “How did the photographer get the animal to do that?” than to exclaim about the skills of the animals themselves.

Because postmodernists interrogate the idea of singular authorship or subjectivity, they are more likely to value actions that animals initiate rather than expecting the animal to fit into a pre-visualized formal composition. For the postmodernists, a photograph “is not the product of a free and unique individual...but rather a field...in which many voices

¹⁷² Terry Barrett, 180-187.

¹⁷³ Terry Barrett, 181-82.

¹⁷⁴ Terry Barrett, 182.

speak.”¹⁷⁵ A postmodern image facilitates the formation of a space in which the viewer can acknowledge the animal’s contribution to the formation of the image and read the image in multiple ways, one of which might be from the viewpoint of the animal.

Modernist photography has a long history of valuing the photograph as a unique and precious object, in part to counteract the glut of cheaply produced, commercially available images. According to Terry Barrett, “Modernist prints are precious, signed, numbered and archivally processed.”¹⁷⁶ The postmodernists are much less likely to be concerned with the production of a standardized photographic product than are the modernists. Barrett quotes Michael Köhler on the postmodernists: “Technical finesse in the production of negatives and prints is allowed, but does not represent a binding standard for the quality of a piece of work.”¹⁷⁷

Many times, the postmodernists use comparatively small 35mm cameras or video cameras and handhold them when they photograph. They are far less concerned with rigid formal structure and the plane of focus in an image. The images can appear grainy and rough. Animals (and children) are notoriously difficult for photographers to work with because of the unpredictability of their actions, so the framing of an image is often random. In some situations, the artists are not able to direct the motions of the animals they are photographing. Instead they engage with the animals and accept the sometimes arbitrary quality of the images that they produce.

¹⁷⁵ Terry Barrett, 182.

¹⁷⁶ Terry Barrett, 184.

¹⁷⁷ Terry Barrett, 185.

The postmodern artists Carolee Schneemann and John Divola each take photographs without looking through the lens of the camera, and so focus and framing become difficult to control. Toward the end of Francis Alys film entitled *El Gringo*, he drops the camera in the dirt and the footage of the dogs he is photographing continues on for about a minute, out of his direct control as an artist. All of the footage Jana Sterbak uses in her video installation entitled *From here to there* was filmed by her Jack Russell terrier Stanley, through a tiny camera affixed to a harness on his back. (See chapter 6 for more expansive discussion of these artists.) Thus, accidents and random events become accepted and sought after elements in the postmodern aesthetic, while for the modernist photographer they would just be ignored as mistakes or considered bad shots.

The modernists, using the animals as aesthetic or formal elements or as metaphors for people in their images, often profess their love and admiration for the animals in introductory essays or on websites.¹⁷⁸ The postmodern artists, who have used animals in ways that validate their personal agency, are notoriously silent regarding the animals they photograph.¹⁷⁹

The Modernists

There have been several notable modernist photographers who have chosen to produce bodies of work devoted to companion animals. Jacques-Henri Lartigue began photographing in the early part of the twentieth century and his carefree, buoyant images of dogs in motion stood in stark contrast to the horrors of World War I. (Fig. 36) Soon

¹⁷⁸ See Elliott Erwitt, Keith Carter, Marc Joseph. Martha Casanave, whose work most clearly straddles the modern/postmodern divide, speaks incredibly movingly about her relationship with her dog.

¹⁷⁹ See Francis Alys, Jana Sterbak, John Divola.

after World War II, Charis Wilson and Edward Weston published their book *The Cats of Wild Cat Hill*, which chronicled their adventures living on the California coast, maintaining a colony of between twelve and twenty cats.¹⁸⁰ The text, written by Wilson, is an exhaustive ethnographic documentation not only of the way she and Weston managed the cats without access to even basic veterinary care or sterilization, but also a detailed and graphic account of the interactions and behavior of the semi-feral cats. Wilson describes the animals fighting, birthing, hunting and killing one another. Weston's photographs accompany the text.

The images fall into an odd space between his famous modernist aesthetic treatments of objects like the pepper or the toilet, and a true documentary overview of the cats in their environment. (Fig. 37, 38) Weston himself seems somewhat hesitant about the impetus of the project. He wrote, "I started photographing cats because Charis goosed me on."¹⁸¹ In many of the images, Weston uses his familiar technique of isolating the cats against neutral backgrounds. However instead of appearing as beautiful aesthetic forms, the cats look awkward and the pictures appear amateurish. Viewers are left wishing for either the typically "Westonized" sensuous observation of the physical form of "The Cat," or for the photographer to provide a real glimpse into the life of the amazing animal inhabitants Wilson's text so explicitly portrays.

According to Wilson, Weston--the quintessential modernist photographer-- started off photographing their cats with a Graflex camera, "since the cats moved so much,"¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Charis Wilson and Edward Weston.

¹⁸¹ Charis Wilson and Edward Weston, 328.

¹⁸² Charis Wilson and Edward Weston, 328.

but eventually began using his 8 x 10 view camera, which would produce more fine-grained photographs from the larger negatives.¹⁸³ Although Weston did waste expensive 8 x 10 film when the cats moved unexpectedly, he developed multiple ways to coax them to hold still in desirable positions while he photographed them. Wilson writes, “One trick of mine was to put butter on their whiskers, after which they would sit still to lick it off... Edward used a very effective noise he had developed for photographing babies... The cats would look up alertly and he’d click.”¹⁸⁴ Weston presages the postmodernists by saying that he did not intend to use the cats in a “symbolic” way in these images,¹⁸⁵ but ultimately returns to his modernist position as evidenced by the considerable outlay of energy he invested coaxing the cats into formulaic poses. In the end, Weston’s images come sadly close to illustrating the ribbon-wearing, yarn-chasing animals Wilson had hoped to avoid.

Elliott Erwitt has published a number of monographs featuring portraits of dogs that he photographed between the 1950s and the 1990s. Erwitt epitomizes the modernist photographer, blatantly anthropomorphizing dogs world wide. (Fig. 5, 7) He is very upfront about his agenda: “This book is not about dogs. These are, in fact, not pictures of dogs at all. Look again. Essentially, these are pictures of people. But if I really took photos of people doing all these things, I’d get into trouble... So these pictures are a

¹⁸³ Edward Weston’s 8 x 10 view camera would produce an 8 by 10 inch large negative. The “Graflex” camera Charis Wilson refers to would have most likely produced a 4 by 5 inch negative- smaller than the 8 x 10 but still a good size!

¹⁸⁴ Charis Wilson and Edward Weston, 329.

¹⁸⁵ Charis Wilson and Edward Weston, 328.

