Puppy Love: Understanding Identity and Emotion Through the Dog/Human Bond

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Abstract

The central research focus is an exploration of identity, my childhood and my mother, told through the story of Irma-Dream, my dog. It examines the symbiotic relationship between dogs and humans; the banality and comforts of home life; and the ubiquity of amateur aesthetics. The works are informed by photography, with varying manifestations including photographic books, videos and images brought together in installation. The studio practice is contextualised with reference to contemporary artists and contemporary research.
Declaration

This is to certify that

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the masters

(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used

(iii) the thesis is 10,949 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices

..........................................................

(Jaya Deva Fausch)
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I woke up around 1am, it was a school night and I was in Year 12. Through the walls I could hear my Mum saying ‘get your hands off me! Get your hands off my neck! Stop it!’ I felt deeply traumatised. I didn’t leave my room; I stayed in my bed, frozen. The next morning I packed my bag and didn’t say anything to my mum or her boyfriend. At lunchtime I called her and told her that I wouldn’t be coming home that night - instead I would be staying at my boyfriend’s house. She was surprised when I brought up the incident the night before and assured me that it wouldn’t happen again and that everything was under control. I couldn’t bear to go home that night. We reached a compromise - I would stay at my boyfriend’s house that night but I would come home for the weekend instead, which I wasn’t planning on doing.

Shortly after this, Mum and Jonathan broke up. He had descended into full-blown alcoholism; Mum thought this was connected to his clinical depression and anti-depressant meds.

Several years earlier he had found his wife’s decaying body, she had committed suicide while he was away for the weekend.
I sat by the ferny plants,
and looked just dreamy
at each one -

I pulled a banana stick away
from one of the plants -
the waste of the junkets
dropped the green stem down to
the ground -

As the agent -
I pulled the blossom stick through
the top of my face -

Blood started to pour -
and my squee is screen.
The softness made five hours and fifteen minutes. That's all.

I wasannes than two pregnant with my five child. The sound
of the child in the room was the same as the sound
of the sound of the child when I was pregnant with my
five child. But to understand the sound, I must remember
the sound. I had the baby, but I was feeling so tired and
so helpless that the sound had been brushed away.

I sat in the dark by the window and
thought of all the time that
had been lost.

"I'm going to be a mom," I
thought to myself.

"I'm going to be a mom," I
said to myself.

Then I realized that
I was not a mom.

"I'm going to be a mom," I
said to myself.

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Then I realized that
I was not a mom.

"I'm going to be a mom," I
say
INTRODUCTION:

This practice led research is concerned with the exploration of my identity, memories and personal relationships. This plays out alongside an exploration of the complex relationship between dogs and humans, reflected in the bond between my dog, Irma-Dream and my self.

I will be approaching this research paper in 3 separate parts, in part one, *Human/ dog: A brief explanation*, I introduce the idea that the dog-human bond is unique and complex-symbiotic and bilingual, and that this interspecies connection has changed the course of history for both species. By referencing contemporary scientific and behavioural research and anecdotal stories I provide a context for the concurrent dog related and autobiographical themes in the research project. Running parallel, these themes often intersect as I strive to understand my identity and relationships- including those with my dog and dogs in general. This chapter will refer to a recent study into how dogs experience love and friendship. Lastly, I connect this research to my experiences with Irma and how understanding the dog-human bond allows me to document and hypothesise about how I relate to dogs in my work and how we affect each other day to day.

In part two, *A Dreamer’s Dream: Living with Irma, Living with the Project*, I reflect on the aims and experiences of creating and living with a long-term art research project. By using William Wegman’s seminal video works with his Weimaraner, Man Ray, as a touchstone, I use Wegman’s early art practice to help create a framework for this project. This framework allows me to locate the photographic documentation of Irma’s development and growth within an art and culture context. By referencing relevant works of Joseph Beuys, Pierre Huyghe and Francis Alys I show how other artists have approached working with canids¹ and how these works have helped shape my practice. I outline the similarities and differences to my own work as well as examining the

¹ According to the Oxford English dictionary, the definition is as follows: NOUN, Zoology: A mammal of the dog family (Canidae). This family includes domestic dogs, wolves, coyotes and several others.
aesthetic and psychological implications of the works described. I observe how these works have influenced my own interest in the dichotomy of formality and amateur in this research project.

In part three, I extrapolate on how the intimate and personal nature of bringing Irma into my life has resulted in an interest in re-experiencing and reframing my childhood, history and memories. Through a diaristic approach to writing fragmentary memories and stories, I connect to my relationship with my mother, the influence of family photo albums and the writings and art works of Tracey Emin and Sophie Calle. This is exemplified through my photo books that connect my photographs with personal writings. I wander through the works of Pat Brassington and Miranda July and connect the parallel themes and imagery of my personal history and dog research.

I will also explore the visual and spatial mechanisms and aesthetics that play out in the work. The day-to-day practice of photographic documentation, diaristic writings, curated books and minimal installations offer a distillation of my research into the prevalence of ‘amateur’ in our culture, and how this has created a ‘window into the home’. Life can be fragmentary, unpredictable, boring and humorous, this is reflected in the way that we currently relate to and experience life on a public and private platform. By using an iPhone, a format that is associated with social media, I emphasise this connection. My works exploit and embrace this by using it to look deeper inward while at the same time exploring stylisation and aesthetics with humour and whimsy.

My work simultaneously looks at the relationships we have with our pets and with ourselves. As I traverse my memories and history, I play out a process of gathering data to understand myself. I use the connection and history between humans and dogs to help me explore my own autobiographical story and to explore how this connection is expressed within the home. I also use my engagement with pets to look at personal memories, stories and the roles that pets play in our lives.
Part 1

DOG / HUMAN: A BRIEF EXPLANATION
A SYMBIOTIC BOND

In the science on dogs, there may be only one or two facts that everyone in dogdom agrees on. One is that the wolf, either directly or indirectly through a common ancestor...is responsible for the domesticated dog. The other fact that is roundly agreed on is neoteny, the retention of infantile traits into adulthood. Neoteny has played a central role in dogs' domestication. This is why dogs are said to behave in such a puppy-like manner compared to how wolves behave.²

Throughout this section of the paper I will discuss the complexities of the relationship between humans and dogs and briefly explore the principal contemporary research and theories on this subject. This research provides an explanation of and context of how and why the bond between dogs and humans is so powerful. Evolution and genetics have influenced the development of this bond, and the empathic capacity humans and dog's share. Underlining the more factual aspects of the day to day documented development of my relationship with Irma, I observe the intricacies of our mutual gaze; the therapeutic unfolding of empathy, and the subsequent enabling of a broader range of emotion in my practice.

