On Possibilities for Interspecies Communication in Performance

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In fulfilment of the requirements for
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Declaration

I, Amber Caitlin Galbraith, declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains, as its main content, work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution, including Murdoch.

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Abstract

This thesis draws on the work of post-structuralist theorists – especially Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari – in addition to the work of posthumanist theorists, such as Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, and Jane Bennett – among others – to argue for possibilities for interspecies communication in performance.

It comprises a creative script titled SIGNUM & tacita and an exegesis. Especially through the creative component of the thesis, which omits textual dialogue, it focuses on opening up possibilities for bodily, reflexive forms of interspecies communication. By decentralizing the textual and linguistic, the affective and instinctual communicative capacities of bodies are heightened in performance.

This thesis contends that, simply by being embodied, all earthlings are affectively communicative. It argues that, although life is richly heterogeneous, there is also a sense of commonality between beings in the mutual experience of being alive, and that recognising this may allow us to understand Others pre-linguistically. It concludes that, by shifting the focus from textual dialogue in performance towards bodily expression, performance can engender a meaningful and wordless exchange between beings. Through the gestural and sensory, all bodies can speak without words.
Introduction

“The animal is a word, it is an appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and the authority to give another living creature.”

(Derrida 392)
This thesis aims to reconsider language – not as a representative, systematic form of signification, but rather as any wordless, tactile, affective exchange between embodied, interspecies beings.

Chapter One establishes a theoretical and historical overview for my argument. It draws on post-structuralist ideas in order to challenge hierarchical thinking that segregates the human from the non-human. It also highlights the communicative possibilities of the body in flux – that is, as a figure in the process of ‘becoming’. It draws on posthumanist ideas in order to displace the human subject by emphasizing our vast, terrestrial, necessary interconnection with Other living bodies and systems. I argue that the body, in and of itself, is a medium for affective expression – for example, through touch, gesture, and instinct. I utilize the posthumanist argument that language and bodies are, in fact, inextricable from one another. I draw on neuroscientific evidence that social animals develop their own linguistic systems of signification based on random noises which gradually acquire a shared sense of meaning. I make the case for a post-structuralist approach to language, focusing on experimentation and deconstruction, may help open up its expressive possibilities to Others.

Chapter Two examines posthumanist performance artist Kira O’Reilly, and considers the elements of her work that have inspired my own creative script, SIGNUM & tacita. By centralizing her own body in praxis, and by means of her visceral aesthetics, O’Reilly raises questions about what it means to be embodied. She also draws attention to the bodies of non-human Others – for example, those of agricultural animals and microscopic bacteria. Her performances may encourage us to reimagine how bodies have the potential speak – affectively and without words.

Chapter Three is my creative script, SIGNUM & tacita. The performance is located in a found natural space near the beach. It is a posthumanist genesis tale with two central characters and a multitude of micro-beings. It contains no textual dialogue,
and describes a series of stage directions.

The rationale for these choices is explained in Chapter Four, a commentary on SIGNUM & tacita. In this chapter, I explain my theoretical and artistic influences and decisions. The two characters are intended to complicate the dichotomies between sound and silence, text and bodies, and human and non-human animals in the organic rapport which might develop between these performers. The script explores dynamics between noise and quiet, space and proximity, and understandings and misunderstandings between SIGNUM and tacita in order to highlight both their commonality and their alterity – thus, positioning us – both as readers and potential spectators, were it to be performed – to reflect on our own larger connections with Other earthly beings.
Chapter One

The Language of Being

“Being expresses in a single meaning all that differs.”

(Deleuze and Guattari 254)
This thesis seeks to answer the question: ‘Can decentralizing the textual in performance uncover possibilities for interspecies communication?’

It aims to engender a meaningful exchange between beings that relies less on the textual or linguistic, and more on bodily expression and affect. More specifically, it aims to cultivate a form of wordless communication that is accessible to multiple beings – thus highlighting the possibilities for interconnection between us, whilst respectfully acknowledging the alterity that separates us.

I argue that, by re-conceptualising ‘language’ – not as a constructed system of textual signification, but as any form of exchange that relies on the interspecies quality of being embodied – we could potentially discover possibilities for new forms of expression and communication in performance between human and non-human beings.¹

My research builds on the monistic notion that the very condition of being embodied and alive interconnects all beings, as “everything is made of the same substance” (Bennett x). We are innately connected to other beings in our shared molecular origins. As earthlings, we are symbiotically connected in our experiences of life – including birth, consumption, procreation, aging, suffering, and eventual death. I argue, therefore, that there are infinite forms of ‘language’ in the necessarily communicative processes of living and being that do not need textual signification to legitimize them. I suggest that languages that are bodily or affective – such as in the context of performance – are especially powerful in realizing a wordless exchange between beings.

**Theoretical Background**

¹ The assumption that non-human beings reciprocate a human desire for communion is admittedly anthropocentric. However, anthropocentric projections of our own “agency” in “nonhuman nature” can help us to empathise with non-human Others by balancing our own “narcissism” (Bennett xvi)
This thesis comprises a dissertation, a creative script, and a commentary linking the theoretical and creative components. I centralize non-textual and non-linguistic forms of expression and communication in my creative script. I have applied the theoretical lens of post-structuralism, which holds that linguistic constructs are always subject to human agenda, as “linguistics is not immune” from “prejudice” or “personology” (Deleuze and Guattari 264). In particular, the post-structuralist ideas put forward by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have informed my research. Deleuze and Guattari are concerned with the radical deconstruction and destratification of all organized matter: to reject the stratification of being, to “disarticulate” oneself from a hierarchy of categorical organization, is a means of “opening the body to connections” (Deleuze and Guattari 159). A post-structuralist awareness of the categories of identity and the hierarchies that they often uphold has helped me to think critically about the relations between human and non-human beings.

Posthumanist theory intersects with post-structuralism because it is similarly concerned with disrupting categories, identities, and the dichotomy between subject and object. It aims to decentralise the human subject in favour of a broader “transversal interconnection” of “human and non-human actors” (Braidotti 45). Rosi Braidotti defines posthumanism as the legacy of Renaissance humanism in Western culture (Braidotti 13). The ideological conception of the rational animal or the ‘human’ in these historical roots is rife with ethical problems for marginalised human and non-human Others because, as Aneta Stojnić argues, the humanistic myth of our supremacy has been used to justify racialized and colonial violence, in addition to violence towards non-humans (Stojnić 126). For Haraway, to live in the posthumanist world is to acknowledge our mutual entanglement with other beings in the contingent, necessary, and intersecting processes of “co-habitation” and “co-evolution” (Haraway 4).

2 I use the word ‘script’ in a non-traditional sense. The creative component of this work is comprised of a series of affective actions, omitting dialogue.

3 Neither Rosi Braidotti nor Donna Haraway hyphenate the term ‘posthumanism’, a seemingly deliberate omission due to the structural and binary connotations of the symbol.
familiarity and strangeness of another being is to meaningfully acknowledge the Other in an exchange that does not always necessitate words.

The Body

In my script the body is central to the pursuit of a non-linguistic communicative exchange. In post-structuralist thought, the body is a fluid entity – neither fixed nor concrete, but perpetually evolving. Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of ‘becoming’ is a microscopic and molecular, imperceptible but infinite process, involving the speed and movement of particles (Deleuze and Guattari 273). This evolutionary ebb and flow of particles is the very stuff that animates and entangles all bodies and systems in birth, life, and death (Deleuze and Guattari 253-4). I draw on these becomings because the possibilities for bodily communication, when we reimagine our bodies as unfixed entities in constant flux, are manifold. A body that moves and changes in innumerable ways can serve as a vastly generative medium for communication between beings.

For example, Jacques Derrida shares a revelatory moment of recognition between himself and his cat in the vulnerability of a naked, bodily, “frontal exhibition”. In his unclothed state, subject to the gaze of the cat, he contemplates the absurdism of the humanistic construct of shame through a bare, intimate “face-to-face” exchange with the animal Other (Derrida 380). This exchange suggests that the body can be a powerful vessel for expression and perception in and of itself. As Haraway explains, “embodied communication” is “more like a dance than a word”, an affective, kinaesthetic exchange independent of verbal or textual signifiers (Haraway, “When Species Meet: Introductions”, 26). In a performance context, there are myriad forms the body can take. Dance is one kinaesthetic form of performance that often omits dialogic or monologic language altogether, so that audiences can usually understand the story on a purely affective level (Wenders 26). This is also the case in performance art, where the omission of the verbal can heighten our senses to affective expression (Blackman and Venn 8), potentially creating an intimate exchange between embodied beings.
Many posthumanist theorists endorse a philosophical monism which holds that systems of signification – especially representations of language – are, in fact, inseparable from the body (Braidotti 56); (Bennett 2). Deleuze and Guattari seek to reclaim what constitutes creative expression – for example, music – from anthropocentric thinking by suggesting that there is already music “in nature” (Deleuze and Guattari 309). Whereas they posit that the body is always prior to language, theorists such as Haraway, complicate this distinction by arguing that the body and text share a symbiotic relationship “in the syntax” as well as “in the flesh” (Haraway 12). Similarly, Kira O’Reilly, a performance artist whose works draw on posthumanist themes, emphasizes the importance of “embodied knowledge”, which she suggests is a kind of tactile wisdom that can only come from corporeal engagement with the material (O’Reilly, “The Art of Kira O’Reilly”, 87). The monistic approach seeks to deconstruct binarised thinking about the brain and body by arguing that there is a sense of unity to all matter (Braidotti 56). Monism is useful here, because the implication that systems of language derive from bodies has enormous communicative possibilities for a vast range of earthly Others. Neuroscience seems to strengthen the monistic position. Studies of the brain show us that systems of language originated from initially “arbitrary sounds” which gradually came to take on cultural “symbolism” in early hominins (Lewis et al. 75). This development seems to explain the onomatopoeic quality of many words, suggesting that other vocally expressive beings could possess systems of language, even if these are generally unrecognised by humans. It also suggests that there may be the potential to conceive of a shared language or lingua franca between interspecies beings based on our shared faculties for phonetic vocal mimicry.