‘kinder, gentler’ way of taking shots that would otherwise be considered unacceptable.”¹⁸⁶ Erwitt has an amazing gift for capturing dogs and people interacting in ways that convey graphic narratives to the viewer, allowing them to derive messages from his images, frequently conveyed via humor. The humor is generated by the actions of the dogs (and people) in his images. In his 1990 image, *Buzios, Brazil*, Erwitt captures a remarkable confluence of events. (Fig. 7a) The two dogs in the foreground of the picture are unmistakably acting as dogs; Erwitt was obviously not able to pose them. However, he frames their actions with two statuesque human figures on the left and right sides of the image. Thus he clearly attributes the animal's actions to the human figures in the image, actions that would be, as he says, considered unacceptable if performed by humans on a public beach, even in Brazil.

Keith Carter has spent most of his life and photographic career in rural Texas. He creates dreamlike images that allude to an idyllic, rural Southern childhood of fireflies and decaying Gothic churches. In the introduction to his collection of enigmatic dog portraits, *Bones*, Carter says, “At times, I have felt both a sentient power and a spiritual presence in the dogs I have photographed.”¹⁸⁷ The dogs in Carter’s images fall out of focus, their bodies are caught at oblique angles or they disappear back into the dark, foggy recesses of the pictures, taking on the guise of highly aesthetic, mythic messengers from other lands. (Fig. 41)

American born photographer and geologist Roger Ballen first came to attention in the late 1980s and early 1990s for his graphic documentary images of the inhabitants,

¹⁸⁶ Elliott Erwitt, *To The Dogs* (New York: D.A.P./Scalo, 1992) 7.

¹⁸⁷ Keith Carter, *Bones* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996) n.p.

mostly white, of small, rural South African villages. Within the performance space of their homes, he arranges his subjects, their belongings and pets into tableau scenes that he then photographs. His human subjects appear malnourished, at times even mentally disabled, and the images are disturbing if not frightening for the viewer. These photographs question not only our view of the human-other but also the animal-other. In Ballen's work the animals function as conduits, allowing us to empathize with the human participants in the image. Both the animals and the people function as "other," and it is our ability to empathize with the animal-other-- not the people-other-- that finally allows the viewer entrée into the alien world of the human inhabitants. (Fig. 42)

In the picture *Circus Fat Lady and Her Dog, Troubles* from 1964 (Fig. 35) Diane Arbus provides a visual precursor to Ballen's aesthetic strategy. Arbus photographed a circus fat lady, one of the subjects she referred to as "freaks."¹⁸⁸ The performer is shown eye-level and looks into the camera with dignity. Her large body is juxtaposed with that of her tiny dog, Troubles, who quickly becomes anthropomorphized as Jack Sprat. However, given the extreme prejudice in our culture against those who are overweight, the dog also acts as a conduit through which the viewer is able to have compassion for a usually vilified "other."

For his photographic essay entitled *American Pitbull*, Marc Joseph traveled across the United States documenting the culture and lifestyle surrounding the breeding and showing of the American pit bull breed. Although he never discusses dog fighting, Joseph's images are visceral and controversial, given the appearance of both the dogs-- who often appear caged or tightly tethered on extremely short leads-- and the owners--

¹⁸⁸ Masters of Photography, 5 June 2007 <http://www.masters-of-photography.com/A/arbus/arbus_articles2.html>.

some of whom are tattooed, with shaved heads, wearing baggy clothing and extravagant jewelry associated with rap culture. (Fig. 43) Not only does Joseph as the photographer tightly control every aspect of the image; these dogs' bodies are highly regulated to their owners' exacting standards. Their physical characteristics are rigorously controlled by breeding practices. Their ears and tails are surgically docked. They are bred for monetary gain and put through meticulous training regimens. The pictures speak more about the propagation of the dogs as commodity and prestige items, about social networks built around violence to animals (dog-fighting and boar baiting) and the use of animals as objects for human validation, than they do about the dog's individual selves. Once again we see dogs in the dual position of being both venerated and denigrated. In his introductory essay to Joseph's book, James Frey says, "American Pitbull. Two simple words. How do they make you feel? There is no middle ground. You either smile or cringe, respect or fear, love or hate."¹⁸⁹

While most of Joseph's photographs use the culture surrounding dog breeding to perpetuate a clichéd image of gang violence and racial stereotyping, in occasional images, the dogs act as family markers. In the black and white portrait entitled *Angel, Ronnie and Cypress, (Southside) Whittier, California* from December 2000, all three figures--two women and a pitbull-- confront the camera with defiant gazes. (Fig. 44a) Joseph's camera is on a level with the kneeling figure and her dog, who leans out of the photograph toward us, while the standing figure looks down on the viewer. Both women wear heavy makeup and the standing figure is dressed in a form fitting, midriff-bearing,

¹⁸⁹ James Frey, introduction, American Pitbull by Marc Joseph (Göttengen, Germany: Steidl Publishers, 2003) 126.

black outfit. Elliott Erwitt's *U.S.A., 1965* presents a family group from a different time and social strata, yet the figures in the image are clustered around their animal with the same intensity as those in Joseph's image. (Fig. 5a) The squeaky clean, crisply dressed middle class family is tightly composed. The figures are linked spatially forming a cohesive group, pressed together at the end of a claustrophobic porch, as far away from the camera as they can get. Although the figures smile for the camera, the dog, standing alert and erect makes clear that this family unit is a closed system.

The young Latino children in Susie Fitzhugh's *Backyard in Tucson, Arizona* from 1996 present a different family view. The children are photographed pinning clothes on to a backyard clothesline. (Fig. 8) The figures are in relaxed motion, forming a dynamic swirl of activity around the tiny dog who sits quietly at the center of the action, in the arms of one smiling figure who acknowledges the camera.

Bill Owens and Shelby Lee Adams' images use pet animals to reinforce economic divisions. As August Sander did in his "ethnographic" depictions of Germans in the 1920s, Bill Owens often places the family dog into his 1970s portraits of suburban families. (Fig. 44, 9, 11) While some of Owens' photographs show suburban vistas-- aerial shots of building subdivisions and tract homes-- many are taken within the confines of the home and show their subjects locked together in hierarchical family structures along with their prized possessions. The dogs become seamless markers of suburban affluence, along with the family television, new sofa or fine china.