Although experts in the field do not currently agree on the timeframe in which humans domesticated dogs, current research posits that this could be as early as 135,000 years ago. Although most researchers belong to one of two theoretical camps; the first, that the origins of the domestic dog date to around 40,000 to 50,000 years ago; the second, that they date back to around 12,000 to 16,000 years ago.³ Irrespective of these proposed dates, it is clear that the domestic history of dogs is complex. Several theories of domestication exist; including the 'romantic' scenario in which early man captures wolf cubs due to their cuteness factor (similar to what makes humans triggered to want to care for our own babies) and then after an initial caregiving relationship it became

a utilitarian one with dogs helping with guarding and hunting; a symbiotic relationship then developed due to there being benefits for both species.\(^4\)

Lorna and Raymond Coppinger developed a second scenario of dog domestication based on what they identified as serious flaws in the above theory; firstly, that taming a few wolves would not do enough to affect the long term evolutionary characteristics, and secondly, that once the wolf hit sexual maturity it would leave to find other wolves to mate with, thus ending the experiment.\(^5\)

Therefore the Coppingers believe that a process of genetic selection would have had to occur naturally rather than by design and that such a natural mechanism came into play when humans began to live in villages, dumping refuse just outside village limits\(^6\). Villagers would then have selected wolves for the single trait of approachability.\(^7\)

To support this theory, the Coppingers point to an experiment begun in the 1950s in Siberia by scientist Dimitri Belyaev, in this experiment Belyaev selectively bred foxes to try to demonstrate that behavioural rather than physical changes triggered the domestication process. As shown in BBC2 documentary *The Secret Lives of Dogs*, Belyaev’s experiment is still going after 60 years, and shows that in a relatively short period of time a selective breeding program has produced foxes with dog-like characteristics, including drop ears, variable coat colour, friendliness, approachability and trainability\(^8\). This is directly linked to neoteny, which is the retention of infantile features of anatomy and behaviour into adulthood.\(^9\)

Based on these theories, the dog is like an immature wolf that never grows up, this is one of the reasons as to why dogs are so drawn to us — the young of any animal are attracted to whatever they are first exposed to\(^10\). One of the theories as to why this evolutionary process of neoteny has

\(^{4}\) Behan. *Your Dog is Your Mirror*, 19.
\(^{5}\) Behan. *Your Dog is Your Mirror*, 20.
\(^{6}\) Behan. *Your Dog is Your Mirror*, 21.
\(^{7}\) Behan. *Your Dog is Your Mirror*, 21.
\(^{9}\) Behan. *Your Dog is Your Mirror*, 22.
\(^{10}\) Behan. *Your Dog is Your Mirror*, 22.
occurred is that the genome of the dog is particularly malleable, and has the largest scope for variation out of any species\textsuperscript{11}.

My work and research is a direct response to this inherent symbiotic bond, it explores the contemporary roles that both species have in a domestic setting and how this is expressed. Dogs have an important working and companion role in our current society, this underscores just how influential we can be to each other, this is partly because we rely on similar social structures.

\textit{No one appreciates the very special genius of your conversation as your dog does.}

-Christopher Morley

WHO AM I? WHO ARE YOU? – DOG AS A REFLECTION OF OURSELVES

As outlined above, dogs and humans have an extraordinary capacity to read each other’s behaviours, emotions and vocalisations. This close level of communication is key to this research project; I constantly process the unspoken dialogue between Irma and I, both in our everyday relationship and in the categorisation and analysis of photographic documentation. The bond we share does feel like a genuine friendship, until recently this sentiment was considered purely anecdotal and was not taken seriously (by the scientific community). The resurgence of research into how the canine brain works has produced a contemporary study into how dogs experience love and friendship\textsuperscript{12}. In this study, neuroscientist Gregory Berns and his team trained a group of dogs to lie inside an MRI scanner without being sedated; they then tracked changes in brain activity in response to receiving food treats. Berns’ found that the area of the canine brain that controls positive emotions was

similar in humans and dogs. This led him to hypothesise that dogs legitimatley experience feelings of love and friendship. Berns’ initial findings were published last year in a book called How Dogs Love Us: A Neuroscientist and His Adopted Dog Decode the Canine Brain. This research validates the strong friendship bonds that a lot of us experience with our dogs; this is an interesting grounding point to my research, which anecdotally explores this issue.

As scientific research begins to focus on the social and emotional inner lives of dogs, more awareness in other dog-related areas is developing. Dog-rehabilitation celebrity Cesar Milan, both promote acknowledgment of the emotional lives of dogs. They also refer to the importance of energy when working with and rehabilitating dogs.

Milan describes energy as follows:

Dogs use constant energy to communicate. Energy is what I call beingness; it is who and what you are in every moment. Dogs don’t know each other by name, but by the energy they project and the activities they share. They know humans in the same way. As humans, we too are communicating with energy – whether we realize it or not.

Millan promotes awareness of one’s own emotional state when working with dogs and demonstrates how influential human energy and leadership is to dogs. In response to these ideas I have been mindful of monitoring my own energy as described by Milan. This was a conscious decision made at the beginning of this project, as I wanted to investigate a different approach and philosophy to my past dog experience. A psychological and practical

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understanding of the emotional and mental lives of dogs has benefited me practically, as well as adding to the project by broadening my own understanding of my relationship with Irma and how I can both influence, and be influenced by it. I feel more in control of our interactions and have been able to move on from the feelings of anxiety and helplessness I felt with my last dog. This sense of communication and mutual understanding is also seen in Wegman’s work, which I will go into further detail later.

Even though humans and dogs have an extraordinary bond most of us have wondered what it would be like to know what our dogs are thinking. Two comedy sketches take this idea to a humorous low point; exploring what it would be like if our dogs were able to speak. In episode 2 of Little Britain USA (2008)\textsuperscript{15}, an eccentric female character watches her Cavalier King Charles Spaniel do a poo, after watching her clean it up, the dog asks her, in a deep male voice, if he could also see her poo. What follows is a silly verbal exchange between dog and human where the dog goads her to do a poo in the park, sitting within the slapstick grotesque style of the Little Britain shows, the viewer can see that the character is perhaps making the voice for the dog and that this banter is actually of her own making. Nevertheless the skit is very humorous and is a satire of our desire to be able to communicate with talking animals.

*Man’s Worst Friend* (2009)\textsuperscript{16} takes this idea even further, following a year in the life of a New Yorker and his Spoodle Lucy. After wishing upon a falling star, Ian wakes up to find that Lucy can talk, and that she has a very annoying voice; his anthropomorphic desire has backfired. Over the next few months he finds her voice and questions more and more annoying, culminating in Lucy running away to live on the streets. She experiences the darker side of life, dabbling in drugs and prostitution all the while philosophising on the existence of life as a dog. In the end the two are reunited and accept each other’s


differences. Although these two examples are inherently silly, they speak of the desire to really understand our dog. The moral of these stories seems to be that although we may wish we knew what they are thinking, ultimately it is our differences that can bond us together.

As a fun and silly extension of these ideas I created the work *(Psychic) Reading with Irma*, this text work consists of a series of emails between a ‘professional’ pet medium and I. For a $60.00 fee Leonora (the psychic) requests 3 questions that I would like to ask Irma accompanied by a photograph. Irma will then communicate the answers to her in her own words. After ‘speaking’ with Irma she sent me a reply, apart from being obviously leading and appealing to a dog owners sense of love and sensitivity, it was an interesting exercise. It highlights the extent that we can anthropomorphise our pets and our wish to communicate with them in a human way. Most of the reading is based on common knowledge about dogs and the psychic’s interpretation of the photograph of Irma. What’s even more fascinating is the proliferation of these services over the past few years. This may parallel the high numbers of Australians who live alone; single parent families; where there is a breakdown of traditional social/community bonds, and an increasing requirement for trust and solace being placed on our pets over people. A century ago, it was extremely rare for people to ask ‘mediums’ for word of their pet – they were more concerned with relatives.

