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MELAMORPHOSIS:
An Artistic Journey Through Shapeshifting

Master’s Thesis
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The thesis questions whether a human-animal transformation, which is a mental or spiritual transformation from human to non-human animal, can be used as a method of finding spirituality or spiritual wellbeing. The thesis also questions the definition of the term spirituality, and whether it is a relevant issue in modern society.

The study is conducted through my personal artistic practice, the project titled Melamorphosis, which is my final MA project and also the title of the final exhibition in Gallery Ava, 25.11. - 14.12.2014. Through Melamorphosis I found that human-animal transformations can be used in order to find a deeper connection to oneself and one’s surroundings (one’s personal nature and one’s identity), and that this can be done through art. The thesis also suggests a new therapy: Human-Animal Transformational Therapy, and gives a basis to how this therapy can work in order to find a deeper connection to oneself and one’s personal nature or spirituality.

The thesis goes hand in hand with my personal artistic practice, and the reader may find more information on the Melamorphosis project and exhibition in Gallery Ava through their website: http://www.avagalleria.com, or through requiring images or video material from me through my email: melanie.orenius@gmail.com.

Keywords  shapeshifting, human-animal transformation, spirituality, art therapy, fine art, therapy, nature
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INTRODUCTION

Through this thesis the reader is able to follow my personal artistic journey through the world of shapeshifting, i.e. human-animal transformations. I will write about my search for the purpose of these transformations and how shapeshifting can be done through art. Human-animal transformations can be a method of searching for meaning in one's life, one's personal spirituality, and thus I will argue that they can have therapeutic value. The reader will be able to read about my suggestion for a human-animal transformational therapy method, and how, by transforming into a non-human animal through art, one can search for deeper understanding of oneself, of one's identity. The questions evolve around how these transformations can be conducted through art, how they can be applied in the modern world and the difficulties of this, and whether or not I have been able to gain deeper understanding of myself, my spirituality, through transforming into animals (through art).

It will become evident that I regard spirituality as an important factor for having a healthy life, because I link it closely to mental stability and health. Discussion of the importance of spirituality has become more relevant in today's Western society, after having become somewhat absent or less important (Farely-Hansen & Bowman, 2001). This will be discussed in the thesis. Courses on ayurveda, meditating, and alternative forms of medicine and therapy are growing in popularity in all parts of the world. I regard this a good thing, since everyone has his or her own spirituality (meaning in life), his or her own identity, and the means of looking for or finding spiritual health varies from person to person.

Spirituality is not necessarily linked to a religion or specific lifestyle, although the term is commonly attached to a discussion of these. This thesis
aims to broaden our use of the term since, as will become evident, spirituality involves a wide notion of other aspects apart from the religious ones that it is usually connected to. One definition of spirituality by Margret Burkhardt:

"Spirituality is that which gives meaning to one's life and draws one to transcend oneself. Spirituality is a broader concept than religion, although that is one expression of spirituality. Other expressions include prayer, meditation, interactions with others or nature, and relationship with God or a higher power" (Burkhardt, 1989, p. 69).

When spiritual wellbeing is addressed, it is rather linked to emotional wellbeing. In some cases mental and emotional wellbeing are referred to as the same, but mostly emotional wellbeing is used when discussing health problems that are not directly linked to a specific mental diagnosis. This is difficult since for example depression can be linked to both. In this thesis the distinctive difference between mental health and spiritual wellbeing is thus the following: mental health refers to problems that have or can be diagnosed and treated by a psychologist. Spiritual wellbeing is something one must search and find on one's own, although help can of course be used; but not medical help. Spirituality is a more general issue connected to who one is or wants to be, and although I regard the lack of spirituality as something that needs to be treated, this is still not defined as a disease. Based on the quotes on spirituality in this thesis, one could regard spirituality and identity as the same. One can be perfectly well, but still not pleased with one's life if one is not in terms with one's spirituality. Within academic research the term spirituality is often regarded negatively because of its vague definition, and because of it's common association to new age, magic, religion and something intangible. John B. Bennett however argues that academics should broaden and update their attitude towards spirituality, since spirituality is considered a valid and important factor
within most other areas of modern day studies, as for example within psychological research (I will return to this in the chapter on Animal-Assisted Therapy). He suggests that spirituality should be considered a mean through which we learn about others and ourselves; that everything and everyone has their own spirituality, and that it cannot be defined through specific beliefs or schools (Bennett, 2004). He makes four main points about spirituality:

"One is that there are multiple forms of spirituality. Each of us possesses his or her own brand, whether or not we or others deem them constructive or attractive. The second is that we often uncover our real spirituality by viewing ourselves through the eyes of others as well as by reflecting on our own experiences of hope and darkness. The third point is that our institutions also have their own spiritualities. Some of these various spiritualities are quite common, though far from admirable. The final point is that education is ineluctably a spiritual matter, however much we may ignore or deny it" (Bennett, 2004, p. 1).

My personal opinion on the terms mental and spiritual health is that they are closely intertwined, regardless of the separation that is commonly exercised between them. This should give the reader an outlining of from what perspective I am writing. For me, one cannot be fully mentally well unless one is in terms with ones spiritual life, which could then for example be one's goals or ambitions in life, or the learning about oneself, one's identity. Thus I will argue that spiritual wellbeing is as important as mental wellbeing. As Bennett argues: what this spiritual life then is, that is completely subjective.

Then although not commonly known, searching for spiritual or mental wellbeing, a deeper understanding of oneself or life, can be done through a
human-animal transformation: shapeshifting. A human-animal transformation is a transformation from human to non-human animal that most commonly happens on a psychological, spiritual or on a so-called "energetic" level (Owusu, 2002). This can also be called shapeshifting, shape-changing or therianthood; terms that I will clarify in the chapters. Anthropomorphism is a term for a transformation from human to other creature, this can be an object or something living, but this thesis focuses on animals (Robertson, 2013). Humans have separated themselves from other animals by putting themselves in the role of the superior being on the planet. Ron Broglio describes the difference as following:

"Traditionally, animals have been viewed as having limited faculties. Their poverty of faculties is supposedly evident in their 'lesser' ability to reason, in their language, and in their use of tools. Their skills are lessened by measuring them against every standard in which we consider ourselves superior, and by this superiority, we differentiate ourselves from them" (Broglio, 2011, p. 17).

I argue that this superiority over animals needs to be removed in order to consider a human-animal transformation as a valid method of finding deeper connection to oneself, or ones spirituality. But a human-animal transformation could also be a method of removing this feeling of superiority over animals. The experiences of animals and human-animal transformations are subjective, and thus these can vary depending on the person conducting the transformation.

Human-animal transformations occur in animistic beliefs, such as shamanism and voodoo. Also history from all over the world, mythology, religions and folklore are filled with human-animal transformations. But human-animal transformations are also still practiced today. This thesis will study these shapeshifters and their means of transformation in order to find
whether human-animal transformations can be used in this day by anyone anywhere, how they can be executed, and whether or not one's wellbeing can benefit from a human-animal transformation. I will question the role of spirituality in the modern western society through our feeling of connection or disconnection from nature, and whether or not shapeshifting can be a way of re-connecting or finding a deeper connection to nature. With nature I refer to everything that is not man-made, our surroundings, animals and the nature of animals, but also human nature; our instinctual behaviour. I connect this definition of nature strongly to the notion of spirituality. Through these questions the thesis aims to find whether human-animal transformations can be used as a type of therapy, and the investigation is conducted through my own art practice.