The modernist photographer Shelby Lee Adams meticulously arranges the formal setup of his photographs with the help of multiple assistants, using a large format camera,

tripod and studio lighting kits.¹⁹⁰ He photographs the rural Appalachian poor of his native Eastern Kentucky. (Fig. 45) Like Owens, he often includes family pets in his pictures. Illustrating the remarkable fluidity of the multiple meanings pet animals carry, in Adams' images the animals serve to reinforce perceptions of rural squalor and chaos. Adams has been criticized for exploiting his subject's economic circumstances--exactly arranging props and people in order to make his photographs appear more graphic-- while at the same time feigning an objectively documentary stance.¹⁹¹ However, like Ballen, his images call attention to an underrepresented and disadvantaged segment of society.

A Foot in Both Camps

There is no hard and fast line between the modern and the postmodern, and the work of some of these "modernist" photographers can also be interpreted as postmodern. I will conclude this section on the modern pet with three artists who have created images that hover on the brink between the modern and the postmodern.

Nobuyoshi Araki is one of Japan's most notorious photographers, blurring the lines between art and pornography with work like *Tokyo Lucky Hole*, his graphic documentation of all aspects of life on the streets of a notorious Tokyo red light district.¹⁹² However, Araki has also amassed a body of work both of his own cat, Chiro, and of cats he encounters on the streets of Tokyo. Tony Mendoza and Martha Casanave push the boundary between modernism and postmodernism in a different way. Both rely

¹⁹⁰ True Meaning of Pictures: Shelby Lee Adams' Appalachia, dir. Jennifer Baichwal, Mercury Films, Inc., 2002.

¹⁹¹ True Meaning of Pictures: Shelby Lee Adams' Appalachia.

¹⁹² Nobuyoshi Araki, Tokyo Lucky Hole (Tokyo, Ohta Shuppan, 1990).

on modernist photographic techniques, producing stunningly composed black and white photographic prints, Mendoza of cats and dogs and Casanave of her whippet. However, like Araki, each interacts with and photographs their subjects in a way that clearly validates the actions of the individual animal. As Owen Edwards says of Mendoza's *Ernie* images in his essay "The Man in the Cat and the Cat in the Man:" "They are the pictures a cat would make of a cat."¹⁹³

The stunningly prolific Japanese photographer Nobuyoshi Araki is best known for his highly eroticized female nudes often involving bondage.¹⁹⁴ The images, which reinforce a stereotypical version of Asian female sexuality, pushed censorship boundaries in Japan and turned Araki into a cultural hero.¹⁹⁵ He frequently accompanies his photographic works with risqué essays that he has written.¹⁹⁶ In Japan, he is known as "Ararchy" (Araki/anarchy),¹⁹⁷ a moniker he invented for himself. Self-conscious and media-savvy, Araki often plays the photographic trickster. His early photographs of he

¹⁹³ Owen Edwards, Foreword, "The Man in the Cat and the Cat in the Man," *Ernie: A Photographer's Memoir* (Santa Barbara, CA: Capra Press, 1985) n.p.

¹⁹⁴ "Nobuyoshi Araki," *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph*. Oxford University Press, 2005, Answers.com 07 Aug. 2007 <<http://www.answers.com/topic/nobuyoshi-araki>>.

¹⁹⁵ Kōen Shigemori, ed.: *Nude Photography, Complete Hist. Jap. Phot.*, vi (Tokyo, 1986), pp. 140–44, Grove Art Online. Oxford University Press, 7 August 2007, <<http://www.groveart.com/>>.

¹⁹⁶ Kōen Shigemori, ed.: *Nude Photography, Complete Hist. Jap. Phot.*, vi (Tokyo, 1986), pp. 140–44, Grove Art Online. Oxford University Press, 7 August 2007, <<http://www.groveart.com/>>.

¹⁹⁷ "Nobuyoshi Araki," *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph*. Oxford University Press, 2005, Answers.com 07 Aug. 2007 <<http://www.answers.com/topic/nobuyoshi-araki>>.

and his wife on their honeymoon, published in the 1971 book *The Sentimental Journey*¹⁹⁸ appear to be snapshots, but are in fact staged.¹⁹⁹ Later in his career, he made “‘false series’, putting false dates on photo prints that disrupt our definitions of reality and fiction.”²⁰⁰ In 1978, he published *Yoko My Love*, which contains portraits of his wife taken in the early part of their marriage.²⁰¹

Araki has also photographed his own cat, Chiro, and documented cats living on the streets of Tokyo. In 1990, the year his wife died, he published *Chiro, My Love*.²⁰² (Fig. 39) In *Chiro, My Love* he often photographs his cat in intimate scenes of daily life that uncannily replicate early images he took of his wife. The images in *Chiro, My Love* belie the modernist’s preoccupation with technique. Many are shot with a camera that imprints the date in the lower right hand corner of both the photographic negative and print. This feature is common on “point and shoot cameras”--which typically make all technical decisions for the consumer including where to focus -- as well as providing convenient date information to facilitate the recording of family history. Needless to say, these features would be anathema to modernist photographers concerned with the pristine

¹⁹⁸ Nobuyoshi Araki, *Sentimental Journey*, (Tokyo : [s.n.], [1970]).

¹⁹⁹ Kōen Shigemori, ed.: *Nude Photography, Complete Hist. Jap. Phot.*, vi (Tokyo, 1986), pp. 140–44, Grove Art Online. Oxford University Press, 7 August 2007, <<http://www.groveart.com/>>.

²⁰⁰ "Nobuyoshi Araki," *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph*. Oxford University Press, 2005, Answers.com 07 Aug. 2007 <<http://www.answers.com/topic/nobuyoshi-araki>>.

²⁰¹ Nobuyoshi Araki, *Waga ai, Yoko* (Yoko My Love), (Tokyo: Asahi Sonorama, Showa, 1978).

²⁰² Nobuyoshi Araki, *Chiro, My Love* (Japan: s.n., 1990).

preservation of their negatives and prints. In fact, the images in the book read a bit like a family scrapbook. We see Chiro in all aspects of his daily life: hunting birds and lizards, sleeping, grooming, being bathed and cuddled by Araki and his wife, and sleeping with Araki. Unlike Mendoza and Casanave, Araki does not seem overly concerned with the formal qualities of the photographs. Many times Chiro is simply placed in the center of the frame and the occasional incident of “red eye” (another photographer’s nightmare) in the cat is blithely included in the book.

In his project entitled *Living Cats in Tokyo*, Araki continues his obsessive documentation of street life in Tokyo; only, instead of sex workers his subjects are the cats living on Tokyo’s streets.²⁰³ (Fig. 40) Again, Araki does not attempt to pose the cats. He simply records them as he encounters them: crossing a street, hiding in a train station, rolling on a sidewalk. The images are mundane in nature, but taken together provide a striking document about the lives of Tokyo’s cat population, one that is somewhat similar to Charis Wilson’s straightforward diaristic documentation of the lives of her cats on Wild Cat Hill.