I have always been intrigued by pet channelling and was interested to see if there would be any accuracy to the end product. Although this work certainly was an interesting step in the project, the end result was not as succinct as I expected and therefore I don’t think that it was very successful.

The provided text depicts the exact email exchange between Leonora they psychic and I. The use of red text appears exactly in the format that it was written by Leonora.
(Psychic) Reading for Irma (excerpt)
Pet reading for Irma

Jaya Fausch <jdfausch@gmail.com> Nov 5
to leotone

Hi leonora,

My apologies for the late reply.
Below is Irma-Dream, who is very much alive. The three questions I would like to ask her are:

1. How is your leg feeling?

2. What is the best food for you?

3. Who is your favourite friend?

Thank you,
Jaya

IRMA CHANNELLING

Leonora Faferko Nov 6
to me

Hi Jaya

I have now spoken to Irma..
I have put to her your questions and I have asked her to please advise replies in her own words and from her own point of view the replies and to add whatever else she wishes.
Your questions:

1. How is your leg feeling?

QUOTE: My leg is better than it was, sometimes I get like ‘pangs’, like little ‘needles’ go through it, but it is better than it was, there are things I need to have done for it to ensure its good health, I need to ensure I do not over run, or climb for instance. Although I do not mind having a walk at times I feel as if I need to stop and rest it, sometimes I will put the leg up a little as this rests it, it feels a little strange at times, but for the most part I feel it is improving … or that I am more accepting of what is going on ‘down there’ with it … this is more than likely what is going on, that there is a bit of getting used to and acceptance of what is going on. UNQUOTE

2. Who is your favourite friend?

QUOTE: I can be also as my name implies … a bit of a dreamer or give that appearance, for you see, I am a thinker and often like to sit and think, to contemplate things around me, to watch and observe those around me and things around me … this I enjoy. Peace, tranquillity is so important to me … I have much in my life, thank you. My friend is a gentle female. I am also needing to say that I love you dearly … you protect me, I feel safe with you and I trust that you do all you can for me. You see, you are my special friend who I look up to … but I am your wise one who knows your heart …. And your soul …. UNQUOTE

I hope you find Irma’s words relevant. She is a lovely girl.

Kind regards,

Leonora
A DREAMER’S DREAM:
LIVING WITH IRMA, LIVING WITH THE PROJECT
In order to really enjoy a dog, one doesn’t merely try to train him to be semi human. The point of it is to open oneself to the possibility of becoming partly a dog. ~Edward Hoagland

PART OF YOU/ PART OF ME

Most of my research for this project has revolved around analysis and reflection on the day-to-day documentation of my life with Irma. Documenting her growth, development, social interactions and mental maturation. By default throughout the project this also applied to myself as I tracked my own day-to-day experience and growth in the same way. This section is a reflection on the beginning of the project and on my changing expectations and goals.

I began working on this project before I officially started it; I researched and contacted the dog breeder before the start of the candidature. I ‘ordered’ Irma in September 2012 (before she was even conceived). Eric and I then drove to a small area past Shepparton to meet the breeder and Irma’s prospective parents. We were originally going to get a puppy due 1/1/2013 but this litter came prematurely and unfortunately most of the puppies died, as there were other people higher on the list we were not offered one of the remaining puppies. Instead I was offered the pick of the litter from a full term litter born on the same day (29/12/2012) at the breeder’s daughter’s house in Benalla. When the puppies were 10 days old I received photographs and went on to pick Irma. When Irma was 2 weeks old (coincidentally the approximate time that puppies open their eyes and ears) Eric and I drove to Benalla to meet her and to check that she was being reared in suitable circumstances. From this time onward she has been called by the name we gave her.17

17 Irma-Dream: this name came about because I wanted to call the new dog Dream, Eric thought that this name was too hippy and suggested hyphenating it with Irma (my Danish Grandmother’s middle name) instead.
In preparation for bringing Irma home, I had strategically asked for a puppy that would be ready to leave the breeders home around the time I started this Master of Fine Arts. This way I would have time to commit to a young puppy requiring constant care; I planned to start integrating her into our lives by bringing her to uni with me. Prior to her arrival I had also done a significant amount of research into the best kind of dog for my personality and lifestyle. I decided on the Miniature Australian Bulldog because I wanted a dog that was like an English Staffordshire Bull Terrier but without the high energy levels and exercise needs, and without the propensity for anxiety. After finding the Miniature Australian Bulldog\textsuperscript{18} I could see that this breed had the traits I was looking for; big personality, vibrant, people oriented, social, responsive to training, stubborn, medium energy levels, without the undesirable traits outlined above. At 8.5 weeks we picked Irma up from a meeting spot near Melbourne airport and brought her home to live with us. Ordering a puppy before she was even born or conceived was quite a surreal experience and did have some parallels with human adoption. The way we conceptualise these acts and experiences with dogs and puppies is often anthropomorphised, although caring for a dog has many parallels with parenthood so these experiences do naturally align.

As discussed in part 1, neoteny is one of the causes of the development of domestication between humans and dogs; infantile traits activate the need to parent in the human brain. There is also scientific research that shows that friendly human-dog interactions releases oxytocin into the bloodstream of both human and dog; this is a natural hormone that is released by human mothers while breastfeeding to help bond with their newborn baby.\textsuperscript{19} The parallel to parenthood is inherent but can also take a larger role when the dog starts to become a surrogate for human

\textsuperscript{18} A new and unregistered Australian breed that is an attempt to create a bulldog that is suitable for the harsh Australian climate. The breeding program has only been operating for about 10 years. \url{http://www.miniatureaustralianbulldog.com.au/index.htm}

\textsuperscript{19} Linda Handlin et al., “Short-Term Interaction between Dogs and Their Owners: Effects on Oxytocin, Cortisol, Insulin and Heart Rate—An Exploratory Study,” \textit{Arthrozoos} 24, no.3 (2011)
babies. After my own experience of miscarrying a baby earlier this year I have wondered whether this event has had an impact on the way I relate to Irma. It has certainly led me to question my understanding of motherhood, my own mother and the role that dogs can have both as a surrogate and as a friendship companion.

By sharing this journey with Irma, as we pass stages and milestones, I have extended my skills in emotional intelligence, empathy and compassion. This was particularly felt during a car accident when Irma escaped from home and was clipped by a car. She sustained a dislocated hip with a damaged joint capsule. According to the orthopaedic surgeons at The Lort Smith Animal Hospital in North Melbourne, the best course of action was to perform a Femoral Head Ostectomy (the removal of the head of the femur). Scar tissue would then form to create a fake joint. The subsequent nursing and healing was exacerbated by a further problem; a (Histiocytoma) benign skin tumour that grew on her neck. This tumour abscessed and she needed emergency surgery to remove all affected skin. Due to the location of the surgery, the wound took a very long time to heal and she needed many vet visits. During this time, I nursed her back to health by carrying her everywhere (she wasn’t allowed to walk after orthopaedic surgery) keeping her crated, hand-feeding her and medicating her regularly.