In posthumanist thought, all bodies and systems are connected in an entangled web of contingency. In the context of this vast interconnection, theorists also emphasise the importance of recognizing alterity – they do not envision a blind egalitarianism that overlooks or erases Otherness, but rather, a respectful exchange that negotiates its

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4 See Chapter Two.
boundaries (Bennett xi); (Haraway 49). Through various methods, some posthuman performance artists have been inspired to attempt a realization of Haraway’s “dream of a common language” between human and nonhuman beings (Chaudhuri and Enelow 4). For many, the method is as simple as listening to animals, allowing them to “speak” on their own terms in order to recognize an exchange of pure instinct, affect, and touch (Jakovellio 624); (Sutil 2). This kind of wordless exchange, in which one simply gazes at the non-human Other – especially with a conscious rejection of the anthropomorphic expectations of what constitutes language – can potentially allow us to commune, even silently, with Other beings – perhaps to revelatory effect, as with Derrida and his cat.

**The Politics of Linguistics**

Aristotelian thought holds that the ability to speak meaningfully is unique to humans, thus separating us from, and elevating us above, non-humans (Qiu 198). Thus, historically, ‘language’ has sometimes been used to justify human supremacy, and to subjugate the non-human Other to human domination (Braidotti 67). The Aristotelian position has since been problematized by some scholars who question whether or not non-human Others can, in fact, communicate in systematic and significant ways, as humans do – even if their language is unrecognizable to us (Qiu 199); (Kirkkopelto 95); (Kawa 9). Neuroscientific knowledge reinforces the idea that there are non-human systems of language. Dominant theories suggest that the utterances of early hominids originated from onomatopoeic attempts to mimic the environment around them, which gradually developed into more sophisticated systems of language. Recent studies suggest that “all social animals” are likely to have similarly categorical systems of “acoustic-semantic” sounds – that is, those that combine phonetic mimicry with meaningful signification (Lewis et al. 64). Thus, there is empirical evidence that non-human Others are capable of communication, and are likely to have similar systems of language to us, even if we sometimes fail to recognize these from an anthropomorphic position.

In post-structuralist thought, language is deliberately deconstructed in order to
reconceptualise its communicative possibilities for Others. A post-structuralist approach to language – which favours fragmentation, experimentation, and deconstruction – recognizes that language is “fundamentally political. There is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language” (Deleuze and Guattari 101). O’Reilly’s performance art, for example, often completely omits any sign of the textual or verbal in its aims towards challenging “power structures as they [operate] through language” (O’Reilly, “The Art of Kira O’Reilly”, 85). I argue that linguistics is not problematic in and of itself. Rather, I suggest that to toy with linguistics in performance could offer a range of novel communicative means.

One of the major problems of any language is its inherent equivocality. My findings reject the premise of monosemy – that is, the idea that there are words that have fixed and singular meanings. Conversely, polysemy, or the multitude of possible meanings of words, offers rich and layered communicative possibilities – but it also risks lapses of understanding. Haraway argues that tropes or “figures of speech” are inherently slippery, evading fixed meaning. She highlights that the etymology of the word ‘trope’, the Greek *tropos*, “means swerving or tripping” (Haraway 20). Derrida, in his face-to-face encounter with his cat, asks not whether his cat can speak to him, but whether she can “respond”, and what it means to respond (Derrida 378). He argues that humans have disallowed the animal Other from developing its expressive “traces” into a system of “verbal language” (Derrida 417-8). I build on his argument by suggesting that animal Others do, in fact, have languages, which have not been disallowed, but simply overlooked by most humans through the lens of anthropocentrism. I am interested in positioning an audience to reimagine how such non-human ‘traces’ might work to signify expression, affect, or response in a system of interspecies language.

**Sameness and Otherness**

In posthumanist thought, all earthly beings are co-existent, co-evolving, and co-contingent in the mutual experience of being alive. With reference to her domesticated dog Cayenne Pepper, Haraway highlights that, despite their differences,
they also have much in common in the politics of identity: for example, they are etymologically similar as “canid” and “hominid”, gendered as “bitch” and “woman” (Haraway 1). Haraway’s recognition of the commonality between herself and her companion species, whilst carefully acknowledging their differences, demonstrates a meaningful exchange between the two. Her work seems to suggest that the process of empathising on the basis of sameness with an Other must be in constant negotiation with the recognition of difference: “The recognition that one cannot know the other or the self”, but “must ask in respect … who and what are emerging in relationship, is the key” (Haraway 49-50). Attentive reverence to the unknowable nature of nonhuman Others can counterbalance anthropomorphism when we attempt to understand or communicate with them. Thus, I am interested in toying with binary threads of alterity and commonality between humans and non-humans within my script.

Derrida posits that, ethically, we should focus not on whether animals can speak, but whether they can “suffer”, an “undeniable” affective phenomenon in all living beings: “No one can deny the suffering, fear or panic, the terror or fright” of a moribund animal (Derrida 396-7). Suffering is, arguably, another form of communicative expression that can be felt and understood without words. The inescapable nature of pain unites all earthly beings, and we are therefore ethically obliged to empathise with the pain of Others. To acknowledge that suffering is not unique to the human experience necessitates some level of silent, interspecies understanding – the unspoken and reciprocal desire not to suffer.

Derrida observes that, in being, we are necessarily “being alongside, being near”, or “being-with” the animal Other – co-existing, interconnected in a mutual kind of “being-huddled-together” (Derrida 379). Here, he calls to mind the image of the pack, or groupings of social animals. Deleuze and Guattari evoke similar imagery in their discussion of our mutual entanglement with non-human Others. They argue for the de-prioritization of categories and individual identities, instead prioritizing Darwinian processes of breeding, descent, and filiation. They explain that every
animate being is “fundamentally a band, a pack”, and only by embracing this notion of interspecies kinship can “the human being [encounter] the animal” (Deleuze and Guattari 239). So, a meaningful exchange with an Other, where our interconnection is recognised, requires the rejection of hierarchical values that keep the non-human Other subject to human supremacy. Instead, we must embrace the relational nature of all embodied beings as part of a greater ecological system, a kind of ‘pack’.

Performance artists and scholars whose works engage posthumanist ideas often deliberately invoke a sense of interconnection between bodies and systems, humans and nonhumans, and nature and culture. The condition of being a “species” at all “unites” us inseparably (Kirkkopelto 90). Performative applications of these ideas seek to create a sense of empathy in audiences that does not originate from anthropocentric “guilt” or “self-preservation”, but in the simple recognition of our interconnected, intersecting, and intersubjective entanglement with nonhuman Others (Orozco and Parker-Starbuck, 63). Haraway calls this interconnecting coexistence “sympoiesis” (Orozco, 180). Some scholars have even suggested the radical notion of an interconnected consciousness across beings, a seemingly unnatural phenomenon, “autonomous” in itself, and able to traverse those corporeal confines of “species boundaries” (Chaudhuri and Enelow 4). It is both a monistic and a metaphysical idea, the concept of an originary, uniting substance, a “unity to the plane of nature” that conjoins all living beings in what Deleuze and Guattari term the “plane of immanence” or “univocality” (Deleuze and Guattari 253-4). In the context of performance, where the body is often central, the interconnection between present beings is palpable, affective, pre-linguistic – it can be sensed kinaesthetically (Blackman and Venn 8). The common experience of being alive allows beings to communicate through affect and instinct.

The recognition of difference is as vital to interspecies communication as the recognition of commonality. Derrida’s exchange with his cat would not be wholly reciprocal without recognition of the cat’s Otherness. He acknowledges his sameness with the cat in their mutual gaze, but emphasizes that the cat’s gaze is not an empty
mirror of his own – rather, she has her own “point of view regarding me”; she is not just passively tolerating being “looked at”, but also looking back with agency, through the lens of her own unknowable subjectivity (Derrida 380). Haraway, too, values the heterogeneity of companion relationships – she points out that the recognition of “significant otherness” is paramount, especially in the context of domestication (Haraway 24). Sameness and difference in human and non-human relations must be carefully negotiated through the selective, “partial connections” between species that are necessary for coexistence (Haraway 25). To aim towards homogeneity in a posthumanist world is fraught with problems, because different beings necessarily have differing needs in a co-contingent system. The recognition of difference is therefore a fundamentally political matter. For Mikhail Bakhtin, it is only by acknowledging the differential qualities of an Other that one can “understand [oneself] as a member of the human race” (McCaw 30-1). This is pertinent in performance where the affective capabilities of bodies are such that beings can intuit difference – for example, through “voice-hearing” and even “telepathic modes of affective transfer” (Blackman and Venn 14). In achieving a meaningful exchange between beings, the respectful recognition of absolute Otherness is fundamental. We can reconcile these qualities of sameness and difference in the exchange through the simple power of common acknowledgement – an exchange that does not necessitate words.