Tony Mendoza’s black and white photographs, which carefully observe the daily habits of the cat, Ernie, exploit all of the fabulously photogenic attributes of the feline species. He spent several months in the early 1980s in a New York loft recording the activities of his roommate’s cat with a camera, a record he ultimately published in the book *Ernie: A Photographer’s Memoir* in 1985.²⁰⁴ Mendoza juxtaposes his photographs

²⁰³ Nobuyoshi Araki, *Living Cats in Tokyo*. ([Japan]: Heibonsha, 1993).

²⁰⁴ Tony Mendoza, *Ernie: A Photographer’s Memoir* (San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 2001).

with his own commentary, creating a unique sense of agency for the cat by way of his careful observations and respectful comments on the cat's self-directed behavior.

When I first moved in, I couldn't afford to go out, so I got to spend a lot of time in the loft with Ernie. I had never lived with a cat before and I was quickly seduced by his personality, his energy, his catness. Were all cats this crazy? His gray and white markings were perfect for black and white photography. I grabbed my camera and started shooting.²⁰⁵

Mendoza honestly acknowledges both his voyeuristic desire to capture Ernie's seductive image on black and white film, and Ernie's persona as an independent, separate being with his own volition and his own directedness, "his catness."

For the most part, Mendoza's images support this view of Ernie. Ernie is independently engaged in daily activities familiar to anyone who has lived with a cat. (Fig. 46a, b, c) However, in some of the images, Mendoza falls back into the tired practice of blatant anthropomorphism. In the new edition of his book, in addition to his own musings on Ernie, Mendoza adds an additional series of comments that are purportedly voiced by Ernie himself. Mendoza appears to allow Ernie to have an equal voice, commenting on the relationship the two of them have developed. However, the viewer quickly realizes that Mendoza has actually regained control of both sides of the relationship by adding the second voice (Mendoza's own) instead of allowing Ernie the dignity of his silence. This is an example of the text in which Ernie is purportedly speaking of Mendoza the first time they meet: "His socks are delicious. I grab on and hold his ankle to my belly. He...says he'll take some pictures of me. I'm thinking: Sure. Why not? I could use a portfolio...I show off my jumping skills. I chase a few bugs. I

²⁰⁵ Tony Mendoza, 16.

show him my latest bird...”²⁰⁶ Here, Mendoza hovers between ironically acknowledging and lampooning our seemingly compulsive need to anthropomorphize our companion animals. Unfortunately, for the most part, the addition of Ernie’s “voice” detracts from the collaborative stance he established with his own voice text and images, and allows Mendoza’s work to slip back into the kitsch category.

At the time he began to search for a publisher for his Ernie work, Mendoza writes that there was a proliferation of cat books being published.²⁰⁷ After numerous rejections, though, the book was eventually published by a small Santa Barbara press and sold phenomenally well, going through three printings in six months and finally selling over 100,000 copies.²⁰⁸ Since the book was reissued by Chronicle Book in 2001, it has more than doubled its original sales.²⁰⁹ So, despite the glut of other published material available on cats, Mendoza’s work resonates with viewers and remains one of the larger bodies of fine art photographic work produced featuring a cat.

The *Ernie* series is the second of several major bodies of work about companion animals that Tony Mendoza has started since he began photographing in 1973.²¹⁰ In

²⁰⁶ Tony Mendoza, 10.

²⁰⁷ Tony Mendoza. Tony Mendoza: Photographs, Words, Videos, (Columbus, OH: Columbus Museum of Art, 2003) 12.

²⁰⁸ Amazon Books website listing for Ernie: A Photographer’s Memoir, 06 August 2007, <http://www.amazon.com/Ernie-Photographers-Memoir-Tony-Mendoza/dp/0811829634/ref=sr_1_1/104-7037089-9415938?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1186421553&sr=8-1>.

²⁰⁹ Tony Mendoza, personal conversation, 4 August 2007.

²¹⁰ Tony Mendoza online resume, Stephen Cohen Gallery. 6 August 2007, <http://www.stephencohengallery.com/artists/current/mendoza_resume.html>.

1979, he produced a series called *Leela*, (Fig. 46d) photographs taken of his then-girlfriend's dog that he published together with another series, *Dogs on Vacation*, in the book *Dogs: A Postcard Book*.²¹¹ The *Leela* series was the first time Mendoza had photographed pets and that work "convinced him there was something there."²¹² Mendoza's early dog work shows the same respect and fascination for the point of view of the animal seen in the *Ernie* work. Dogs fill the frame of the photograph. Their sheer physical excitement and motion is conveyed in several ways: by the animals' proximity to the camera lens, by the harsh lighting created by his on-camera flash lighting unit, by the frozen motion of the dogs and by the background motion blur created when Mendoza uses a long exposure coupled with the flash unit.

In the *Bob* series, started in 2006, Mendoza photographs Bob, his wife's longhaired dachshund, interacting with other dogs at the leash-less dog park, in the surf on the coast of Florida or on his own in a variety of situations. For this series, Mendoza is photographing in color with a digital camera and continues to use an on-camera flash. The viewer, thrust face to face with the larger than life-size figures of Bob and the other dogs, is thrown into visual overload by the vivid colors and sharp detail of the very large--up to 44" wide-- prints. The presumed cuteness of the diminutively blonde Bob is quickly neutralized by his disproportionate size (in the image) and the ferocity of his reactions to the other dogs. In one image, (Fig. 46e) the figure of an enormous German Shepard, filling two-thirds of the frame, looms over Bob. Stretched to his full height, Bob is tucked beneath the other dog, staring him (her?) in the eye. However, given the camera

²¹¹ Tony Mendoza, *Dogs: A Postcard Book* (Santa Barbara, CA: Capra Press, 1995).

²¹² Tony Mendoza, personal conversation, 4 August 2007.

angle, he appears to be almost physically pushed back by the utter intensity of the encounter, although the two dogs are not touching. The remaining one-third of the image is blank sky, adding a further feeling of vertigo to the image, as if-- were Bob to step back-- he would tumble into a void. In another image, Bob and a second dog are shown mouth-to-mouth, teeth bared, “roaring” into each other’s faces. (Fig. 46f) The proximity of the dogs, their sheer size in the photographs, crisp details and glaring colors all provoke a visceral sense of embodied emotion-- anxiety or exhilaration-- in the viewer which is very different from the detached action of anthropomorphizing an animal. Here the viewer is thrust into the physicality of their own emotions, if only for a moment, before they project those emotions onto the figures in the image. This ability to momentarily anchor the viewer in the present-tense experience of their emotions is one shared by the postmodern artists discussed in the next chapter.