I also had clear goals and expectations of myself in relation to rearing this new puppy. This included: rearing a dog that did not have anxiety and was happy to be alone, no biting or nipping, no excessive barking or vocalisation, no destructive behaviour, and good leash walking manners. These goals and expectations coincided with and fed into my art practice. I had an idea of how the project would precede I was aware that this would be driven by how my relationship with Irma developed as her personality matured. At the beginning of the project I anticipated that I would film and photograph a series of experiments and questions that I would set up; appropriating dog videos on YouTube, mimicking
behavioural science experiments, tricks, tests. This quickly changed to a more organic style of documenting what was happening in her development and our daily life. One of the issues I experienced with this approach was that I had hundreds of photos taken on my iPhone and no way of cataloguing or showing them. I also found it difficult to keep up with her development as puppies develop very quickly.

In contrast to the amateur-style documentation in this project, *Brother From Another Mother* (Figure 1 & Figure 2) is a series of three studio portraits featuring Irma with her real half-brother, Barry, and two male dog friends (Atticus and Farnsworth.) This series references family studio portrait photography, professional pet portraiture and the photographic commemoration of a special event or a child/pet's development. It is also a formal documentation of Irma’s life. Irma is also a natural model, early in life her breeder remarked that she was always posing for the camera; she has an instinctive ability in front of the camera, leading the photographer to remark that she 'acts like a professional’, when in front of the camera. She has also completed a professional modelling appointment for The Victorian College of the Arts (Faculty of The University of Melbourne.)

As the title suggests, Barry is Irma’s genetic half-brother and is one of the two surviving puppies of the premature litter sharing her birthday. I wanted this series to contrast with the images in the books, and give the viewer an experience of the public/private dichotomy that usually occurs in our homes (formal pictures displayed and more intimate ones kept private.) These portraits will be displayed in a row, they will be framed and of a small size. I also wanted to use these portraits to underscore the whimsical and playful aspect of the project; dogs posing for portraits are an exemplification of cuteness. Juxtaposing the cute and playful element

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20 Irma starred in a small campaign for the VCA open day 2013. This was a paid appointment and included a studio photo shoot and an appearance/tour around the campus on Open Day. She even sat on a baby grand piano while being serenaded by one of the Musical Theatre lecturers.
of these portraits, *Brother From Another Mother*, will be displayed next to *Dog Blood Blinds 1 & 2*.

*Dog Blood Blinds* (Figure 3) depicts two individual white paper blinds that are splattered with tiny droplets of brown (dried) blood. Photographed in soft light and against a white backdrop these images are unexpectedly ethereal. The blood spray appears as an ambiguous pattern until inspected closely; the utilitarian nature of the blinds is abstracted. These photographs are a result of a recent trip to visit family in Adelaide. Staying with my Uncle and Aunt, their children and two dogs, I soon heard the story of why the aforementioned blinds and other objects in the house were sprayed with blood. According to Aunt Frances the family had returned home several months before to find what looked like a murder scene; blood covered the ceiling, walls and floor. On investigation, they discovered that the family Greyhound Sunny had hit his tail, cutting it open. He then wagged his tail, spraying the whole house with blood. After visiting the vet, Sunny was sent home with a bandage on the end of his tail. Several days later, confused by the change in weight of his tail, he went to sit down on his bed and accidentally sat on his tail, snapping the vertebrae. He then needed to have the broken area of tail removed. The family continued to live with the blood-splattered blinds covering the living room windows, until I requested them for this project. This story and the evidence shown here is an example of a violent banality that pervades aspects of this project, most notably present in the series of books *With or Without You*. Violent actions are told in simple ways and juxtaposed with mundane, humorous and cute interactions.

WILLIAM WEGMAN

The similarities between this project and William Wegman’s practice are unmistakable. Born in 1943, Wegman is an American artist best known for his photographic work with his Weimaraners, he is also known for his
seminal video art from the 1970s. By looking at the works *Reel 2: The Kiss (1972)*, *Reel 7: Smoking (1976-1977)* and *Tame Animals (1987)*, I will be analysing the way he approaches his relationship with Man Ray and how their relationship informs the work.

*Reel 2: The Kiss (1972,)* (Figure 4) is a short video that is part of a series of demonstrations and durational tests. According to Wegman, these videos are brief vignettes involving studio and familiar household props, they also parody television culture. In *The Kiss*, we see Wegman lying on the studio floor, Man Ray lays beside him in the top left corner of the image. Man Ray is occupied with licking inside Wegman’s mouth—they are locked together in a ‘kiss’. To dogs licking means many things; grooming, affection, respect to elders, submission, appeasement, and taste. The bridging of dog/human language and boundaries in this work highlights the trust that we can have for each other and how roles can be exchanged. Is Man Ray treating Wegman like a puppy, a toy, food? Is he cleaning him or is he showing affection? By isolating and inverting in this action, Wegman has asked us to question the behaviour we engage in with our dogs and the roles that we prescribe them. By titling this work *The Kiss* I wonder if he is commenting on the anthropomorphic affection many dog owners give their dogs or if he is simply taking a banal action (a dog licking) and constructing an experimental gesture? Regardless, this work is humorous, intimate and a bit gross. By looking at the boundaries between himself and his dog Wegman elevates a simple canine act into something absurd.

One of the themes of *Reel 7* is familiarity and remembering. In *Reel 7: Smoking (1976-1977)*, (Figure 5) Wegman attempts to teach Man Ray how to smoke a cigarette. Shot in colour, this video depicts Wegman sitting on a chair with a microphone, with Man Ray sitting beside him on the floor. As he tries to convince Man Ray to smoke a cigarette (which

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would smell offensive to a dog) Man Ray looks at him quizzically and tries to turn the interaction into a game.\textsuperscript{23} In \textit{Reel 7: Smoking} this banal human habit takes on an absurd dimension when paired with the instructional dialogue of Wegman enticing Man Ray to try a cigarette, which obviously Man Ray can not understand:

Come here. Sit. It's good, once you get the hang of it. Really you'll like it. Just inhale. Kind of swallow the smoke. Like this. Watch. (Bill inhales.) Watch Ray. (Bill exhales.) Suck it in, and then blow it out. Here. (Offers cigarette to Man Ray.) Try it. How do you know if you don't try it?\textsuperscript{24}

\textit{Brother From Another Mother} has similarities to Wegman's \textit{Tame Animals, 1987}, (Figure 6) this photograph features Weimaraner Fay Ray and Border Collie mix Charlie posing on a plinth and an upturned garbage can against an orange backdrop, both dogs stare off camera towards the left. The title implies that these dogs have given up their primal nature, perhaps just for this studio portrait and are engaging in a very human behaviour — posing in a studio for a photograph. Each dog balances on their object with poise and focus. This engagement with the viewer and the camera is replicated in my studio portraits.

Both in his practice and in interviews Wegman shows that he considers his dogs to be collaborators and family members; he reveals them as dog archetypes and also as individuals. This approach seems to be unique as he is constantly and consistently engaging with them as individuals and activating the strong bond that he has created with them to benefit the work. He explores his dogs as subjects instead of objects.

\textsuperscript{24} William Wegman, \textit{Reel 7: Smoking}, 1976-77, black and white video with sound.
A BRIEF LOOK AT DOGS IN CONTEMPORARY ART

To further contextualise the use of dogs in my work this sub-chapter will compare and contrast a selection of contemporary art works that feature dogs. This selection includes works of controversy, cuteness, whimsy and meditations on the physicality of life. The works discussed here also allude to questions about the ethics of animals in art and to the roles that dogs play in our lives, as pet, companion, aggressor, pariah or primal animal. Francis Alys, Guillermo Vargas, Joseph Beuys, Pierre Huyghe, Bennett Miller and Anastasia Klose have all used dogs in their work in differing ways. Their treatment and execution of the works selected here have helped make them important contemporary artists.