On ‘Becoming’
The concept of ‘becoming’ is neither a sympathetic self-identification, nor a mere act of mimesis or mimicry – rather, one becomes in the deconstruction of forms, in the substance of pure “matter”, the endless movement of atoms and particles in evolutionary flux that “continually makes and unmakes” all things, bodies, and systems (Deleuze and Guattari 258). Similarly, for Haraway, becoming-dog is a gradual, biological, evolutionary process – an inherited byproduct of the “historical aberration and a naturalcultural legacy” of the domestication of animals (Haraway 3). According to Derrida, becoming is in the etymology of the French Je suis, which can mean both “I am” and “[I] follow”. The polysemy of this translation allows for an
ambiguous kind of “crossing of borders” – when Derrida literally follows his cat, he is also euphemistically assuming her interior subjectivity by way of connotation (Derrida 372). For Deleuze and Guattari, becomings happen more literally, on a microscopic scale – on the level of molecules and particles, in the dynamics and vibrations of atoms (Deleuze and Guattari 273). For Haraway, the notion of becoming is similarly molecular: a transmission of fluids which facilitates a process of “symbiogenesis”, in which she and Cayenne Pepper have exchanged “viral vectors” via the tacit intermingling of their different strains of saliva (Haraway 1).

Some scholars argue that becoming is inherently performative – a kinaesthetic gesture of not only transformation, but empathetic relation to Others through the body (Orozco 180); (Chaudhuri and Enelow 4). Especially in the liminal space of performance, where bodies and voices are fluid, affective, and reactive, becomings are infinitely possible. To become-Other in the context of performance art by assuming the Other’s interior subjectivity and exterior physicalisation, is to attempt to understand the Other in a non-linguistic, transformative exchange. There is neuro-scientific evidence to explain this heightened sense of empathic connection in the context of performance. Performances engage in mimesis or mimicry, a behavioural tendency that is innate to many social animals – thus, performative representations are not unique to humans (Lewis et al. 64). Mirror neurons, which have been observed in both hominid and primate brain activity, are fired in enacting or observing performative acts, working to facilitate a sense of empathy. Thus, many non-human beings can affectively come to mutual understandings in silent, gestural acts of copying and observing. These findings empirically validate the emotional phenomenon of empathy that transpires between human beings in performance, and suggests that primates, too, are capable of experiencing this phenomenon. However, one can consciously disengage from empathy, especially when observing the artifice of realism, because both humans and monkeys “can differentiate” the mimetic gesture from “something real” (Huibin 619-26). Thus, neuro-scientific knowledge also reinforces post-structuralist cynicism towards the limitations of representation.
It is therefore somewhat paradoxical that I am attempting to interrogate and deconstruct linguistics through the representative medium of the written word. However, language is dual, functioning either to empower or disempower beings. Language is not inherently harmful in itself, but through its ubiquity and influence – especially in human life – the structures of power operate. By proxy, non-human Others are also implicated in the politics of linguistics. Thus, it stands to reason that if we can effectively re-imagine what defines representation, particularly language – as I attempt to do in my script – we might be more attuned to what non-human Others are telling us.

**The Politics of Mortality**

Human and nonhuman beings are entangled both in the mutual experience of being alive and in the inevitability of death. The impermanence of all matter is a necessary condition to counter-balance material entropy and waste. The certainty of death therefore impels all living beings and imbues them with an instinctual sense of purpose – be it to territorialise, to consume, to reproduce, et cetera – a phenomenon conceptualized by Sigmund Freud as the death drive (Sutil 5). I cannot know, but I can speculate even from an anthropocentric position based on observations of animal behaviours in the face of death or dying – for example, those who seek the comfort of the pack (dogs), or those who opt for the quiet dignity of solitude (cats) – that death has some significance to non-humans.

Like beings and bodies, performances are finite processes. Thus, I suggest that the Freudian death drive compels all performance. Death is a source of inspiration for many performance artists as an implicit reminder of the corresponding “joy of life” (Kawa 9). Death – not a malevolent force, as it is sometimes characterized – is in fact the necessary condition of being alive. All beings are entangled in the inescapable systems of birth, life, and death – but, in the ruthless natural processes of living and dying, longevity is a matter of privilege. To humble oneself from the anthropocentric position – to embrace the nature of our embodied interconnection to terrestrial Others in our shared and imminent mortality – is to open oneself up to the myriad
possibilities for non-linguistic communication with Other living beings.

By centralising the body in performance, I hope to highlight possibilities for meaningful communication between embodied beings through its kinaesthetic and affective expressive abilities. To become with the nonhuman Other does not necessarily entail a literal act of metamorphosis – rather, it is a silent, communicative exchange that affects both beings irreversibly, changing beings in an interior and imperceptible way. To recognize our mutual entanglement in the interconnected experience of being born, living, and dying is to recognize the potential for a common language that relies not on words, but on the shared experience of being embodied.
Chapter Two

**Body Language in Performance Art**

“what happens in this space between you and me? / … and how do our bodies speak within it?”

(O’Reilly, “The You and the I”, 138)
In this chapter, I analyse Kira O’Reilly’s work including lectures, poetry, interviews, and audio-visual materials, as well as critical reviews. O’Reilly’s oeuvre is characterized by a raw, visceral aesthetic that raises questions about what it means to be embodied. Her performances of note include *Wet Cup* (1999-2002), in which she undergoes medical cupping in order to raise disciplinary questions about biological science (Linsley 519), and the controversial *inthewrongplaceneness* (2005), in which she dances with the carcass of a pig, evoking themes of gender and the (non) human body (Bouchard 102). These, and her other works, evoke the relational politics of bodies by omitting the textual and verbal, and by centering her own body in the performance space. The body is vital to O’Reilly’s work (O’Reilly, “Playing With Post-Secular Performance”, 57). Her art deploys sensory forms of expression and perception which rely more on experience and instinct than intellectualism and logocentrism. The pre-linguistic quality of O’Reilly’s work, which omits the traditional play text in order to centralise bodily presence and affect, has been especially influential in the development of my own creative script, *SIGNUM & tacita*.

**Embodiment as a Basis for Interconnection**

Haraway argues that language and bodies are, in fact, inextricable from one another – that “syntax” and “flesh” are inseparable (Haraway 12). This is a monistic idea that O’Reilly, too, explicitly endorses (O’Reilly, “The Art of Kira O’Reilly”, 87). O’Reilly envisions a “collapse” of the body, touching on post-structuralist notions of the radical destabilization of all subjects and objects (O’Reilly, “Beyond the Body”). For her, the body is never fixed, never finite, but perpetually evolving, offering an infinite range of possibilities. In many of her performance works, the body is, in fact, the *space*: the site of the performance is not concretely located, but in the “dynamics” between the “you and I” (O’Reilly, “Beyond the Body”). Thus, O’Reilly is attentive to the connected nature of embodiment throughout her work (Katsouraki 82). I am interested in this approach for my own work, which attempts to highlight this interconnection, thus encouraging audiences to reconsider what it means to be
embodied and alive alongside Others.

The recurrent theme of empathy throughout her work is sometimes characterized by self-identification. In her poetry, O’Reilly writes in self-address: “you’re damaged now/ you have tenderized yourself – like steak” (O’Reilly, “The You and the I”, 139). The simile of agricultural violence is overt. She seems to opt for simile over metaphor to subtly acknowledge the difference between her own self and the animal Other: her own act is agent, sacrificial, whereas the agricultural animal Other has no choice but exploitation and probable death. In this poem, O’Reilly is reflecting on her self-mutilating gesture in the performance piece Wet Cup. Footage shows her seated, naked. Her size, dwarfed in relation to the space, makes her appear vulnerable. An unnamed man in theatre blacks and medical gloves enters. He begins to carry out the ‘cupping’, pressing the seal of each glass bulb to O’Reilly’s bare skin, creating a tight and painful-looking vacuum. Her flesh is visibly swollen, bruises erupting underneath the pressure. Gradually, the cups accumulate over her body, the suction holding them in place, each globe drawing blood from tiny cuts. We see the man take a scalpel from the trolley and make a sharp incision in O’Reilly’s thigh. The blood has begun to escape the vacuum seals in places, thin fingers tricking down the contour of her bare spine. When the piece ends, the space is vacant of human bodies. Only inanimate bodies and microscopic bio-matter remain, tiny, but affective: steel trays, O’Reilly’s blood pooled in glass cups, rags splattered with asymmetrical red blotches – residual, visceral traces of the bodily exchange that has transpired (dnarchive). For me as a viewer, their presence is palpable, but wordless.

O’Reilly is interested in destabilizing binary constructs separating human and non-human animals, the micro and the macro, and the self and the Other – often by creating visual parallels between these dichotomous subjects. For example, in inthewrongplaceness, the “sometimes indistinguishable” bodies of woman and sow evoke a sense of connection between the human and the nonhuman subject (Bouchard 102). She is hyper-sensitive to this sense of connection, but careful not to unintentionally reinforce the binary between human and non-human animals by
simply seeking to invert the power relation that keeps the animal Other subjugated. Instead, her art evokes an implicit sense of global and ecological responsibility by positioning audiences to remember that all human and non-human beings are mutually connected and co-contingent in the struggle for survival.