Martha Casanave has produced a stunning body of black and white photographs of her pet whippet dog, published in the 2002 book entitled *Beware of Dog, You Might Fall in Love*.²¹³ Casanave’s technique is not unlike what the viewer might have longed for from Edward Weston’s images of the cats of Wild Cat Hill. In typical modernist fashion, she moves in close to the whippet, isolating parts of her body in the frame against neutral backgrounds. In fact, in an image that appears to be a tribute to modernists like Weston and Imogen Cunningham, Casanave beautifully juxtaposes the dog’s head and leg against a calla lily. (Fig. 47) However, in Casanave’s images, although the background is neutral in the sense that it is not distracting, the snippets of details that we

²¹³ Martha Casanave, *Beware of Dog: You Might Fall in Love* (Carmel, CA: Center for Photographic Art, 2002).

can see include parts of Casanave's own body, blankets, pillows and the edge of a bed or sofa. Like Mendoza's images, Casanave's exhibit a remarkable sense of tenderness for the myriad incredible physical details of the dog's body, from the whorls of her fur and her delicate joints, to the pads of her feet and her lovely toenails. In the essay that introduces the book, she writes about how the whippet came to her at a time when both Casanave and the dog were ill. The artist says of her illness: "I kept myself isolated as much as possible so people wouldn't notice how I was feeling. I wanted an animal for companionship."²¹⁴ She and the dog recovered together, and she began photographing the whippet. The images create an extraordinary sense of embodied physicality, of the human and non-human together, beyond the place where language is necessary, drawing comfort from one another's presence.

As often as I have looked at Casanave's images, they still move me to tears. I can say that they are by far the only images I have seen which accurately convey the sense of peace and contentment I have when I am on my bed reading with five animals lying in proximity, on and around me. With the exception perhaps of the title of her book, Casanave has carefully avoided the stench of sentimentality in her images, as Steve Baker suggests, by using the modernist technique of fracturing her subject. Preventing the viewer from seeing the whole animal, except for the motion shots where the dog's body is a blur of energy, reduces the chances for anthropomorphizing the dog. (Fig. 48) However, this same technique, of portraying beings by isolating their physical

²¹⁴ Martha Casanave, 7.

characteristics, is part of what caused critics to decry Robert Mapplethorpe's objectification of the African American models he photographed.²¹⁵

The difference, in Casanave's case, is that she has included herself and her home in the photographs with the dog, allowing the viewer to experience the intimacy of her relationship with the dog. For anyone who has tried to photograph his or her pet, it is obvious, looking at Casanave's images, that only someone completely trusted by the dog could get that close to her, with or without a camera. Perhaps more importantly, unlike Mapplethorpe who was controlling every aspect of his model's appearance in the photograph, since Casanave herself appears in many of the photographs, she, as the photographer, has given up a degree of control and is not able to pose every aspect of the image. As my students find out when they gamely try to photograph their pets, animals are unpredictable and it is extremely difficult to get them to "do what you want." So Casanave has captured the dog in her own embodied sense of agency and self-hood, her "dogness" to borrow the phrase from Tony Mendoza, and the intimacy that she exhibits with Casanave is part of her own subjectivity, not a pose she is forced into. These are all characteristics I also attribute to the postmodern pet.

²¹⁵ Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Encyclopedia, 6 June 2007 <http://www.glbtc.com/arts/mapplethorpe_r.html>.

CHAPTER 6

The Postmodern Pet

It is, in a sense, entirely appropriate that most of the time artists (and writers and philosophers) continue to get it wrong, to botch it and to bind the animal inexpertly to their own inexpert lives.

Steve Baker²¹⁶

In *The Postmodern Animal*, Steve Baker articulates a range of issues that postmodern artists concerned with animal subject matter have engaged in, from those interested in saving endangered animals to others who are likely to be “skeptical...of culture’s means of constructing and classifying the animal in order to make it meaningful to the human.”²¹⁷ Baker cites the late twentieth and twenty-first century activities surrounding the questioning of identity--troubling the idea of the intact “privileged and empowered individual”²¹⁸-- by both postmodern philosophers and artists as crucial to his conception of the postmodern animal. He models his idea of the postmodern after that laid out by Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition*: “The postmodern stands for the forms in which imaginative thought necessarily challenges the complacency of the age.”²¹⁹ He continues, “No rethinking of human or animal identity is likely to emerge, it is clear, if art and philosophy choose to present the animal primarily as matter for human ‘solace and pleasure.’”²²⁰ Baker identifies three strategies as important for postmodern

²¹⁶ Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* 189.

²¹⁷ Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* 9.

²¹⁸ Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* 17.

²¹⁹ Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* 18.

²²⁰ Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* 19.

artists engaged with animal subject matter, ones which “undermine...*expert-thinking*, *hierarchy-thinking* and *identity-thinking* [emphasis his].”²²¹

The multiple discourses involved in the animal rights movement impact any discussion or counter-discussion of human-animal relations in the early twenty-first century. As I argued in Chapter 3, representations of animals do in fact indicate societal attitudes toward and treatment of actual animals. Concurrent with an increasingly visible discussion of issues endorsed both by the animal rights movement and the discipline of Animal Studies is the emergence of a variety of artwork dealing with animal content.²²² Steve Baker devotes a chapter of his book called “Fear of the Familiar” to the discussion of the postmodern fear of pets, and artists who use the pet motif.²²³ The major photographic artists that he mentions are William Wegman and Carolee Schneemann.

Since the initial publishing of Baker’s *The Postmodern Animal* in 2000, an increasing number of artists have used photographic representations of pets in their work. With the exception of Carolee Schneemann, who speaks eloquently about her relationship with her cats,²²⁴ and William Wegman, who has been well-documented in conversation about his dogs, the contemporary artists who I consider for this paper do not articulate their specific views vis-à-vis the animals they use in their artworks in public venues such as written artist statements. So, while it is no doubt possible to argue that the two trends

²²¹ Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* 19.

²²² See Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal*.

²²³ Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal*, 166-190.

²²⁴ See Linda Weintraub, “Interspecies Eros,” in *Animal. Anima. Animus*, ed. Marketta Seppälä, Jari-Pekka Vanhala and Linda Weintraub (Pori, Finland: Pori Art Museum, 1998) and the artist’s website: <http://www.caroleeschneemann.com>.