Francis Alys’ video Gringo (2003) (Figure 7) takes the viewer on a point-of-view journey through a deserted Mexican town. The viewer experiences the discomfort of being an outsider when the camera is confronted by a pack of snarling dogs25. This video shows an alternate side to the close and friendly depictions of our relationship with dogs in the West. Alys’ Gringo and Guillermo Vargas’ Exposición No. 1 (You are what you read) 2007 explore the domestic dog as aggressor and pariah. These roles are common in developing and third world countries and are a stark contrast to how the dog has elevated status in the West. Vargas’ Exposición No. 1 (You Are What You Read) 2007 (Figure 8) is an interesting counterpoint to Alys’ Gringo. In Gringo, the dog is the aggressor, displaying typical pack behaviour to defeat an intruder; in You Are What You Read gallery visitors are confronted with a sickly street dog tethered to a fixture in the wall. On an adjacent wall the words you are what you read (in Spanish) are spelled out in dog biscuits. Far from being a competent aggressor, this dog is suffering and passive. You Are What You Read was incredibly controversial, making international news, and receiving calls to boycott the exhibition and the use of live animals in art.

The palpable suffering of the dog enraged many viewers, again this may be linked to our subconscious need to care for and protect dogs. This work is also an interesting counterpoint to the question of whether a dog can be a work of art, as posed in Untitled 2011-12, discussed later in this section.

In Joseph Beuys’ *I like America and America likes me* (1974) (Figure 9) a wild coyote is placed in a fenced area of the gallery. Beuys swathed himself in felt and entered the coyote’s area; the stand off between artist and wild animal became a durational performance that lasted for eight hours a day for three days. He also engaged in symbolic gestures, such as throwing his gloves to the coyote and striking a triangle. Although this performance was intended to test the boundaries of man and wild animal, the coyote became accustomed to Beuys presence and spent most of the performance asleep. At the end of the three days Beuys was able to hug the coyote before being taken to the airport.

*I like America and America likes me* (1974) is a majorly influential performance work, this influence can be seen in Pierre Huyghe’s Untitled 2011-12 (Figure 10) which was shown at dOCUMENTA 13 (2012). Untitled 2011-12 is an outdoor installation that focuses on the loss of artistic control, it centres around a large compost heap and also includes a sculpture with a head of live bees, growing plants, an uprooted tree and a dog, named Human, with a painted leg. Human becomes a centrepiece of this garden and is often followed by viewer’s taking photographs. This work also asks the question, can a dog be a work of art? Untitled references non-human forms of intelligence and allows Human to be at one with nature and do as she pleases, which is generally being a dog. The following video, *Greyhound Human annoyed by documenta-visitors - Karlsaue Park in Kassel, Germany 2012, dOCUMENTA (13)* gives the

viewer a sense of the live, spontaneous nature of the work and shows some of the kinds of social interactions that Human experienced in *Untilled*.

The following quote discusses how dOCUMENTA 13 shows how an interest in dogs is reflected in the festival, and how *Untilled* responds to the theme of the festival — sustainability.

Sustainability and the relationship between nature and culture are also strong themes of the documenta, which some have jokingly dubbed 'dogumenta' due to its interest in dogs. "Many think there is a difference between culture and nature but there really isn't... It is important to gain a perspective on the world and on life that is not just human," Christov-Bakargiev told Zeit magazine, criticizing anthropocentric views. Christov-Bakargiev, whose fluffy white pooch Darcy rarely leaves her side, has commissioned a vet for the exhibition to discover what dogs find "beautiful" and has set aside a "dog park" in Kassel for the use of canines.27

The relationship described between Christov-Bakargiev and Darcey is an example of the intense friendship bond between humans and dogs as described earlier in this paper. The elevation of dogs to a special status as shown at dOCUMENTA (13) is proof that this complex bond is very important to humans from all walks of life.

Australian artists Bennett Miller and Anastasia Klose also explore the importance of our close bond with dogs in contemporary life. Bennett Miller's *Dachshund U.N* (2010) (Figure 11) is a cute and comical reimagining of the United Nations. A collection of live Dachshunds arrives

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to take their places in a scale replica of a former U.N. office in Geneva, Switzerland. This structure will play host to a meeting of the U.N.’s Commission on Human Rights, wherein all 47 of the national delegates are dogs.\textsuperscript{28}

The Dachshund delegates are encouraged to debate rigorously, while being watched by a live human audience. Miller’s experiment was chaotic and humorous, while being wildly cute and hyper-political.\textsuperscript{29} This work gained international attention due to its universal appeal and strong cuteness element. As described earlier in this paper, ‘cuteness’ is a major factor in why humans respond to dogs, with a need to care for and parent them. Anastasia Klose also explores cuteness and the everyday through family and parental connections with a dog. Her most recent work showcases her adoration for her 7 year old Bassett Hound, Farnsworth (Figure 12). Her forthcoming experiment, \textit{Farnsworth’s Republic for Dogs,} 2014, (Figure 13) will see the ACCA forecourt transformed into an off-leash dog park for Summer, 2015. This will be a meeting place for people and dogs, making it a social and psychological example of how the deep connection between dogs and humans can be explored environmentally and in contemporary art.

This selection of key works provides a contemporary context for the work produced through this research project. A focus on performance and video in the exploration of the dog/human bond and on questions of ethics and roles that dogs play has created a climate for me to pose these questions in my own work. The most similarities with this research project are seen in Anastasia Klose’s recent work.


Part 3

MY MOTHER, MY SELF:
NAVIGATING THE PERSONAL
The only thing in which I found faith was doubt. It struck me as a far more natural state of being. Faith required effort that was beyond me. Doubt was instinctive...if somebody subscribed doggedly to a particular political ideology, it struck me that they were constrained by it...my doubts were also personal and directed inwards: Am I good enough? Am I smart enough? Am I pretty enough? Am I doing the right thing? ...I admired well-grounded confidence in others, but I felt that people with unwavering certainty in themselves, and in their beliefs and opinions suffered from a form of moral vanity.30

CARVING UP MEMORIES AND PHOTOGRAPHS:
PHOTO ALBUMS, COLLAGE AND FAMILY

Tracking Irma’s development has led me to explore my own identity and childhood in greater detail than I have previously done. By amalgamating dog photographs with documentation of my life and experiences, I have created the centrepiece of this project; With or Without You, a series of six hardcover books exploring text and images of my life with Irma, as well as my childhood and history. Through this series I was able to investigate my interpersonal relationships and the effects they have had, particularly with my mother. This investigation has resulted in an extensive autobiographical journey that plays out in these books but also informs the project as a whole, influencing the reading of the other works produced. It also raises questions about making work that deals with personal territory and how this can be problematic in nature. In this section I will discuss different strategies for the personal to come into the

gallery and how my treatment of photographs is created and informed by family photo albums and collage.