Her work sometimes reflects on gazes shared with Others. For example, in her poetry, the homophone: “the you and the i / the you and the eye” draws a beautiful parallel between the affective dynamic of a bodily exchange and the importance of acknowledgement – the instinctual drive of social animals, necessarily instinctual because of their relational nature, to see and to be seen (O’Reilly, “The You and the I”, 138). She draws similar parallels between animate and inanimate bodies, comparing her “skin being cut” with “breaking the surface tension of water” (O’Reilly, “The You and the I”, 138). The use of simile, again, is particularly effective here – it works to suggest commonality between the bodies of flesh and of water, but by omitting the close proximity of metaphor, it respects the alterity between them. She extends the simile throughout her poem, painting imagery of a “vast body of land … / times, places … distances crossed” … “new territories./ geographies …” (O’Reilly, “The You and the I”, 139). This passage highlights a parallel between the borders and boundaries of bodies and lands, permeable, changeable – in some ways as artificial – as each other, a comparison O’Reilly has made before (Bouchard 95) in order to suggest a sense of interconnection. Her poetry makes it difficult for its reader to disconnect – it demands a connection with its intricate map of earthly parallels. In Slick Glittery, O’Reilly moves slowly, deliberately, her muscles tensed defensively like a predator on the hunt. Here, she evokes a reptilian image, augmented by the shiny green ‘scales’ of aluminum stuck to her naked body. There is something bestial about this movement, and the way she crawls on her belly evokes Darwinian notions of continuity and co-evolution (VernissageTV). She slumps face-down in a pile of glitter, slowly inhaling and exhaling, drawing the particles in with each breath. Her decision to imbibe the harmful particles into her lungs creates a powerful, if unintended, environmental commentary. I interpret this as an act of martyrdom, to clog her own respiratory
system, thus implicating her body in the fate of Other bodies – such as the body of the ocean. This sense of interconnection of all embodied beings seems to inform O’Reilly’s work, largely through her own bodily expression. Interconnection has become a major theme in my research and creative work. The condition of being alive and embodied forms the foundation for the pre-linguistic interspecies exchanges that I hope to suggest possibilities for in my script.

Playful Representations
O’Reilly’s craft exhibits a distinctive aesthetic which juxtaposes elements from the clean, clinical, orderly sphere of the biological sciences with the more shambolic realm of visual and performance arts. In her practice, she deliberately seeks to blur the traditional disciplinary dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative fields of study (O’Reilly, “Playing With Post-Secular Performance”, 59), refusing the label of ‘scientist’ (VernissageTV), though she has engaged in extensive laboratory experimentation with bio-matter. She brings visceral, residual traces of her biological work into her praxis as an artist, incorporating materials including embryonic fluids, cell cultures, and pig carcasses. In video interviews, she highlights a parallel between her mutual passions of art and biology: life itself – that is, the substance of the “everyday” (VernissageTV). Conscious of the richness and multiplicity of the bio-matter that she works with, she emphasizes that her practice is never “solo”, but “multiple”, acknowledging her collaborators – both human and non-human (O’Reilly, “Beyond the Body”). Many of her performances, particularly Slick Glittery, deliberately juxtapose the stiff, sterilized “laboratory” aesthetic with the bright gaudiness and artifice of “glitter”, “plastic”, and other “shiny” substances. This juxtaposition of disciplinary aesthetics attempts to disrupt Western scientific discourses which prize rationalism and logocentrism, thereby welcoming Others, especially artists, into the otherwise “masculinized” space of the laboratory (Bouchard 104).

O’Reilly’s entire practice is characterized by a sense of openness, as she adaptively allows her art and ideas to evolve with her praxis (Linsley 520). She seems to suggest
that representation and the ‘real’ are linked by toying with the artificial “fissure” between them (Katsouraki 74). In *Wet Cup*, for example, the man who enters wears theatre blacks contrasted with white latex medical gloves and a medical trolley – his ‘costume’, partly performative and partly pragmatic, could be read as reflective of O’Reilly’s hybrid disciplinary influences. As he ‘performs’ the ‘operation’, the act is stylized, theatrical – but also cautious, measured, and methodical (dnaarchive).

Similarly, in *Slick Glittery*, we are introduced to a warmly lit, spacious room: an exhibit for a gallery, traditionally the domain of the artist. In this space, O’Reilly engages bodily with raw eggs, deliberately calling to mind her earlier biological work with chicken embryos (VernissageTV). In these examples, she refuses to separate science, or the ‘real’, from art, or representation, instead highlighting the complex relationship between the two disciplines. These aesthetics re-appropriate and re-imagine the conventions of the fields of both science and art, suggesting that the two are never wholly separable. The work seems to attempt to dismantle the commonly held and related binaries between culture and nature, and of representation and the ‘real’, effectively raising questions about these dichotomies and the deeper, systemic separations they uphold – of exclusion and inclusion, of human and non-human animals, and of the self and Others. Furthermore, and of particular relevance to my creative work, O’Reilly’s reliance on aesthetics works to further decentralise the text in performance.

Most all of her performance pieces omit any kind of dialogical or monological utterance. Her decision to centre the textual and verbal script of performance is deliberate and political. When she does include text in performance, she toys with it in what Haraway defines as a metaplasmic, or transfigurative, way (Haraway 20). She likes to “make” it, she acknowledges, but struggles to “figure [it] out” (O’Reilly, “Beyond the Body”). For O’Reilly, there seems to be an enigma to probe in the equivocality and multiplicity of language – its potential failings and misunderstandings seem to inspire her rather than hinder her. Like Haraway, she envisions text and flesh as closely linked. In some of her works, she examines the relationship between the two – she offers the example of *Marsysus – Running Out of*
Skin which she performed at SymbioticA in Western Australia, in which she used her own living biological tissue to create an artificial, systematic ‘lace’ of skin (Bouchard 103); (O’Reilly, “Beyond the Body”). In doing so, she effectively integrates a codified system, akin to one of language, into her own living, animate flesh, thus highlighting the arbitrariness and artificiality – and thus, limitations – of linguistics.

“The You and the I” employs an open, sprawling free-form meter, and its soft consonants are inviting, sensory, almost musical. Its gentle iambs comfort the reader – the writing is not cold and formal, but vulnerable in a way that is stylistically distinctive. Most of its lines end with question marks, open and indeterminate, never imposing or forceful. All of it is written in lower case, free from grammatical convention. Even this seems to be a political choice, particularly in the lower case “i”, which renders the speaker’s voice non-authoritative in tone (O’Reilly, “The You and the I”, 138-9). I found only one trace of the textual in her performance works, in a seemingly untitled performance, footage of which was uploaded by arts magazine this is tomorrow. In the footage, O’Reilly is absent-present, her otherwise naked body semi-veiled by a gauzy black cloth. The image is reminiscent of the archetype of death, evoking a daunting sense of impending mortality, further reinforced by the conspicuous presence of writing in the central background directly behind her. The text works as an inexorable reminder to the audience of the inevitable – memento mori – a scrawled pencil graffiti reading “THOU SHALT NOT KILL”. The space is desolate and grimy, reminiscent of an abattoir or perhaps death row, heightening the foreboding atmosphere. A thin layer of what looks like black mold speckles the dank-looking walls – the microscopic bodily performers that frequently collaborate with O’Reilly, working here to evoke themes of decay and consumption, reminding us that life and death are cyclically entwined. Like O’Reilly herself, the audience are absent-present: they are out-of-sight, present only in the murmur reverberating in the hollow acoustics of the space and the flash bulbs of cameras (this is tomorrow). O’Reilly evokes the subjugated animal Other as she lies, naked and supine, writhing and contorting her body, voiceless. The laboured, muscular stiffness of her body resembles a phase of rigor mortis. She struggles to erect herself into a sitting position,
but is unable to do so, helpless in what resembles throes of death. The only linguistic sign present is not there to uplift or absolve her – it weighs upon her, oppresses her, seals her doom. I read this as a critique of the influence of human systems of language, through which certain imbalanced power relations are reinforced, privileging and empowering some whilst excluding and oppressing Others, thereby establishing the very conditions that define the longevity and quality of life in a kind of politics of mortality. Thus, O’Reilly’s intentions in deconstructing and decentralizing language are the same as my own: to allow Others who have historically been excluded or oppressed through the constructs of language to ‘speak’ on their own terms.

**Becomings: In The Exchange**

“Like Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘becoming animal,’ O’Reilly’s performance [inthewrongplaceness] generated in her traces of pig” (Parker-Starbuck 145). O’Reilly’s concept of becoming seems to dwell in an ambiguous realm in which hybrids, chimaeras, and all kinds of “relationships and crossings” of “flesh and skin” with “non-human materials and technologies” share exchanges that irreversibly affect all entangled bodies and beings. In her practice, becomings are achieved through an interchange between “matter and manifestation” that works to collapse multiple binary structures (O’Reilly, “The Art of Kira O’Reilly”, 85-6). She recognizes the ordinary ‘reality’ that bodies are “provisional” and “contingent”, but also advocates for more extraordinary possibilities of bodies – that they can be “fantastical” and “imaginary” (O’Reilly, “Beyond the Body”). Her becomings are terrestrial and fleshy, but also open to the unknowable nature of Otherness. For example, in a recent lecture, she described walking slowly through spider webs, verbally acknowledging the energy the spiders have expended in their architectural craft by describing their work as “tiny sculptures” or “installations”. She explained that by letting herself “drag through the spiders’ webs”, she allowed them to become a part of her own body, to “integrate” the matter into her own system (O’Reilly, “Beyond the Body”). Through the proximity of her skin to the web and their sticky entanglement, she achieves a kind of becoming. However powerful the gesture may be in the context of
performing arts, it is rife with problems, for she does not even seem to consider the consequences of her uninvited bodily invasion into the spider’s home. The exchange is neither respectful nor reciprocal; it benefits O’Reilly’s art whilst disempowering the arachnid Other. Ontologically, at least, this ‘becoming’ with the spider web demonstrates a kind of tactile, momentary fusion between forms of matter – thus enacting a kind of wordless, if violent and inequitable, communication between the two entities.