(animal rights/studies and artists using animal subject matter) are unrelated or that the intentions of the artists are not consistent with this interpretation, I have chosen to examine the aesthetic strategies that these artists are using by contextualizing them within the framework of the animal question. How do artist and animal relate? What power relationships are established between the two? Is there a space for the animal to act out of its own autonomous sense of agency or resistance? Whether the artist is acting from a consciously “pro-animal” sensibility or not, any change in aesthetic strategies resulting in an increase in autonomy or aesthetic agency for the animal is indicative of changing attitudes toward animals, and a potential reshaping of our definition of our own humanity. The fact that these artists have produced imagery in which animals are represented in different manners than they have been in the past indicates that a new set of attitudes are available with which to evaluate the images. These artists may not be conscious that the aesthetic strategies they are using consider the agency of the animal they are photographing. They may not have struggled with the conundrum of how to represent animals without anthropomorphizing them, or whether their representation is based on an authentic experience of the animal. Yet, they are demonstrating radically new aesthetic strategies.

Since we have determined that representations of animals reflect societal attitudes toward animals and that the strategies of these artists easily fall outside of to-date normative aesthetic practices of dominating and subjugating animals, we can see that within the work of these artists are embedded emerging societal concerns regarding the animal question. Baker cautions, “It would be quite wrong automatically to associate animal imagery in postmodern art with any overtly pro-animal stance. Nevertheless there

is a proximity to and engagement with the animal...²²⁵ In fact, the postmodernists may simply be using the animals in an effort to reach for a new definition of their own identity. Thus, they use the animal with as much self-interest as any modernist artist. However, their aesthetic strategies can still have the side benefit of presenting the animal as an entity with agency. According to English Professor Cary Wolfe the definition of human is fashioned in opposition to that of animal. So as we struggle to remake our own identities, in the process of remaking what it is to be human, we remake what it is to be animal at the same time.²²⁶ We end up dragging the animals inside the “the circle of morality and subjectivity”²²⁷ in our usual self-centered and self-concerned fashion, but dragging them in nonetheless.

William Wegman

William Wegman, who started his career as a conceptual artist in the early 1970s, has gained an international reputation for his photographic and video work featuring his pet Weimaraner dogs. Upon superficial observation, Wegman’s work may seem trivial or sentimental. However, since the start of his career, he has systematically chosen to work with subjects and methodologies that fly in the face of the art world. A more sure-fire formula for disaster as a fine artist could hardly be conceived than to dress your dogs up in human clothes and take highly stylized photographs of them. However, Wegman’s

²²⁵ Steve Baker, Postmodern Animal 23-24.

²²⁶ Cary Wolfe, Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species and Posthumanist Theory (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003) 192-93. W. J. T. Mitchell, “The Rights of Things,” Foreword to Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species and Posthumanist Theory (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003) xii.

²²⁷ Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel, xii.

underlying concerns-- language, its misleading nuances and our failed attempts to communicate with each other in domestic situations-- certainly place him directly within the bent of the poststructuralist, postmodern art era. His choice of the dog as a model, an animal so intrinsically incorporated into the world of the human and yet lacking that very quintessential ability to speak, to communicate with us, is certainly not an accident. Further, Wegman did not just choose to photograph any dogs. Rather, he chose his own dogs and thus he is able to fully mine that uncomfortable, ambiguous liminal space which has been created in contemporary society by the incorporation of pets into such close contact with the lives of pet owners.

These artists consider an animal's individual agency in different ways. Wegman, in his early black and white video work, and Carolee Schneemann, in her photographic series, *Infinity Kisses*, actually allow the animals to act and participate (or resist participation in some cases) in the production of the artwork. This idea that an animal might direct the course of the image-making collaboratively with the artist generates a strategy that Susan McHugh calls "the 'pack aesthetic' or collaborative production of art and artistic agency."²²⁸ McHugh comments further on Wegman's production of his early video work:

Especially when staged in video format, these attempts to convey cross-species communication gained widespread interest not only because they struck the viewer as funny or true, but because Wegman used to play directly to the video camera, usually in situations contrived to undermine the truth-value of his claims. In these texts, a crucial component of Wegman's challenge to human authority is the presence of his then companion animal...the Weimaraner dog Man Ray, who, whether read as falling for or openly resisting Wegman's prompts, was a key player in the pieces.²²⁹

²²⁸ Susan McHugh, "Video Dog Star".

²²⁹ Susan McHugh, "Video Dog Star."

She goes on to point out that, “...(S)ignificantly the camera positions Wegman and Man Ray as each occupying half of the frame; in conjunction with the content, this framing focuses attention on neither man nor dog but on what occurs between them.”²³⁰

In this transcription of the *Spelling Lesson* video from 1974, Wegman speaks to his dog Man Ray, and the dog responds:

You got ahhh...P-A-R-K was spelled correctly and that was good.” Dog moans, tilts head. “Now wait a minute,” Wegman responds. “And you spelled O-U-T right, but when it came to beach, you spelled it B-E-E-C-H which is like the uhhh...Well there is a gum called Beechnut gum but the correct spelling is...We meant beach like the sand, so it should have been like the ocean...B-E-A-C-H. See, that’s the difference.” Dog moans and puts a paw on Wegman. “Well, okay, I forgive you but remember it for next time.

Wegman clearly demonstrates the gap between humans and animals that the lack of language creates. (Fig. 49) He exemplifies our inability to conceptualize animals without anthropomorphizing them- without attributing our own understanding to them. Wegman’s character is convinced that his dog can spell, while the dog acting only as himself, is purely mesmerized by the attention of his surrogate pack leader. McHugh laments what she sees as Wegman’s later reversal of the open dialectical collaboration between the two species that she identifies in Wegman’s early video work. In his later color Polaroid images, McHugh asserts that Wegman assumes the dominant role as artist, positioning the dogs in specific poses and situations.²³¹ However, he still wrestles with issues relevant to the relativity of pets and humans as in the image *Country Road* from 1990. (Fig. 50) Here Wegman has rendered the dog helpless by putting him in a role that

²³⁰ Susan McHugh, “Video Dog Star.”

²³¹ Susan McHugh, “Video Dog Star.”

can only be played by a human. The dog's legs are ineffectual, they cannot reach or operate the pedals of the bicycle and he is unable to move out of harm's way in the middle of the road. Dogs, genetically manipulated by humans, remain stuck in between the world of the wild animal and the human world and must rely on human protection for survival in the urban environment.

