To AE,

A moment expanded through witness of a squirrel’s death yielding autopsical lebenskuenstler of babel pidgin in cyberspace. The significance of this mutation is tardy enough to reckon its aesthetic in provision of hindsight. Your lessons laid groundwork for the revelation. Please accept it as sacrifice to Albion as a measure of my gratitude for the apocalypse.

Gary Lee Cordray

-The vibe of our collective intuition-

Consciousness exists as a state of of; it’s the moment that things (in the broadest sense) are founded upon in our experience. It acts as intention formed by memory and anticipation continually ending in a moment of witness. The inherent behavior of consciousness to differentiate is quickened through communication and the production of meaning in its apparent striving to create adhesion for reality. This hosts the mark of intention and lays the groundwork for meaning to embellish our taxonomies and understanding of the abstract. Language grants consciousness the expanded depth and structure that furthers our intuitions ability to be informed by histories apart from our own. Thus, language could prove to be humanity’s most significant contribution to the evolution of consciousness on earth. The resulting cohesions of nominal reality gave way to more collective institutions of thought that are expanding the affordances of our technology and agency over the savage.

Despite the benefits of language overall, I’m interested in flaws of its syntax. I wonder about the effect of its shortcomings on things ranging from individual cognitive tendencies to global concept exchange. Considering how signifiers can skirt a languages utility to differentiate without further details, one can see how meaning exists in flux relative to its contextual interpretation. The resulting
manifold of potential realities makes me yearn for a clarifying expression of conscious being that transcends the framework of language. The desire has led to exploration in the crafts of woodworking, painting, social practice and squirrel whispering. I have arrived at two processes of painting that are very different although the thematic similarities urge me to discuss them as relative. I categorize the work through two series titles: “The Creatures Endeavor” and “Spatial-kinetic Chrono-linear”.

**Research Methodology**

I have been looking at the work of artists such as Komar and Melamid, Lucy Kimbell, Mark Dion, Natalie Jeremijenko, Sascha Braunig, Linn Meyers, Ai Wei Wei, Dred Scott, Alfredo Jaar, Jenny Holzer, Maya Lyn, Chris Burden, Joseph Beuys and Aethelred Eldridge. I’ve also been studying phenomenology and reading works by Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Arendt, Sartre and Derrida. Other writings that currently inform my practice are:

*The Gift*, by Lewis Hyde,

*A Cyborg Manifesto*, and *The Companion Species Manifesto* by Donna Haraway,

*Surface Encounters: Thinking with Animals in Art*, by Rob Broglio,

*Artist | Animal*, by Steve Baker,

*Art & Animals*, by Giovanni Aloi,

*To Life! Eco Art in Pursuit of a Sustainable Planet*, by Linda Weintraub

*Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things*, by William McDonough and Michael Braungart,

I currently consult and draw resources from national archives using the Sojourner Truth Library’s database at SUNY New Paltz, reference research leads and recommendations given by professors or colleagues, and access data through observation and active engagement with the environment.

My research became exploring how animal behavior could harness metaphorical perspectives on human objective. This was coupled with efforts to find a way to instigate collective engagement with the environment. I wanted to nurture forth a discussion about phenomena surrounding animal cognition, our conceptions of nature and the experience of earthly consciousness.

The notion that separates human from natural fails in logic. The division supports a structural syntax in our language and thought where nature is seen as an ideal lack of human intervention. This division logically roots the concept of human technology as an un-naturally occurring phenomenon in the world and places human intent as an objective correlate to natural process. A viewpoint that emerges from this context places itself as separate from the environment and experiences nature as an external occurrence.

Witnessing behavior evident of an animal’s desire can provide insight on how our own experience is subject to a myriad of instinctual cognitive underpinnings. Reflecting on non-human motive can bring forth uncanny notions of cross-species similarity with humans. When considering how we relate to animals, we are a step
closer to the sanity of realizing our connection to nature as a process rather than a place.

The subject of my research led me to explore avenues of design collaboration with animals to generate paintings where authorship of the work could be shared through active or passive forms of engagement. Others have made similar explorations in process and I have come to observe a continuum between two points of animal authorship as a result. One end of the spectrum involves human observation of animals to create work, whereas the other strives to engage the animal as active participant in the process of making.