*With or Without You*[^31^] is a set of 6 individual books:

- *Upskirt, Down Dog* (Pink)
- *Growing Pains* (Green)
- *Hallelujah* (Yellow)
- *Beautiful Face* (White)
- *Hounds* (Black)
- *Ginger Snaps, Ginger Straps* (Orange)

This series is the culmination of 2 years of photographs that document my life. Displaying the photographs was proving to be difficult due to the volume and inconsistency in shape and size; using a book format allowed me to loosely categorise them, therefore creating a visual language within the series. This is shown through the use of repetition, size, cropping, juxtaposition and grouping, colour and shape coordination, text/image relations and subject matter. In *Upskirt, Down Dog* this is demonstrated in the first set of images, where objects found on the ground while walking the dog are photographed roughly in the centre of the frame. Singularly these images are quite banal but juxtaposed with each other they become absurd. The objects include: men’s Calvin Klein underpants, a sanitary pad, a section of tennis ball fluff, chopped meat and a trampoline (Figure 14).

While compiling these books I referred to Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher’s book *Learning to Love You More*,[^32^] which is based around completing tasks from simple instructions, for example - give advice to yourself in the past. I then applied this structure to prescribe simple tasks

[^31^]: This title is a reference to the song *With or Without You* by U2, performed by Hamish Cowan for the soundtrack to *Looking for Alibrandi*. This song is used in a scene where it is revealed that a main character has committed suicide despite appearing to ‘have it all’. This song and this scene stuck with me as a teenager.

[^32^]: This book is the culmination of an online project that Fletcher and July started in 2002.
of my own. This process allowed me to play with memories and stories from my childhood; text was then juxtaposed with photographs, as seen in Figure 15. I have employed deliberate strategies to foster a deep individual experience with the work — in the past it had been installed in a triangular configuration so that only one person could experience all elements at one time. Learning to Love You More also references the history of the ‘artist book’; the book becomes an important art object that allows the viewer to experience an intimate relationship with, as opposed to a book with a large edition number. The self-portraits shown in the book are not glamorous, an example of this is seen in Figure 16, this is because I am interested in looking at the self and where I am in relation to the things I document. This self-examination also talks about wider social relationships by exploring the way I see myself and the way others see me. By revealing images of myself from Irma’s perspective (of looking up at me), I aspire to share the intimate nature of our entwined world.

As a finished work Upskirt, Down Dog, became unexpectedly loaded with psychological meaning; there is a folding between the two very complex relationships of mother/daughter and daughter/pet. A sense of psychological displacement pervades the book, underscoring that interpersonal relationships can be inadequate. Throughout the book it becomes evident that the relationship with my mother conditions the way the viewer reads my relationship with Irma. By experiencing the past, the reader can see that the past is conditioning the present. The following is an excerpt from Upskirt, Down Dog, which depicts a fictional account of a conversation I wish I could have had, with my mother.

**Conversation you wish you could have** (Excerpt from With or Without You: Upskirt, Down Dog)

Me: Hey mum
Mum: Is that you Jaya? Hi Sweetheart.
Me: Yeah mum, so, I was calling to talk about something. I know we’ve talked about this before but I didn’t feel like you really acknowledged what I was saying, so, I wanted to bring it up again. When you went to India without me when I was three, it really fucked me up. I think it affected the rest of my childhood, afterwards, I think I was so angry at you that I haven’t really taken you seriously since, and have never felt part of your family since then.
Mum: Oh Jaya, I didn’t realise how deeply this affected you. I am genuinely sorry. I wish that I had made different decisions and put you first when you were a child.
Me: I know that you were young and things were much tougher than I was aware of at that age but, all I wanted was a mum who was interested in me.
Mum: I’m sorry that you felt that way; I wish that I could have been there for you more. I wish I had made more of an effort to really get to know you so that you didn’t feel like you had to ‘be the strong one.’
Me: I felt so alone growing up and wished that you had been able to go the distance with me emotionally. I know that it’s not helpful to blame you; I’m just finding it really hard to get over these feelings and struggles.
Mum: I know sweetheart, things have been tough, but I really want to get to know you now and be close. I’m sorry that I wasn’t able to prioritise and be stronger for you kids when you were growing up, I feel strong enough in myself to be that for all of you now.
Me: I really want us to be closer and for us to really know each other. It’s really nice to hear you say all of this. I’m looking forward to spending more time together.
Me: I really feel like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders, thanks for listening and not simply justifying your choices.
Mum: I’m really happy we could talk openly about this.
Me: I love you mum.
Mum: I love you too.
*Hallelujah (Yellow)*, is a photographic exploration of my childhood and history; it is made up of photos selected from family photo albums and my own photo library. As shown in Figure 17 and Figure 18, it almost exclusively shows photographs of myself, my childhood, my family, history, significant and banal moments. It surveys my life and is a meditation on striving to understand myself. It is also the largest book of the series.

*Beautiful Face (White)* functions in the same way, but covers Irma’s photographic history. This book documents a vast array of her experiences in life and shows the simplicity and joy of being a dog (Figure 19 & 20.)

*Growing Pains (Green)* and *Ginger Snaps, Ginger Straps (Orange)* are both collections of images that show wider scope. Cats (Figure 21), friends and other aspects of life are collated in these books to show the large range of experiences that Irma and I have in life. They also form a repository for images I have taken in public of other people’s dogs (Figures 22 & 23). These books become a store of categorised moments.

*Hounds (Black)* is an intimate collection of fragmentary stories punctuated by photographs. These stories range from tales of adoption and birth to fragments about vaginas and toddler-hood (Figure 24).

The process of constructing these books evolved from reflection on my personal family photo albums. Photo albums function as a repository for memories and a catalogue of personal experiences, which often involve both the subject and photographer, bound within the context of the frame. The unique experience of the family photo album blurs the parameters of the frame, as the viewer is invited to reflect upon experiences that go beyond the frame of the image. Frame, to one viewer is exclusive and to another viewer is expansive. The images in a photo album speak to each regardless of how random they are and inform the experience of the
album as a whole. Although my books don’t look like photo albums they use the same language and function in a similar way e.g. cataloguing significant and insignificant moments, invoking personal memories and sensations. Collage has also been a significant influence in the making of this work, a collaging sensibility informs the decisions I make when placing, cropping and juxtaposing images.

Photo albums can also function as memory tombs and time capsules; time is captured and halted — images become stuck in time and space. Personal photo collections are often some of the most important family relics to be passed down.

Both sides of my family immigrated to Australia in the 1950s and 60s, the only connection that we have to the family history is through original photographs. When my Swiss Grandfather died in October (2014) the family discovered that he had lived an extraordinary life and that he had not shared its details with anyone in Australia. This included extensive travel through Europe, North America, South and Central America, military service, high paid jobs, girlfriends, cars and love letters. Preparation for his funeral unearthed photographs from his youth that the family had never seen (Figure 25). This sense of halting and reflecting time is explored in Hallelujah (Yellow) where I show a succession of images surrounding my Grandfather’s funeral (Figure 26). The ability of photo albums to span and reflect on time is also pertinent in the comparison of human and dog life spans. The photographs throughout the series reflect the differing ages and conditions of Irma and many other dogs.

By using my personal family photo albums I was able to intimately follow my family history as it played out through the generations, and ultimately reflect on its impact on my own life. This autobiographical inquiry runs parallel to my daily investigation into my relationship with Irma; these two investigations constantly fold into one another. Understanding and
looking at dogs and my relationship with them has been a gateway for understanding my relationships and myself. Animals, particularly dogs have always featured in my life; I have a natural affinity with them, this project has led me to interrogate what they give me emotionally and psychologically.