A lot of the visceral elements in her work evoke becomings. From an evolutionary standpoint, becoming is the very stuff of life – its ebb and flow, its perpetual pulsation, the endless oscillation between birth and death – the rapidly vibrating speed and movement of the atoms that make up living matter. In her poetry, she describes her skin being cut using terminology appropriated from quantitative discourses – for example, the gaping wound a “Möbius strip of ins and outs and mes and yous”, an “opening”, a “wound. Unwound. Unwinding” (O’Reilly, “The You and the I”, 138). The comparison of her cut to a Möbius strip evokes a sense of the infinite multiplicity of life, a series of shifting struggles and negotiations – a ‘becoming’ that never truly stands still. The play on the word ‘wound’, which can denote fleshly damage, but also a sense of healing and moving forward – a cathartic ‘unwinding’ – may remind the reader how closely birth and death are linked, a common thread that, as mentioned earlier, connects all animate beings. This wound is a negotiation of power – through her vulnerability, she opens herself up to becoming.

In *Slick Glittery*, spaces and bodies are transformed in a natural-cultural amalgamation of egg yolks and glitter. The piece starts out neatly, architecturally arranged, before O’Reilly in her capacity as performer begins to crush the eggs with her naked body (VernissageTV). In footage, we see a wide shot of *Slick Glittery*, preset. Four bowls of glitter are lined up diagonally across the room. Eggs are spaced out evenly in symmetrical, intersecting lines. As she interacts with the space and its materials over several hours, disorder breaks loose: broken shells, embryonic fluids, and haphazard flecks of glitter are smeared around the room and O’Reilly’s naked
body, re-centering the presence of a non-human, yet “living, vital materiality” (Katsouraki 79). Like an evolutionary explosion, the space and its bodies of glitter, flesh, and fluid transform unpredictably, with all the unknowable chaos of birth and growth – a biological becoming distinct to her practice. This raw, visceral mise en scène has inspired SIGNUM & tacita, which also engages its audiences on a primal, pre-linguistic, and sensory level, thus rendering language needless.

**Death and Otherness**

The politics of embodiment necessarily extend to the politics of mortality itself. O’Reilly’s work highlights the violent exploitation that non-human beings are subject to (Parker-Starbuck 145). Death is a fundamentally political matter because it does not affect beings and systems equally (Stojnić 127). O’Reilly, having already professed the influence of Freud, expresses a fascination with the unconscious compulsion of “death impulses” in the context of being embodied (O’Reilly, “Beyond the Body”). She seems keenly aware of her own mortality in her poetry: “i have a breath taken./ i have been a breath taken.” (O’Reilly, “The You and the I”, 138). She is sparing with punctuation throughout her poetry, so the use of periods here is particularly impactful, strengthening the lines with a weighty sense of finality. Her future-spective gaze, in which she has been a breath taken, is without fear – it is a mutually respectful gaze, a face-to-face with death itself, arguably the ultimate Other. I argue that death is another incorporeal performer present in many of O’Reilly’s works, invisible, but deeply affective.

Musing on *Bad Humours/Affected*, she notes that she was inspired by the discovery that, following the rarely used medical procedure of leeching, leftover blood was once used as fertilizer. The half-life of this scientific medical knowledge had seen the “harmless byproduct” rediscovered in more recent years as “hazardous waste” (O’Reilly, “The Art of Kira O’Reilly”, 86). The parallel highlights that, like bodies, the representative, textual constructs of discourses and epistemologies are finite – again, evoking the monistic connection between bodies and languages. It also implicitly reminds us of the inextricable link between life and death, for the same
visceral substance that was once culturally understood as vital and nurturing has taken on new meaning as potentially deadly – suggesting that our bodies, too, have the potential to be both harmful and healing.

In being embodied, one can create life – for example, through procreation – or death – for example, through inflicting violence. As with the condition of being alive, the inevitability of death connects all embodied beings. According to Derrida, the fear of mortality and the relative, affective experience of “suffering” are “undeniable” phenomena in nonhuman animals, for “No one can deny the suffering, fear or panic, the terror or fright that humans witness in certain animals” (Derrida 396-7). Thus, O’Reilly’s evocations of death have inspired my work, for mortality is another condition of embodiment that connects us innately in the mutual experiences of suffering, ageing, illness, and death – thus opening up further possibilities for wordless, affective, and empathetic exchanges between mortal beings.

O’Reilly’s work is as mutable, evolving, and alive as the earthly beings that inspire and inform it. She aims to question the oppressive structures of human supremacy within her body of work, especially as they operate through the structures of linguistic systems, categories, and binaries. Through her praxis, she invokes the macro-political ‘reality’ of the co-contingent, co-evolving, and inescapable interconnection of all natures and cultures, systems and beings. In tandem, the centrality and value she affords to those microscopic, intangible, imperceptible, ‘invisible’ Others in her work encourages us to be more attentive to alterity in communication, to re-imagine what makes up a language, a body, or their fusion in an individual ‘voice’. Thus, O’Reilly’s work has inspired SIGNUM & tacita in its aims to re-conceive a language for Other beings that is affective and wordless.
Chapter Three

Script: SIGNUM & tacita

“Significantly other to each other, in specific difference, we signify in the flesh a nasty developmental infection called love. This love is an historical aberration and a naturalcultural legacy.”

(Haraway 3)
Birth

Dusk on a beachy landscape. We see *tacita*, unconscious, suspended in a clear vessel of water. The water is neither still nor stagnant but ebbing and flowing with great vitality. *tacita* should be immediately alienating, with their menacing, behemothic figure; but also familiar in a bestial way, reminiscent of other earthly beings. They are shrouded in furs, teeth, claws, scales, and feathers that are motley but distinctly terrestrial. *tacita* floats, submerged in the embryonic fluid of the most ancient and earthly womb – sea water. Attached to their tail, which doubles as an umbilical cord, is the foetus of SIGNUM, who is generally similar in appearance but smaller and with thinner hair – they resemble a more hominid figure.

Suddenly, we hear the tide crash loudly against the shore. *tacita* opens their eyes, awake, and staggers forth from the waves. Blood, mucus, and salt water gush forth as they are born, spluttering and gasping inarticulately. The birth is not quixotic or sentimental, but ugly, raw, and brutal. The foetus cries, visibly distressed. *tacita* gazes upon it in horror: this alien, parasitic entity that has been contingent on her flesh for 9 months, leaving *tacita’s* body emaciated and malnourished. Panicked and reactive, *tacita* begins to gnaw through the umbilical tail bone that conjoins them like twins. SIGNUM screams in pain, but soon, they are separate – individuals. SIGNUM has the shorter end of the gnarly, mutilated tail.

*tacita* takes pity on the babe and hums lowly, soothingly, in their throat. SIGNUM is lulled and attempts to take the reluctant *tacita’s* teat into their toothy mouth, causing *tacita* to hiss reactively, and SIGNUM to squall again. In a feline motion, *tacita* bites SIGNUM’s throat, gently holding them in place, and begins to clean the fluid from their naked body. Both lie there blinking and breathing for a while, subtle and automatic gestures, as they acclimatize to the environment.

*tacita* extends a limb towards SIGNUM, instinctively making contact. The tactile gesture further soothes SIGNUM, who begins to doze, snoring lightly. *tacita* emits an
eerie but beautiful sound, melodious and strange, like keening. Every time SIGNUM tries to move, tacita seizes them by the throat until they are still.

Time passes. SIGNUM grows into a fuller form with tacita’s tough, but nurturing, care. But SIGNUM’s bodily configurations and needs are different to tacita’s. SIGNUM has opposable thumbs, a nose, protruding ears, and fleshy lips; as opposed to tacita’s reptilian ear-holes and sensory gash that serves as a nose and mouth. SIGNUM wants to use their lips and teeth to kiss tacita, and their long, flexible appendages to cuddle them, but tacita construes the gesture as an invasion of their territory and lashes out violently. SIGNUM cries at the rejection and gradually grows a little more distant.

As SIGNUM develops fully, they begin to respond to the environment around them differently to tacita. Whereas tacita curls up in a foetal position for warmth, SIGNUM clothes themselves in scraps and cut away bits of their fur in a bizarre grooming ritual that disconcerts tacita. SIGNUM stretches out their body to sleep under the scraps. The two co-exist necessarily, but are increasingly wary of, and alienated by, one another’s alterity.

Speech

tacita is seemingly alone. The audience sits in the silence and stillness of the moment with tacita for an uncomfortable stretch of time. Slowly, tacita’s breathing becomes heavier, the rhythmic sound filling the open space. Circulatory sounds of blood rushing can be heard. Sounds and lights suggest tiny Other presences including sounds of crawling, scrabbling, squeaking, cawing, howling, barking, crying, grumbling, and even a rising and falling sound somewhat like laughter. tacita falls into an improvised, rhythmic sound pattern with the unseen presences, vocalising against the wall of sound, until the exchange is harmonious and dialogic.

The mood that develops is meditative. The steadily beating, rhythmic quality of the cacophony engages the hominid audience by appealing to something primal.
SIGNUM enters at a tense, climactic moment, bursting in hyperactively, flailing their limbs and chattering their teeth rapidly with excitement. The microscopic presences of sound and light flee, thoroughly disturbed. *tacita* rounds on SIGNUM, their body defensively rigid. SIGNUM bares their teeth at *tacita* in a grin. *tacita* bares their teeth at SIGNUM in warning, snarling.