Carolee Schneemann

Carolee Schneemann came to prominence in the 1960s through her always provocative performance pieces exploring feminist issues, many times through the vehicle of her own body. Throughout her career, Schneemann has used real cats and images of cats, her own and other people's to mine the associations that cats have had across the centuries with female sexuality and with witches, with the demonization or at least "otherization" of a woman and her sexuality. Cats have always been important to Schneemann, so much so that in her fascinating essay entitled "Interspecies Eros," Art Historian Linda Weintraub says Schneemann marks the stages in her life according to the life spans of her cats.²³² Schneemann has completed two major bodies of work in which she engages with two of her cats in a way that some may deem transgressive, but which Schneemann regards as a natural part of the sensuality/sexuality and animal nature of both the cat and the woman.

Schneemann, in particular, is very vocal about the role her cats took in initiating the behavior she documents. Here Schneemann describes her experience and the creation of her work entitled *Infinity Kisses*, from 1981-1987. (Fig. 51)

²³² Linda Weintraub, 129.

Since he was a kitten, my cat Cluny woke me every morning with deep kisses. During each week– even half-asleep– I reached for a hand-held Olympus camera to film our kissing. Lighting, angles, exposure and focus were always unpredictable...The intimacy between cat and woman becomes a reflection of the viewers attitudes toward self and nature, sexuality and control, the taboo and the sacred. Cluny died in 1988...He was reborn as Vesper in 1990 and continued the kissing expressivity until his death.²³³

Schneemann found a fragment of an Egyptian relief sculpture that shows a woman and a lion nose to nose, indicating the gift of prophecy. She included an image of that sculpture with her installation. Schneemann later created a second photo grid called *Infinity Kisses II* dated 1990-1998, documenting her encounters with Vesper.

Schneemann says “We teach our domesticated animals to behave nicely, which means, not sensuously. They are trained to conform to human conventions. But pets can teach us pleasure and shamelessness, to really appreciate the orgasmic experience.”²³⁴

Schneemann was accused of bestiality and obscenity with this work, and certainly she allows her cats to act in a manner which is outside of generally socially acceptable bounds.²³⁵ However, this is a behavior that the cats initiate. Schneemann accepts the actions of the cats, and in fact welcomes them as indicative of the close interspecies bond she felt with both Cluny and Vesper. By doing so Schneeman refuses to negate the part her cat is playing in directing certain aspects of their relationship by disallowing unconventional behavior (from a human standpoint) on the part of the cat. Schneemann says, “The cat is an invocation, a sacred being, profoundly devoted to communicating love and physical devotion, and the cat is self-directed.”²³⁶

²³³ Carolee Schneemann, Imaging Her Erotics: Essays, Interviews, Projects (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2002) 264.

²³⁴ Linda Weintraub, 133.

²³⁵ Linda Weintraub, 133.

²³⁶ Carolee Schneemann, Imaging Her Erotics 215.

Francis Alÿs, John Divola, Jana Sterbak

This emerging postmodern aesthetic acts in opposition to an older, more modernist use of images of pet animals in which cats and dogs are considered anthropomorphically, and are denied a presence as individuals. In the modernist paradigm, animals are viewed symbolically. They act as metaphors for their human counterparts, or they appear as possessions or objects reinforcing class distinctions. For artists creating images of pets in a postmodern context, it is their very ability to conceive of these animals as individuals with agency, self-directed behavior and resistance that provides the vital energy that drives their artworks. Three artists have each located a relationship with an animal or group of animals at the core of the artworks that I will consider for this paper: Belgian-born artist Francis Alÿs (*El Gringo*, 2003), well-known Los Angeles-based photographer John Divola (*Dogs Chasing My Car in the Desert*, 1996-2001) and Czech-born, Canada Based Jana Sterbak, whose Jack Russell terrier Stanley filmed *From here to there*, her 2003 video projection installation. By incorporating actions that animals initiate into their artworks, these three artists allow the animals to act as subjects rather than objects. Skewing the traditional use of pets as symbolic carriers of meaning, one-sided human extensions or possessions, the artists allow viewers the opportunity to reframe our relationships with animals in a larger context.

Belgian-born, Mexico-based artist Francis Alÿs produced an approximately four-minute-long video called *El Gringo* in which he photographed his encounter with a pack of dogs as he walked through a small Mexican village. (Fig. 52a-e) Alÿs is not visible in the videotaped image and the viewer is apparently seeing through his eyes as he walks

handholding the camera. The image bounces down the dirt road into the village accompanied by the scratchy sound of his footsteps. At first we see vegetation and small structures. As Alÿs comes to the center of the village, one and then an increasing number of dogs begin to approach the camera. At first the encounter seems harmless. But as Alÿs moves forward, the dogs become increasingly more vocal. They come closer and closer to Alÿs and his camera. The image swings around haphazardly as if Alÿs is looking for an escape route. The camera is confronted on all sides by snarling dogs and the sound of teeth snapping together. The dog's sense of agitation becomes palpable and their anxiety is visceral. Eventually the dogs become so agitated that Alÿs drops the camera in the dirt (and presumably runs away). The animals gradually calm down and eventually approach the camera. The last image we see is of the tongue of a dog licking the lens, before the screen goes black. Alÿs uses his own presence and that of his camera to generate a cycle of emotion for both the participating animals and for viewers. We move from quiet anticipation to intense anxiety and fear, back to playful calm, as the offending agent is finally removed. An implied presence in the film, that of the intruder, and obviously the instigator of the action, Alÿs allows the dogs to participate as collaborators, determining the sequence and final ending to the action of the video, although of course not negating his own ultimate voice as editor and author.

Between 1996 and 2001, Los Angeles-based photographer John Divola made a series of black and white photographs of dogs that chased his car as he photographed in the desert. (Fig. 53a-d) Here is a quote from the preface to his 2004 book entitled *Dogs Chasing My Car in the Desert*:

As I meandered through the desert, a dog would occasionally chase my car. Sometime in 1996 I began to bring along a 35mm camera equipped with a motor

drive and loaded with a fast and grainy black-and-white film. The process was simple; when I saw a dog coming toward the car I would pre-focus the camera and set the exposure. With one hand on the steering wheel, I would hold the camera out the window and expose anywhere from a few frames to a complete roll of film. I'll admit that I was not above turning around and taking a second pass in front of a house with an enthusiastic dog.²³⁷

The images Divola produced for this series exist in stark contrast to his fine-grained, large format color images of small desert structures. They are grainy and raw, framing and composition are random and chaotic. Some are printed quite large, evoking a visceral sense of movement through time and space as the dogs careen across the picture plane. Divola, like Alÿs, is acting as the intruder and clearly provokes the animals he photographs. However, they respond from their own sense of volition and in this case, resistance to the artist/intruder. Divola engages the animals and allows them to become partners in his collaborative enterprise. The visceral quality of the photographs allow the viewer to experience the immediacy of the moment captured on film, and forego the immediate need to attribute symbolic or metaphoric significance to the animals in the images.