APPROACHING THE PERSONAL WITH TRACEY EMIN AND SOPHIE CALLE

Two contemporary artists who also make work about their personal lives are Tracey Emin and Sophie Calle. Both artists use autobiographical writings to record their personal experience, as well as incorporating confessional text into their art practices. Tracey Emin’s memoir *Strangeland* has been an important reference point for the confessional writings in my books. Her honest and intimate voice weaves effortlessly through her traumatic childhood, contextualising her art practice and the adult that she has become. Emin’s early works *May Dodge, My Nan 1963-93, My Bed and Exploration of the Soul 1994* will be examined here, linking her confessional writings and her approach to bringing work with a personal focus into the gallery, to my own. Sophie Calle’s *Exquisite Pain* will also be referred to; Calle also uses hard-hitting, diaristic writing in book and gallery form to explore her personal life.

*Strangeland* is mostly about Emin’s relationship with her mother and is written in an intensely intimate way. It explores her childhood, traumatic experiences and her most intimate and darkest thoughts. It is also about her relationships with family and friends and about her journey from innocent child to jaded adult. She also maps her developing art practice and discusses the experience of making specific works.

Her confessional approach to the personal comes to a head in *My Bed (1998)* (Figure 27). In this work Emin relocates her bed, along with its
accompanying tissues, dirty sheets, panty hose, condoms and empty pill bottles into the gallery. This work caused controversy because the relocation of such a personal, banal and unkempt scene was considered disgusting and ‘not art’. This work also has a sense of vulnerability and self-destruction; the following quote from *Strangeland* gives insight into the origins of this work:

> But for me, my childhood was over, I had become conscious of my physicality, aware of my presence and open to the ugly truths of the world. At the age of thirteen, I realised that there was a danger in innocence and beauty, and I could not live with both.\(^{33}\)

*May Dodge, My Nan 1963-93* (Figure 28) is a collection of intimate objects, images and letters that Emin collected throughout the period shown in the title. By displaying these treasures in frames Emin elevates them to objects worthy of notice in a gallery. This is also seen in *Exploration of the Soul 1994*, a work comprising of 32 framed sheets of blue A4 paper and two colour photographs (Figure 29). The notepaper features poetic text written by Emin that recounts events in her life up to the age of 13 (Figures 30 & 31). Her deeply confessional and poetic style of writing takes the viewer deep into her vulnerable and chaotic inner life, while at the same time allowing us to question the authenticity and affect of the work. The following quotes from *Strangeland* describe her relationship to her own body and her feelings about an abortion she had several years earlier.

> I put my hands on my tits and felt the soft, warm fleshy things. . . that did not belong to me. In fact no part of my body felt like it belonged to me. My

stomach was soft and puffy, my clitoris smooth and flat. It all felt so sad, so fucking sad.\textsuperscript{34}

It always creeps up on me unexpectedly: my body and how it makes me feel. Today, I thought. Today, six years ago, I was pregnant. Fuck me, I actually carried life. I put my fingers inside myself: unbelievable, impossible, that life could come from there. It was dry and tight: it was incredible that it could stretch so much.\textsuperscript{35}

Although her art works have things in common with my own, it is Emin’s writing that has most actively influenced this project. Her poetic but fragmentary style of writing in \textit{Strangeland} is what I have naturally emulated in my book series. In Emin’s writings there is an intimate sense of the chaotic mess of the trauma of the past, in comparison Sophie Calle’s writings follow a more controlled diaristic approach that leads the viewer to question what the artist’s intent or affect is. This is most obvious in \textit{Exquisite Pain}, a repetitive collection of stories following a difficult break up. \textit{Exquisite Pain} is a meditation on suffering and obsession and is a significant example of how other artists have integrated text and photographs (Figure 32).

\textbf{PUBLIC / PRIVATE: A WINDOW INTO THE HOME}

Throughout this project there is an interchange of formalisation and casualness that occurs. I apply a formal execution to an amateur aesthetic, as the majority of photographic and video works are captured on my iPhone. This method is preferred for its simplicity and

\textsuperscript{34} Tracey Emin. \textit{Strangeland}. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2005), 171.
\textsuperscript{35} Tracey Emin. \textit{Strangeland}. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2005), 171.
immediacy, making efficient work of cataloguing vast volume and sets of images and videos. This accessible format provides the freedom to play with the idea of the amateur, while selectively curating images that create different meanings, which feed back on themselves and interrogate the boundaries between public, private, and personal space. These boundaries are also explored through our relationship with our pets and our bodies. Using animal videos on YouTube to explore how we express our relationships with our pets I reference these types of interactions in my own videos.

The video works _I Love You To Death_, and _Kisses_, provide a collection of short recordings, which document my daily interactions with animals over the duration of this project. _I Love You To Death_ is a compilation of moments that I captured while travelling in Hong Kong, where I was exposed to an extraordinarily diverse range of animals both living and dead. As a tourist it seemed much more acceptable to avidly snap away at seemingly banal moments of daily life in Hong Kong, yet the visual obsession remained consistent. The museum of different animals available to me simply by walking the streets provided vast insight of the cultural differences between life in Melbourne and in Hong Kong. Cats plague the streets of Hong Kong, and the locals enjoy a rather alternative form of cat ownership and foster-hood, stray cats thrive in this incredibly dense city, relying on food and affection from locals, they are simultaneously part of the city and part of the home. Amongst the tiny laneways of Kowloon, densely overpopulated with food-stalls, the cats would circulate in small groups completing daily rounds at different stalls for routine meals. I often hypothesised as to how these groups had formed and would try to analyse their behaviour; discerning males, from females and young from old. While the cats did their rounds and I stopped to take photos, the stall owners would often emerge and take pride in my affections toward the cats. On many occasions they would come out with treats and the cats would perform tricks, which often involved sitting on a favourite chair, or vantage point. Many would lounge
on bins holding dried lizard skins or shark fins while customers shopped around them.

Crossing cultural boundaries, this video documentation seems to depict contrasting images of love and affection towards animals in the streets — an old man wheeling a Chow Chow down the street in a trolley, with images of neglect and cruelty. Contradictions were apparent- on the one hand people swooned over the cute puppies, kittens, turtles and exotic fish however the living conditions provided for the animals were very strange. The poor living conditions for the animals was clearly driven by capital gain. It is difficult to respectfully assert criticism over this cultural treatment, as I understand there are much larger implications responsible for the flow down effect of negligence. All the same while the city displayed alien affections toward they’re animals – it was clear that the critical engagement driven by love, empathy and mutual gain was a distinguished human trait.