There is an intense, volatile moment, in which it seems there may be a violent altercation. *tacita* blinks several times in warning. SIGNUM holds their gaze. Tension builds. Suddenly, SIGNUM mimics *tacita*’s threatening expression, baring their teeth and grimacing; but their mimicry is exaggerated, clumsy, and comical, and their growl is feeble and mewling, which causes *tacita* to relax and both to share a musical sound something like laughter. *tacita* rolls onto their back, exposing their stomach to SIGNUM, who does the same.

The sunlight continues to wane over the sea. The tide draws higher. *tacita* and SIGNUM are drowsing together, not fast asleep, but not quite awake. They share a gibberish sleep-talk exchange. The murmuring tones soothe *tacita*. SIGNUM is allowed to cuddle in close.

We see a dream sequence for SIGNUM, who gets up and walks around while *tacita* remains sleeping. We see scrawled text on sand, but it is intangible, dream-like, sheer as light. SIGNUM approaches the marks with interest, trying to sniff them, touch them, taste them – ultimately, to interpret them. However, the text continues to change its form as SIGNUM watches with bemusement, rapidly scrambling itself so that it is blurred and incomprehensible.

SIGNUM returns to rest beside *tacita*, who wakes and rises in the same instance. We hear sounds to herald the morning including the twittering and chirping of birdsong and the clicking of cicadas. *tacita*’s eyes widen as they sniff the air, stalking out the source of the sound. As they close in on their prey, they begin to chirp in a feline manner, attempting to mimic the bird calls. *tacita* seizes on their invisible prey, takes
it in their jaws, and returns to SIGNUM’s side.

tacita roughly pries open SIGNUM’s mouth with their front legs and regurgitate the semi-digested prey deep into their throat. SIGNUM is horrified by the rough awakening, choking and spluttering as they flee. Puzzled, tacita follows them, and returns shortly afterwards holding a half-heartedly struggling SIGNUM by the scruff of the neck in their mouth.

This time, tacita puts the food on the floor, allowing SIGNUM to eat on their own terms. Immediately, SIGNUM bends and scoops up the food with their hands, straightening their back, standing to full bipedal height. tacita’s reaction is nervous and edgy. They gaze at SIGNUM questioningly. SIGNUM senses their discomfort and makes some gentle, soothing vowel noises. tacita is excited when they realise that they are able to repeat the vowel sounds in a near-perfect imitation. SIGNUM is also excited and progresses into softer vowels, but tacita struggles to form these and becomes frustrated. Again, empathetically, SIGNUM internalizes tacita’s frustration as their own. As tension builds between them, SIGNUM expresses irritation through a series of hard, sibilant consonant sounds, reminiscent of hissing. Terrified, tacita flees from the stage. Weary of misunderstandings, SIGNUM remains in the space.

**Strangers**

SIGNUM erects an artificial, largely symbolic boundary, fence, or ‘border’ – for example, a piece of rope – between the two beings. Although they are in literal, physical proximity to one another, SIGNUM refuses to acknowledge tacita through the boundary. SIGNUM begins to decorate their side of the stage with markings with a chalky rock, the markings as close to the ones seen in their dream as they can remember. tacita mimics the motion perfectly, but without leaving any trace apart from, implicitly, the invisible oils secreted through the pores of their skin, which they pause to sniff from time to time.

As the strange mimetic drawing ‘dance’ continues, tacita’s back leg becomes
ensnared in the rope boundary. They howl with pain. SIGNUM is furious at the intrusion into their newly claimed ‘territory’. SIGNUM ties tacita up with more rope, winding it around their neck, like a makeshift collar and leash. tacita is staked to the ground as SIGNUM returns to making arbitrary markings.

After a drawn-out moment of physical distance, SIGNUM goes to check on tacita, who is whimpering from the pain of confinement, unable to relax in their bound position. tacita’s menstrual blood has broken through, trickling out from between their legs. In the blood, a hard-boiled egg emerges. SIGNUM collects it, wipes the fluid off with an embroidered handkerchief, and eats most of the egg. Whatever SIGNUM doesn’t eat falls to the ground for tacita to eat. They then return to their side of the stage to sleep. tacita sobs softly, unable to sleep.

The morning sounds return just as tacita is falling asleep. SIGNUM returns to see if tacita has laid another egg. When they see that they have not, they are furious, and lash out violently by prying open tacita’s mouth gash in a parallel interchange to that in the preceding scene. Afterwards, SIGNUM appears somewhat remorseful and loosens their hold. They repeat a long vowel sound at tacita, attempting to elicit mimicry, but tacita is exhausted and unable to vocalise. For a long time, SIGNUM talks at tacita in a berating manner. When they get no response, SIGNUM “tsks” and returns to their markings.

A little while later, SIGNUM re-emerges and, pleased with tacita’s quiet acquiescence, kisses their head, pets them, and gives them a treat to eat. The nourishment allows tacita to release another egg.

Pleased, SIGNUM unties the rope from around tacita’s neck and gestures towards the audience, permitting them to have an exploratory sniff. tacita bounds over eagerly and inhales audience members deeply, holding their gaze. When they become excessively enthusiastic, waggling their whole body with inquisitive delight, SIGNUM decides that tacita’s behaviour is too boisterous and clips them across their
SIGNUM takes *tacita* into their space and shaves some of their fur, scales, and feathers off in arbitrary patches, leaving haphazard stretches of naked skin. As SIGNUM cuts, we hear tiny screeches of distress as the microscopic parasitic and bacterial creatures that live on *tacita*’s body are left in ruins. *tacita* seems grateful for the benevolent attention and submits to the grooming. However, they are weakened by the loss.

**Pack**

SIGNUM and *tacita* sit in close proximity to one another. SIGNUM is desperately trying to teach *tacita* a consonant sound. Each time *tacita* fails to articulate the consonant correctly, they are clipped across the ear. The closer *tacita* gets to enunciating the sound, the more excited SIGNUM becomes, until finally, *tacita* is able to mimic the sound with relative accuracy. The sound is clear, but not quite human, an eerie mimicry. Satisfied, SIGNUM gazes into *tacita*’s eyes and smiles toothlessly.

They begin to dance with increasingly rapid motion, becoming exhilarated and delirious. Their mouth orifices meet and they exchange a spittle-filled kiss, causing SIGNUM to moan and *tacita* to purr.

They share an intimate, silent exchange in which they simply trace one another’s bodies, exploring their physical differences with appreciation and wonder. As the tactile exchange builds in intensity, their utterances come to form an improvisational *lingua franca* made up of a mish-mash *tacita*’s garbled vowel sounds and SIGNUM’s harder consonants. Both participants should be physically, mentally, and emotionally attentive and attuned to one another. Both seem to find joy and pleasure in the overlap of understanding in the exchange, despite minor potential mistranslations and misunderstandings. The kinaesthetic interaction culminates orgasmically for both characters.
**Post-Coitum**

The chemical, molecular, atomic interchange between *tacita* and SIGNUM through the act of sexual intercourse releases a strong, musky smell into the open space. Both bodies are marked with bites and bruises, tiny physical metamorphoses as sexual byproducts. Following their fleshly merging, hair, scales, and feathers fall from their bodies, especially *tacita*’s. Both bodies are increasingly swollen and hairless in an empathic, joint pregnancy.

Suddenly, gushing fluid can be heard as they go into labour. Both writhe and scream in excruciating pain. At this point, they should be closely physically linked, holding one another as though they are a single animate being. As they contort, a sickening splitting sound is heard. The violence of the birth splits them apart again. Blood and mucus burst forth as countless projections of shadow larvae suddenly spring forth and multiply across the stage.

The newly separated and physically transformed *tacita* and SIGNUM are almost unrecognizable in their new forms. Even their *lingua franca* has changed – *tacita* is chattier and able to utter a limited number of distorted consonants, whereas SIGNUM is quieter than before and takes up less space. The whelps remain onstage, steadily present, teeming in a low hum.

**Death**

Some of the brood succumbs to the brutality of the natural order. Resources are finite as the shadow larvae continue multiplying. Some of their bodies are scattered on the sand. The surviving ones continue to thrive and copulate, cannibalistically consuming the bodies of the deceased for nutrients.

The ageing *tacita* and SIGNUM resign themselves to quietly pass the rest of their mortal time together. SIGNUM spends much of their time masturbating to orgasm. *tacita* spends most of their time eating fermented fruit. Both dance when they are
intoxicated from their chemicals of choice. All the while, the shadows continue to consume the beach, the darkness augmented by the gradually sinking sun. The humming and hissing sounds steadily increase in volume. Eventually, annoyed, SIGNUM crushes some of the whelps with a hideous cracking sound, causing tacita to cry out in lamentation and SIGNUM to act violently towards tacita, striking them with a closed fist.

*tacita* eats more and more fermented fruit in their grief. Their teeth are the first part of them to rot, brittle bits crumbling from their mouth. *tacita*'s toothlessness disallows them from hunting or eating independently, rendering them moribund. In a role-reversal, SIGNUM clutches them to their breast and feeds them milk to nourish them.

SIGNUM is able to prolong *tacita*'s life by nursing them, but only temporarily. Without meat, *tacita* quickly succumbs to death. SIGNUM tries to rouse them, attempting to sing in the eerie, keening way that *tacita* would in order to comfort them; but the sound is hollow and broken up by sharp consonants. The song dies in SIGNUM’s throat and they begin to sob dryly. Gradually, all things are thrown into disorder and chaos. More and more shadow larvae begin to perish. Other flora and fauna begin to languish and wilt.