Czech-born, Canada-based artist Jana Sterbak works with photography, sculpture, performance, video and installations. *From here to there* was filmed in 2003 by a Jack Russell terrier named Stanley. (Fig. 54a-f) Stanley was fitted with a lightweight medical camera. We see through Stanley's eyes as he wanders in the snow and brush along the banks of Montreal's St. Lawrence River and beside the canals of Venice, Italy. For Sterbak's final installation she edited the footage that Stanley shot and presented it on large video projection screens. The soundtrack to the piece combines Stanley's

²³⁷ John Divola, Dogs Chasing My Car in the Desert (Tucson, AZ: Nazraeli Press, 2004) n.p.

intonations with the 1955 recordings by Glenn Gould of J. S. Bach's Goldberg Variations. Since Sterbak allowed him to roam relatively unhindered, the perspective and point of view of the resulting video are determined exclusively by Stanley, with Sterbak contributing aesthetic and editorial decisions.

Some of the modernist photographers discussed in this paper are confronting more overtly difficult subject matter than the postmodernists- Marc Joseph explores issues of violence and domination and Shelby Lee Adams deals with the implications of extreme poverty. However, the formal, static quality of the photographs prevent them from delivering the emotional wallop of either Schneemann, Divola or Alÿs' gritty, visceral imagery. The modernists use the animal as metaphor, symbol or prop in a highly directed or choreographed manner. They ignore or disregard the animal's innate capacity for independent action or they frame it solely in terms of human actions, while the postmodernists meet the animals on their own terms. They allow and encourage them to act from their own agency and incorporate the animals' actions into their imagery without attempting to dominate or control them.

CONCLUSION

I think it entirely possible, if not likely, that a hundred years from now we will look back on our current mechanized and systematized practices of factory farming, product testing, and much else that undeniably involved animal exploitation and suffering...with much the same horror and disbelief with which we now regard slavery...

Cary Wolfe²³⁸

My study has revealed a vibrant world of philosophical, academic and scientific thought and research about the human-animal bond, evidenced worldwide, which echoes my own quest to understand animals in a different, more authentic way. My preliminary desire was to see envisioned, in contemporary imagery, not only the intense connection I feel with my pet animals but also my strong sense of their individuality, self-possession and agency. Now I have come to understand that the images we produce representing animals are layered with multifaceted meanings. These meanings encompass our idea of our place in the ecosystem, our ethical and moral responsibilities in terms of protecting plant and animal species, as well as our abilities (judicious and not) to moderate our power to meet our wants and needs in favor of the environment. As such, I believe these images have tremendous implications not only for monitoring our attitudes in the coming crucial decades, but also for affecting change to those attitudes. In order to make sense of the complex relationship we have with animals and the even more complex layering of meaning that is revealed from the ways in which artists have exploited their relationships with animals in order to represent them, I have been challenged to reach outside of my familiar comfort zone of art historical research materials. I have tried to meld information about animals themselves from natural science literature, research from sociology and

²³⁸ Cary Wolfe, 190.

psychology regarding the ways that we have understood and interacted with animals over time, and philosophical texts that confront the question of the “animal other” with my own knowledge of the influence of visual imagery in our culture and contemporary art-making practices.

The world-wide movement of animal-based advocacy and academic study is effecting a paradigm shift from an old way of viewing animals as beings strictly put on earth for human use--a modernist conception-- to a more inclusive understanding and respect for their agency and self-directed natures, which I am calling a postmodern view. I believe that this new postmodern way of imaging animals, which may not yet be fully articulated even by the artists themselves, is evidence of a dramatic, incipient change in the heretofore firmly entrenched perception of the hierarchy of humans and animals. The harbingers of doom for the planet are sounding loudly, and the prognosis seems dire. The consequences of continuing to act out of a belief system that gives us license to use the planet, animals and plants on it for our short-term gratification have been made clear.

One of the benefits of doing this research has been to uncover a community of committed individuals who are advocating change. Pet animals are sometimes denigrated as being inferior to those animals who may be more legitimately thought of as representing the natural or wild world. Nonetheless, pets are the only animals with whom most of us have contact, and are certainly the only animals with whom many of us can develop long-term relationships. This puts them in a unique position to be photographed, documented and imaged by artists in our culture. I believe that representations of animals made out of this new postmodern stance have the potential to promote a more all-encompassing system of viewing the planet and to influence the long-term decisions we

make. As such, they are tremendously exciting. Images of pets have risen beyond the trivialized, nostalgic or sentimental categories to which they have heretofore been relegated. If, as this animal-centered movement emphatically suggests, continuing to understand and accept animals as individuals with agency and resistance, is a major component in bringing about significant change to the health of our planet, I believe that artistic representations of pet animals will be an important and valuable component and are so worthy of our continued attention.

It is difficult if not impossible to examine radical changes that are taking place in society from within the same milieu that they are occurring. This being said, my impression is that the changes in the academic, philosophical, artistic and advocacy communities regarding the “animal question” are part of the larger postmodern and posthumanist questioning and reshaping of human identity and subjectivity that has been occurring since the 1960s. I assume that the changes in aesthetic strategy and point of view regarding animals that I am discussing appear much larger and more radical now, in the moment, than they will to scholars and viewers in coming years, as the trend toward reassessing our relationship with animals progresses. Only a short thirty plus years after the postmodern explosion in the contemporary art scene of the 1970s, scholars are already parsing “periods” of postmodernity.²³⁹ Perhaps one reason for the great disparity in thinking on the one hand that postmodernism reveals a sharp break with modernism, and on the other that it is simply continuous with the modern,²⁴⁰ is that the further away

²³⁹ Steve Baker quotes both Wendy Wheeler and Hal Foster who divide postmodernism into stages. Steve Baker, Postmodern Animal 24-5.

²⁴⁰ Madan Sarap, Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism, (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1993) 130.

we get from the “break,” the smaller that break seems. Thus, the resulting change appears more and more contiguous with what came before it. My intention in this paper is to point out a change that is occurring in the depiction of companion animals in contemporary art. This change is certainly just emerging. And yet, this artwork represents something transformed, different in some intrinsic way, from the modernist depictions that came before it. These artists are making images that function as part of popular culture and the ideas and methods that they are using to represent animals have a broader context than just isolated images in a white box gallery. Whether the artists are conscious of this or not, whether they have articulated their methods or not, the presence of these new strategies indicate that a societal change in the way we consider animals in our culture has begun to take hold, and that these images are part of that change.

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