Komar and Melamid’s paintings made by rescued elephants† would be an example where an artworks authorship is almost exclusive (non-human) enough to provide a measure of insight on animal intuition of aesthetic. The works absurdity reveals limitation in the elasticity of arts definition by juxtaposing craft and animal. Painting sales go back to the sanctuary as charity, completing the projects discourse in action for the better good.

Lucy Kimbell’s “rat fair”‡ exhibition also engages a similar discussion about aesthetic agency in a piece of the show titled “is your rat an artist”. The installation consisted of an environment for rats with motion sensors to relay data from the animal’s movement back to a computer that printed lines based on paths made by the rats. 19 “drawings” created in this manner were then analyzed by an art expert to determine if the rat in question was an artist.

Both of the above mentioned examples illustrate human agency over the animal by using authorship and collaboration as a means to question. I am
interested in these processes because they get away from modalities of anthropomorphizing and representing animals as symbols of human likeness. In turn these works serve to critique aesthetic and the notion of otherness.

The Creatures Endeavor

I began utilizing line to explore representation of movement in the environment and illustrate an expanded moment in stasis. Without visual linkage to place or origin, observing the line reveals a disembodied lapse of time where motion has occurred in space. I began watching my dog and tracing her path from a blueprint of the apartment where she wandered. The dog’s senile condition resulted in her turning around in circles and backtracking frequently, generating line formations that I found interesting. I started placing obstacles in the terrain and moving her food dish to generate forms and patterns.
Using the mark generated from recording her motion as the base from which I designed paintings, afforded me freedom to explore methods of abstraction and generate a visual aesthetic that echoed her perceived lack of intention. Unfortunately the dog died having only got to design a dozen paintings, but working with her helped me discover direction for my process of making.
After her passing, my research moved outdoors. I began feeding and training squirrels on campus with the hope of getting one to come close enough to touch. Eventually one emerged that was brave enough to reach out and grab my finger. The contact of her fleshy hand was an uncanny experience that charged my desire to work in further collaboration with animals.

Playing with the creature I found that she would run off with a peanut to bury it and return in good faith if I maintained my location. Eventually she learned to recognize me and come quick when beckoned. I wanted to design paintings that shared this narrative similar to how I worked with my dog, but the squirrel would journey off too far with the nut for me to trace her paths. If I brought a bigger piece of paper to record the motion it would spook her off. The circumstance led to building an adjustable maze feeder to generate painting designs. The range of
objections the proposed project received postponed installation for close to a year.

To gain approval, I had to reach out to the biology department and many faculty members for support. I am very grateful for their persistence in helping me see it through to installation.

Even though the maze was designed as a means to observe and engage animals for the ends of painting, it also proves potential as an interactive teaching tool and public “art” installation. Using peanuts as reward in the movable labyrinth, to alter a squirrel’s path, becomes a method of putting natural process of learning and memory on living display in the environment. In doing so, the installation grants an opportunity to consider the significance of animal behavior while observing a moment of entangled life.
Using line to document the squirrel's motion through the maze, served to show a piece of time in which an objective is achieved. I started developing a light source focused on the peanuts location to highlight the destination and provide context for the lines that were recorded from the journey to get there and back.

Painting the moment in this manner facilitated semiosis within the lines etiquette that continues. Abstract content regarding consciousness and desire began to emerge but a hawk ate my favorite squirrel and revealed the concept of wrath in the
narrative. I wanted my paintings to be happy. The existential dilemma incurred by witnessing her gruesome death caused a hiccup in direction of my observation. The process branched to represent something internal to my own experience of consciousness. The layers of my cognition are entangled relative to what attracts my attention. I began to mark as pantomime to feeling and found a more abstracted line to be the perfect conduit.

**Spatial-kinetic Chrono-linear**

A mark can alter the experience of time through the intention of its history. I began to add layers of paint and respond to the form as it collects through means of removal in an effort to slow it down. Exploring etiquette in lines coming and going I hope to see a primordial aesthetic of conscious reality emerge. The moment of our experience prior to words may act as the shape of time that presents itself as rhythm. The sensation can be shared through faculties of hearing to garner a collective affect of synchronization. Thus, the logic of sound acts to integrate internal time consciousness and facilitate the intuition of our collective.
1. Husserl; consciousness and experience
2. Husserl; *intentionality* and *internal time consciousness*
3. Derrida; *difference / differance* and reality

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