For days, SIGNUM mourns by holding *tacita*'s lifeless, rotting body. Eventually, everything around them is bare and barren. SIGNUM has nothing left to eat. Desperate and starving, they remove *tacita*'s withering uterus with their fingers, and consume it. Soon afterwards, SIGNUM also dies – from ingesting *tacita*'s spoilt flesh, or eventual starvation.

Night has fallen. Again we hear the same sound from the opening scene of the ocean crashing against the shore. In the dim light, SIGNUM crawls backwards, re-entering the water at high tide. This time, in their reincarnated forms, SIGNUM carries the foetus of *tacita*. They float, submerged, unconscious.
All is still for a long, tense moment. We hear the wind across the water. Suddenly, a sole, surviving shadow larvae creeps out, then another, and another, until they are swarming all over the space.
Chapter Four

Commentary

“The permanent search for knowledge of the intimate other, and the inevitable comic and tragic mistakes in that quest, commands my respect, where the other is animal or human …”

(Haraway 35-6)
The creative script *SIGNUM & tacita* is a posthumanist genesis tale that examines and complicates the interrelated dichotomies between sound and silence, texts and bodies, humans and animals, as well as nature and culture. Influenced by the linguistic distortions and experiments of post-structuralist thinkers and a posthumanist focus on embodiment, affect, and becoming, I have created a script that tells this story without textual dialogue. Inevitably, the script relies on textual stage directions, but in praxis, were it to be produced, its meaning should be clear independent of the spoken word. In addition to the literature I have read, my own observations of the communicative and expressive capacities of the non-human animals that I live alongside have generated some fruitful creative ideas.

I have deliberately made the characters agendered so that themes of identity politics, such as those pertaining to gender and race, do not the obscure posthumanist themes central to this script. Of course, the construction of only two characters may run the risk of unintentionally reinforcing the very binaries I am attempting to challenge; but it is my intention that the complexity I am aiming for will emerge in the transformative, intimate, and palpable dynamic between the participants embodying the two roles. In praxis, the piece should therefore employ dual or even multiple casting, so that the rapport between its characters is spontaneous and irreproducible in every performance.

The choice to capitalize SIGNUM’s name is deliberate. The character represents the figure of the human animal and the humanistic valuation of systems of signification and representation, especially those of language. I selected lower-case and italics for *tacita’s* name as it is more likely to be read as a gentle whisper or internal thought, a nod to those wordless, textless languages spoken by animal Others, often unheard through human ears.

I have tried to be careful to avoid demonizing the human being through SIGNUM and victimizing or valorizing *tacita* as the non-human Other. I have found that
meaningful communion between human and non-human animals cannot be achieved through a mere inversion of the human-animal power dynamic, but in simple, reciprocal acts of listening. The silent communion I am looking for can be found only in the respectful, attentive recognition of the qualities of sameness and difference all earthly beings.

**On ‘Birth’**

*SIGNUM & tacita* should take place not in the space of the theatre, but in a found natural space near the sea. The landscape itself represents a non-human body, teeming with life of its own, reinforcing the very corporeal reality of our contingent relationship with the environment around us and its organic Otherness. The performance aims to decentralise the textual script by drawing attention to the expressive capabilities of bodies. This element is inspired by postdramatic theatre, which is concerned with “moving beyond the dramatic text into a more open event-based experience in which the physical body, the image and sound replace the text as the centre of attention” (Carlson 315). Thus, the space should be pre-set with *SIGNUM* and *tacita* as silent, but vivid and corporeal, presences. The omission of traditional expositional dialogue is intended to allow the kinaesthetic qualities of presence and affect to ‘speak’ for both characters in the very act of being physically embodied (Blackman and Venn 9).

The characters are depicted in foetal development. The timeline of the play begins with birth. I draw a visual parallel between the womb of an animal and the ocean, from which the vast majority of living beings are thought to have originated millennia past – many of the forms and beings that make up “life” are originally “water-based” (Haraway 5). This visual symbolism highlights the commonality between myriad earthly beings that can swim instinctively, especially viviparous animals, or those that developed in the water of the womb. *SIGNUM* and *tacita* are conjoined by a single tailbone, which doubles as an umbilical cord, in an attempt to make their filiation and origin ambiguous, and thus raise questions about their co-evolution. Inspired by Haraway, the two characters are not dialectically opposed, but
rather, necessarily co-contingent beings sharing a space of “co-habitation” (Haraway 4).

I am also interested in evoking questions about the relationship between nature and nurture, as SIGNUM and tacita are borne of the same origins, and yet, as their characters develop, they respond to stimuli in individual and idiosyncratic ways. Their separation as individuals is effectuated by tacita gnawing through the cord of tissue that connects their bodies. SIGNUM has a lower fur density and loses most of their tail—thus, SIGNUM assumes a more hominid figure, whereas tacita’s form is more primal. There are aesthetic resonances between these characters and the work of artist Patricia Piccinini, whose sculpted figures resemble terrestrial hybrids that defy categorization as “slippery mutants, occupying spaces that both inhabit and go beyond the categories of human and animal” (Goriss-Hunter 546). The characters of SIGNUM and tacita have been similarly constructed in a posthumanist attempt to both represent and complicate the traditional dichotomy between human and non-human animals and “nature and culture” (Haraway 4).

Although the theme of human category identities is not central to SIGNUM & tacita, there are some implicitly gendered threads. Some posthumanists draw parallels between the Otherness of human and non-human animals – for example, the sociological overlap between “speciesism and sexism” (Chaudhuri and Enelow 8). I am interested in de-romanticising archetypical representations of motherhood through tacita. Much of my methodology has involved simply listening to and observing animals. Chaudhuri suggests that there are multiple ways to simply “listen to animals” that may allow us to “represent them in new ways” in which non-humans are capable of “speaking back” (Chaudhuri 38). I have observed cats and their litters and noticed that the maternal instinct is not innate to every mother. Some opt to abandon their young, or eat them alive. On a personal level, the sense of bodily invasion involved in female reproduction disturbs me, despite gendered social and cultural expectations of eventual motherhood. Thus, the birthing scene should not be sanitary or beautiful, but visceral, bloody, and thoroughly brutal. Like Piccinini’s
work, the implication that the maternal body can be “monstrous” is intended to raise questions about “how we think about motherhood” (Goriss-Hunter 545).

The first miscommunication between the characters occurs when SIGNUM attempts to cuddle *tacita*. Despite their benevolent intentions, the conditions of physical difference create a violent misunderstanding, because SIGNUM’s primate-like fleshy lips and opposable appendages make it instinctual to them to express affection through the tactile means of cuddles and kisses, whereas *tacita*, more canid in physical form and nature, interprets the gesture as a territorial threat. This comes from my own observations of dogs – my dog’s body language when hugged, shrinking herself and sometimes raising her hackles, suggests that she may be wary of the human embrace, opting for distance and space. The misunderstanding inevitably arises from their essential and embodied differences. Thus, the alterity of the two characters creates immediate dramatic tension for the next scene.

**On ‘Speech’**

I allow the next scene to steep in silence for a long while in an attempt to further build the affective rapport between *tacita* and the audience. My aim is that the prolonged silence will heighten the sensory impact of those tiny, perpetual, biological rhythms – for example, the flow of blood in one’s ears, or steady breaths rising and falling. The natural landscape should gradually work to emphasise these bodily ‘utterances’. The silence and use of empty space around *tacita* is also meant to draw attention to those imperceptible, but ever-present beings, or “microorganisms” (Haraway, “When Species Meet: Introductions”, 41) that co-exist with us in forms such as bacteria, algae, insect life, and fungi. In the act of simply “being alongside” these presences, our interconnection with them is highlighted (Derrida 379). *tacita* communicates meaningfully with these forms of micro-life. I like the idea that the exchange becomes musical as a means of expression (Foxcroft 14) – perhaps through those summery sounds found “in nature” (Deleuze and Guattari 309) such as bird-song, cicadas chirping, or sun sizzling on hot stone. My aim is to position the audience to reconsider the beauty and value in those almost-invisible life forms that
SIGNUM’s intrusion is intended to lampoon language by exaggerating its features of grammar, syntax, and diction, and thus highlight its fallibility and artificiality. SIGNUM’s chattering should be ostentatious and comical. Again, there is a lapse in understanding when tacita bares their teeth – a facial expression that seems to have evolved as a friendly gesture among hominids and many primates, but risks being interpreted as a menacing display of power by many other non-human animals. Similarly, SIGNUM’s prolonged eye contact is construed as a threat. I have observed from my cat Lumina that blinking with both eyes seems to be taken as a demonstrative gesture of trust – a way of expressing a sense of security and ease with her. She will reciprocate the gesture with her own blinking, whereas prolonged eye contact, seemingly expressing mistrust or perhaps simply imposition will incite her to slap me in the face. For SIGNUM and tacita, the misunderstanding is reconciled through the musicality of laughter, affectively and instinctively understood by both beings to be a joyful exchange. I am careful throughout the script not to represent every misunderstanding as causal of destruction, conscious of the long history of the misunderstanding as source of comedy in Western story-telling. When tacita and SIGNUM expose their stomachs to one another, the characters are expressing a reciprocal, mutual trust in an instinctual and feline gesture that I have observed in all of my cats. I am especially inspired by the cats that I live with and continue to observe because domesticated cats seem to have developed a system of vocal signification including meows, chirps, and chatters based on their co-evolution alongside human animals. Their sleeping alongside one another reinforces the implicit bond of trust between them. One of the reasons I deliberately chose dusk for the timing of the piece was to create a hazy, liminal moment that blurs the different timelines of their sleeping patterns.

