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‘Encounters with her Presence: Relating with the Feral.’

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## ENCOUNTERS WITH HER PRESENCE RELATING WITH THE FERAL . . .

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*DAWN M GAIETTO*

W atching

I watched anthropomorphised animals walk, talk, and sing. I did not confuse this as the language of the animal or the world of the animal, but a way to attempt in understanding an ‘other’. I knew from experience that animals lived their own lives, in their own way.

## The elusive

In February, I am walking a dog at night. We both notice a fox following us.

She remains at a constant distance bobbing elusively from our sights, yet  
she remains present; her sight fixed firmly upon the dog.

By March, the dog and I are in the garden, late  
one evening. I notice as she repeatedly sniffs along  
the bottom of the fence row. I continue to watch -  
then I see the whiskers, the nose, and the cream-coloured snout.

A fox and a dog chase noses and scents along this line.

Both curious - enough to follow; both elusive - enough to avoid the other.

In April, I am sitting in a chair in the garden in the late evening. The dog is doing dog-  
stuff in the centre of the garden. I look down - emerging from my legs is a fox. I watch

her quietly, as she  
silently stalks the dog. She stops -  
she slowly raises her head-

we make eye-contact. Looking with one another.

After the slightest hesitation she  
spins around out of the garden. The dog  
has no idea as she continues upon her dog-doings.

Things progressed, slowly.

In August, mid-afternoon I was heading to the garden.

I stop before the door, she is present,  
she is sleeping.

A few days later, I cannot see her in the garden.

I open the door for a dog  
and a cat to go into the garden.

Returning a bit later,

I notice the dog standing in the exact centre  
of the garden. Repeatedly looking  
from the far back corner to the front. I look more closely to see this scene.

In the foreground the cat is wandering around, with the dog in the centre,  
looking anxiously back and forth, and in the background  
a fox is curled up under a tree. Upon opening the door, the cat returns inside.

I walk calmly outside into the corner farthest from the fox.

While I smoke, a dog and a fox sniff each other and walk a boundary -  
uncertain who has trespassed upon whom.

The dog walks over to me and the fox walks out of the garden



Still from *encounters with her presence*, 26'21", 2016.



**T**his video is an unfolding of three near identical views. Each includes a bit of the garden patio and a faux sheep skin blanket; the first includes Miss Maddie Dog, and the last includes a fox. The video opens with a black screen, a void to be filled. Emerging first, on the left side of the screen, is the landscape with a dog, then the middle third opens to the landscape and foregrounds the lighting. Lastly, on the right third of the screen a fox is revealed. This video is soft in the individual treatments of the three images, yet retains hard divisions which aid in maintaining the sense of replication. The breathing of the dog is obvious and she is continually moving. The landscape flows with fluctuations from the wind and the dappled sunlight. The fox is eerily still, and has been confused by some viewers as a taxidermised specimen, until her eventual departure from the frame. These visual qualities allow a sadness to emerge; a potential elegy. The duration of the film as a whole is 26'21", yet the duration of each of the three images varies. The three scenes come and go, and through the formal repetition allow a sense of being-with that merges between the three images. This sense of being-with is physically present in the experience of the animals as both have shared the bed and left remnants of their fox-ness and dog-ness on the surface. Each chooses to inhabit a shared space. If the first space is the void, the second through forth spaces are variations on habitation, and this in turn reveals a fifth space. This fifth space is the opportunity for the viewer to cross between the images, and the visual frames; to understand the sense of co-habitation. This is reinforced through the narrative arc — void, dog-ness, space, fox-ness — the near identical-ness yet obstinate differentiation. This is a presentation of a question, a question of one's knowledge of the feral and domestic nonhumans by which one is surrounded, and of the liveliness of the animate.