*Kisses*, is a collection of interactions and experiences with my own pets, Merzbow, Piper and Irma, this footage is juxtaposed with images of animals in pet shops and in public (Figure 33). These vignettes document the everyday happenings and experiences with the animals and provide a window into my home (Figure 34). The viewer can have a vicarious experience where they are injected into a private space they wouldn’t normally have access to. The domestic experience shown in the series of books and videos, are supported with a defined space cast with re-purposed rugs and carpet. Cut-out to form simple shapes depicting pop cultural references, a burgundy circle, green shag dog-bone and black shag cat head. These carpet shapes will be installed on the floor and wall to create a feeling of immersion and tactility, linking the viewer to the experience of a small child or dog. They seek to bring the domestic and the personal onto a performative stage.
TOOTH AND NAILS: USING THE BODY IN THE PRACTICE

The body has always been important in my practice. Understanding and accepting my own body has been explored in my previous works and remnants of this investigation are revealed in the bruise photographs throughout the *With or Without You* series (Figure 35). This interest in the body is now more aligned with an investigation into adornment and aesthetics imposed on the body. In this project I have documented everyday experiences, which include my body, rather than exploring my body through documentation. Through investigating body adornment I am able to navigate a relationship to the body that I have not previously had: a carefree sense of fun.

A sense of hyper-stylised femininity informs the last work from this project, *I Want to Fall in Love Again*. This work is a performance piece that will be staged during the opening of my MFA exhibition and it will allow viewers to take my photos home on their fingernails. The act of painting one’s nails is seen as a feminine one and can be heavily stylised. *I Want to Fall in Love Again* transcribes a selection of my photographs onto my viewer’s nails. This will be performed by Nicki — a nail technician from Point Cook, and is achieved with new technology, a Tink’d nail photo printer. After booking Nicki, she went on to tell me that she is German, dyslexic and a night manager at a brothel. This is the second link to sex work that I have encountered in this project. In 2013 we fostered a litter of kittens for a rescue group, it turned out that their previous carer works for a soft-core porn company and the kittens had featured in several adult films and photo shoots. The title *I Want to Fall in Love Again* references a feeling of nostalgia about teenage love and lust. It is a work that endeavours to bring together the private and public aspects of the project and is a short-term memento for the viewer to take home. This performance also discusses female beautification, aesthetics, cuteness and physical boundaries. Irma will also be having her nails painted at a
doggy salon for the Graduate Exhibition; this will be an interesting counterpoint. *I Want to Fall in Love Again* will also reference the extent that dog owners will go to in order pamper their beloved pooches, and the consequential plethora of business models designed to capitalise on these cravings. The performance will be set up like a kitsch nail desk incorporating fluffy cushions on the chairs, with knick-knacks and pictures to surround the area.

*I Want to Fall in Love Again,* acknowledges the nature of body adornment projected onto our pets as a pleasure that is completely self-serving. There is little conclusive evidence, which can indicate the ability of a dog to distinguish self-reflexive definitions of beauty, yet we whimsically enjoy posing the hypothetical dilemma onto them. What will Irma make of her diamanté nail accessories or dyed pink leg? It is a fairly distorted intervention which we impose on the animals, especially when our very love and adornment of them – comes from their apparent carefree and anti-discriminatory lifestyle. Colloquially we long for ‘a dog’s life’ as it is romanticised for being free of obligation, responsibility, and stress. Yet we still can’t help but impose conflicting concepts of pleasure and vanity, which they are completely oblivious to.

In an attempt to somehow remedy this confliction, I wondered how I could intervene on my body in a more dog-like way akin to the human-like beauty treatment I was applying to Irma. I began to contemplate the idea of my canine teeth; the strongest ripping teeth that both canines and humans share. Designed for immediate consumption they are symbol of primal greed conjuring images of vampires, monsters and the association of the devil in our domestic dogs. It seemed fitting to adorn my own canine tooth with such luxurious decadence as I fetishized my own desires onto Irma by adorning her with equally frivolous embellishments, which not even she can understand. I underwent this cosmetic procedure in Bentleigh; a technician used dental glue (used for braces) to fix a ‘rainbow’ Swarovski crystal that would reflect different colours off my
tooth. This work has not been documented as its functions in its every day wear – as a performance integrated with life. Lasting 6-12 months depending on wear; the glue adhering the jewel will inevitably decay incidentally distinguishing a brief moment in time.

Accepting the knowledge that these adornments of dying Irma’s leg pink and accessorising her nails will have little fathomable affect on her, the work seeks to illustrate the unique bond between Irma and I, and act emblematically on the bonds we all share with our pets. With a wink to the notion of ‘man’s best friend’, Irma and I display a camaraderie fulfilling the daily pleasures of beautification together as a ‘woman’s best friend’. While I cannot discern her ability to enjoy painted nails, or dyed pink hair, the simple act of being together quenches her desire to love and be loved.

As viewers are invited to have my images cast onto their fingernails, they will carry my works with them amongst their daily rituals – emblematic of where they came from. They will be disseminated amongst the hands of many and will inevitably decay to nothing more than a memory.
Conclusion

This research project has tracked and documented Irma’s life and the creation of an intricate social bond between us. Using photography, writing, video and installation I have been able to explore and attempt to understand the complex bond that exists between humans and dogs, in turn this has led me to explore my own autobiographical story, elements of which I had purposefully distanced myself from. This project asked me to connect with my past and my history, enabling me to write about personal memories and explore family photographs.

It has also enabled me time to analyse and philosophise on my relationship with Irma and on the importance of dogs in my life. The project has led me to realise that one of my vocations in life is dogs, and that I need to continue working with them, personally and professionally. The research has taken me on a personal journey featuring birth, death, pregnancy, injury, trauma and love. By exploring different formats and ways of cataloguing my images I have expanded on ways of showing images in the practice. I have experimented with spatial elements culminating in the final installation- a vehicle for showing the connections in the different works discussed in this paper. These emotions have fed back into the project and have revealed unexpected pathways that I have negotiated to explore, compile and exhibit the works.
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Appendix: Works exhibited for final Examination

Figure 1
Jaya Fausch, *With or Without You* (Installation View), 2014. Synthetic rugs, Framed C-Type Photographs, 6 hard-cover photo books, Nail-Art station and nail technician, dog with dyed pink leg. Dimensions variable.

Figure 2
Jaya Fausch, *With or Without You* (Installation View), 2014. Synthetic rugs, Framed C-Type Photographs, 6 hard-cover photo books, Nail-Art station and nail technician, dog with dyed pink leg.

Dimensions variable.

Figure 3

Jaya Fausch, *With or Without You* (Installation View, Detail), 2014. Synthetic rugs, Framed C-Type Photographs, 6 hard-cover photo books, Vinyl applique lettering, Nail-Art station and nail technician, dog with dyed pink leg.

Dimensions variable.
Figure 4
Jaya Fausch, *Brother From Another Mother*, 2014. Framed digital C-Type print
40 x 50cms
Figure 5
Jaya Fausch, *I Want to Fall in Love Again* (Installation View), 2014
Performance, Nail Art technician, T’inkd machine, live dog with dyed pink leg.

Figure 6
Jaya Fausch, *I Want to Fall in Love Again* (Installation View), 2014. Performance, Nail Art technician, T’inkd machine, live dog with dyed pink leg.
Jaya Fausch, *Cat-Head* (Detail), 2014 and *I Want to Fall in Love Again* (Installation View) 2014, Acrylic rug, dog with dyed pink leg.
Dimensions variable.

Jaya Fausch, *Dog Blood Blinds 1* (Installation View), 2014
Figure 9
Jaya Fausch, *Dog Blood Blinds 1 (Installation View)*, 2014
Framed C-Type print
60 x 80cms
Figure 10

Jaya Fausch, *Upskirt, Down Dog* (Detail), 2014

Hard-Bound photo book, 50 pages

22 x 22cms