SIGNUM’s sleep sequence is inspired by the methods of posthumanist performance artists, some of which involve visions taken from the subconscious realm of dreams – particularly the work of Agata Kawa, who takes inspiration from “dreams and
reveries” (Kawa 8). The unreadable, unstable text in this scene, reminiscent of the inability to read in a dream-state – something that I have observed from my own dreams – is intended to draw further attention to the permeability and artificiality of language constructs. I was inspired by Antonin Artaud, who argues that we must “put an end to the subjugation of the theater to the text” by creating a kind of “speech” that is communicative “beyond words” by means of “intonations”, “movements”, “attitudes”, “cries”, and “onomatopoeia” (Artaud 242). Laura Cull argues that Artaud’s omission of phonemes in his creative work – that is, the hard, consonant sounds that separate certain words – creates a more fluid, softer sound that is arguably a more accessible and equitable form of expression (Cull 249). By omitting the sounds of articulation that distinguish words, a more innate, instinctual vocalization is produced, like a human “call” (Jacovellio 625). Thus, tacita can initially only use broad vowel sounds to represent their animality, whereas SIGNUM’s lips and teeth endow them with the capacity to form consonants and phonemes. I have noticed that my cats are instinctually wary of sibilant consonant noises, especially the hiss of the letter ‘s’, hence tacita’s reactive fear and evasion when SIGNUM makes this sound. This time, the misunderstanding causes greater conflict between the characters.

On ‘Strangers’
SIGNUM’s choice to sleep under furs rather than preserving warmth through the foetal position as tacita does represents their attempts to separate themselves from the animal Other. Like the character’s use of language, this should also be done clumsily in order to gently ridicule the myth of “human exceptionalism” (Bennett 34). The parallel between SIGNUM and tacita as they dance out patterned markings is intended to show their common desire for self-expression – however, despite the similarities between their tracings, only one set is recognizable through the lens of the anthropomorphic gaze – the non-human Other is “refused the power to transform those traces into verbal language” (Derrida 417). I also intend to emphasise the artificiality of borders – such as those between lands, or those separating human and non-human animals in zoos – by using something flimsy, such as rope. There is a
Beckettian absurdity in one’s arbitrary placement on one side or the other – an existential meaninglessness evoked in the image of the non-human animal unable to escape from a strange and empty landscape, like the protagonist in *Act Without Words* (Beckett 205).

SIGNUM’s consumption of *tacita*’s menstrual egg is intended to raise uncomfortable ethical questions about agricultural exploitation and the reproductive rights of non-humans. For example, in O’Reilly’s work, the very presence of the egg works as an implicit reminder of the human complicity in acts of consumption implicated in “animal violence and death” (Katsouraki 80). At this point, the power dynamic between them has shifted to one of oppression and subjugation. Yet, even in the context of cruelty and exploitation, the two beings are still mutually contingent in the natural-cultural processes of agriculture – SIGNUM must nourish *tacita* in order to eat their eggs, and *tacita*’s survival hinges on their submission.

**On ‘Pack’**

A revelatory moment of wordless communication is realized when SIGNUM and *tacita* simply sit in close proximity and observe one another’s idiosyncrasies. This scene represents a culmination in affective understanding between the two characters, which manifests in a physical, sensual exchange inspired both by Haraway’s tongue-kisses with her dog (Haraway 1) and artist Nicolas Salazar Sutil’s tactile stroking of his cat (Sutil 1-2). Wordlessly, they concede to any and all misunderstandings, paying reverence to the unknowable nature of one another’s subjectivity – thus, making them closer than ever. The gentle toothlessness of the smile and the reciprocal acknowledgement of the gaze facilitate the empathetic moment. The climactic orgasm marks the threshold of the metamorphosis or ‘becoming’ in the next scene. As Haraway suggests, the act of coitus, “yoking” or “cobbling together” is the very condition of “sym-bio-genesis” or “becoming with” (Haraway, “When Species Meet: Introductions”, 31-2). For terrestrial beings, sexual reproduction is a transfigurative process – for example, the exchange of pollination between a “wasp” and an “orchid” produces a becoming in the processes of “reproduction” and
“orgasm” (Deleuze and Guattari 293). Thus, for SIGNUM and tacita, both bodies becomes Other in the exchange: in the physical metamorphosis of pregnancy. The fruit of filiation, too, is genetically differential from its parents, thus suggesting possibilities for evolutionary becomings on a genealogical scale. The reciprocal and transformative act of sex – and possibly love – between characters is in itself a wordless form of communication.

On ‘Post-Coitum’
In exploring the notion of ‘becoming’ Other, I focused on the biological process of procreation: filiation, copulation, conception, a long, inter-species, inter-genetic process of “symbiogenesis” (Haraway, “When Species Meet: Introductions”, 31-2); that is, “expansion, propagation”, “contagion” and “peopling” (Deleuze and Guattari 239). It is in the act of breeding that becoming occurs on a gradual, molecular, and genealogical level.

Our reproductive capacities are finite as other biological processes occurring within. Thus, after the sexual, chemical exchange between tacita and SIGNUM that leads to conception, both bodies are transformed by the ravages of age. I am fascinated by the knowledge that we are perpetually dying, as our cells die and regenerate constantly even as we live and breathe. All organisms are consistently becoming – in age, illness, or accident – in waning away to “the same inorganic” matter (Sutil 6). Thus, becoming occurs endlessly in the ebb and flow of life – in the constant flux of all things, bodies, and systems. This becoming through procreation transforms not only both bodies, but both languages, as their unique system of interpersonal communication, or lingua franca, is further complicated in the act. The exchange therefore alters both irreversibly and brings them closer to a silent but mutual understanding.

On ‘Death’
The inevitability of mortality is the catalyst for the use of time in SIGNUM & tacita. Death both impels the performance forward and condemns it to its end (Bernstein
214-5). I chose dusk, that earthly moment of waning daylight, to suggest our precarious position as a species on earth in the current moment of extreme ecological and “industrial destruction” and “mass extinction” (Drum 27). Death is necessary for rebirth. Thus, as resources dwindle, some of the shadow larvae succumb to starvation whilst others thrive and repopulate. The shadow larvae deviate from their parentage, a seemingly random evolutionary change. Their large numbers, too, have been traditionally used to create dehumanizing representations – consider, for example, the negative connotations of the word ‘swarm’. SIGNUM feels that these features of the shadows’ alterity are alienating, thus enabling SIGNUM to detach from their paternal obligation and obliterate some of the larvae.

The Freudian “drive for life through death” (Sutil 5), and those implicitly interrelated drives that link pleasure with self-destruction – for example, the urges of animals, both human and nonhuman, towards sex and intoxication – compel both tacita and SIGNUM towards death. Here, contingency and consumption re-emerge thematically. Without teeth, tacita can only succumb to malnourishment. Despite SIGNUM’s best efforts, the ruination of tacita’s body is irreparable, and ecological balance is severely upset by the loss. Most beings proceed to perish in the devastating imbalance of the unsustainable environment. In a small, restorative gesture, SIGNUM consumes the uterus that carried them, re-absorbing its nutrients. This, too, is a wordless and transformative exchange between the two characters, for in consuming tacita’s flesh, SIGNUM enacts an unseen, fleshy “congealment” that is in itself “a process of becoming” (Bennett 49). The play deploys a circular narrative – the regressive movement of both characters backwards into the womb represents a rebirth that speaks to the endless and cyclical nature of life itself, in which birth and death are inextricably entwined. Importantly, although the story of SIGNUM & tacita ends here, nothing truly ends or dies in this terrestrial realm that is perpetually engaged in the process of an evolving becoming. Momentarily, all is still in the stagnancy of death – however, life is not extinguished, but simply dormant.

The shadow larvae re-emerge. Like the enduring, prehistoric figure of the cockroach,
the brood infests the space. Microscopic beings inherit the earth. Life begins anew. Despite the bleak mood that permeates the entire performance, this is meant to suggest some hope for the earth: the body of the landscape endures despite the many becomings of its earthly inhabitants – both creative and destructive becomings caused by the contingent, necessary, and “insatiable consumption” of various kinds of beings (Braidotti 63). Wordlessly absolved of the noise of the human subject, the space and its bodies continue to speak even in the darkness, just as they always have.
Conclusion

“Life does not speak; it listens and waits.”
(Deleuze and Guattari 76)
Language is not always necessarily semantic or syntactical. Like bodies, languages are in constant flux. They adapt, evolving with their environments, like the very beings that speak them.

To simply be alive in co-contingent system with Other beings is to speak meaningfully without words. Our survival as human animals relies on our relational nature with Other living things. As necessarily symbiotic beings, we are interconnected with earthly Others on a pre-linguistic level. As fleshy, mortal creatures, we share reciprocal, potentially empathetic connections in our mutual desires – for example, towards pleasure, and away from suffering. Words may fail us sometimes, but the shared affective capacities of embodied beings to express happiness and hurt are almost always palpable and unmistakable. Especially in performance art, where the body is often central, these capacities may be maximized in order to open up their communicative possibilities.

As I have argued, neuroscientific findings suggest that we share the capacity to empathise. Beings may consciously engage or disengage with empathy, but the phenomenon is undeniable. All of us, in being, are a part of a larger entity: the earth. I conclude with the suggestion that this planet, for the duration of its existence, always has and always will speak its own language – meaningfully and independently of the human subject. If we listen attentively, we may begin to understand it better than we do now.
References