The thesis is divided into chapters according to the most relevant animals I have transformed into, or transformed others into in the art project *Melamorphosis*. Not all the transformations are visible in the work. Through the chapters the various types of transformations are discussed and

compared to each other. This thesis is written hand in hand with my artistic practice: my final MA project that is *Melamorphosis*, the title deriving from my name. The research is comprised of a critical review of published texts, documentaries, art projects, and also incorporates interviews. Human-animal transformations have been studied to give a basis and history of the relationship between humans and animals and spirituality in order to use animal-assisted therapy in modern day therapeutic treatments. This thesis will question whether human-animal transformations could be used as a part of a therapeutic treatment in order to open the view of what therapy can be, and in order to open up the possibility for art to be combined with other elements contributing to new therapies. As identity issues are the issues most strongly related to people experiencing the need of a human-animal transformation, I will also discuss the dangers of shapeshifting and Body Dysmorphic Disorder.

My transformations in the *Melamorphosis* project are practical exercises based on the research of this thesis, and the results of these transformations play an important part in the text. I have been acutely aware of the issues of cultural appropriation during the making of *Melamorphosis*. I do not consider myself an expert in human-animal transformations through certain beliefs or cultures, but the aim of the project has been to find a new artistic method of transformation, one that is based on previous knowledge on the subject. Although I have had the honour to be guided through certain transformation methods, as for example my transformation into a hippopotamus through voodoo (vodun/vodou) magic in chapter three, the artwork based on that transformation is not a representation of animal transformations through voodoo. It is rather a documentation of a part of the extremely personal and intensive journey I have made in order to test human-animal transformations through art in practice. This again in order to make way for other artists, art therapists or therapists; to gain information on how it can play out in reality; and to share information on human-animal
transformations as a way for anyone to search for meaning in life, for spirituality. I will also write on where I intend to go with my work after this project.

BACKGROUND

Questions around identity became the main focus of my art practice during my final Bachelors year in 2011, when I made a multi-personality disordered self-portrait based on Jung’s theory on sixteen different types of personalities. The multi-personality disordered self-portrait, named *Sixteen*, was also the first work in which I realized that by putting myself in main focus in my work I am able to take the ideas further. This because of following reasons: firstly, the works became morally safer. By putting myself in the vulnerable position behind the camera lens, for example, I reduce the risk of exploiting other individuals. The risk of exploiting cultures still exists, naturally, but also my specific approach to a subject further reduces that risk; my approach being through failure (failure is also present in the *Melamorphosis* works) and humour, and through a sensitive yet straightforward and honest take on the subject. I still do not consider my works safe, but the only person at risk is I, and the artist should always be at a certain risk when making art. Second reason being that by putting myself in the centre of my artwork, I have found that the viewer approaches more easily. This perhaps also because I make myself a type of clown (which is also a shapeshifter), I make myself an object that the viewer is allowed to laugh at. Although humour is central in my work, it is tightly linked to tragedy. This becomes apparent through the failures in my pieces, for example trying to physically transform into an animal when it is impossible. My BA dissertation at the University of the Creative Arts in Canterbury was on this topic, titled *The Connection Between Comedy And Tragedy: And How It*
Is Used Within Fine Art. Animals also entered my work in the making of the Sixteen, and became more present after moving back to Finland from England, in 2011. The first piece in which I appeared as animals in my work in Finland was in the photography series titled Roadkill (image on page 8). It was a way of expressing my culture shock of coming back to Finland in the darkest part of the autumn, and moving back to the countryside in Finland from a city in England.

I regard art as a spiritual tool, and as a perfect field in which to study subjects of somewhat questionable methods, such as human-animal transformations. Because of the lack of restraints in mediums, I have found it difficult to fit my personal art practice in a specific area of the field. Through this project however, I began to consider myself a "wereartist", from the term werewolf, and my journey through discovering shapeshifting through art can be followed within the chapters of this furry book.

2. Eight characters from the Sixteen project, including two shapeshifters: the clown and the wolf.
SHAPESHIFTING

WHAT IS A SHAPESHIFTER

Shapeshifter, also called shape-changer, is a term for a person who voluntarily or involuntarily performs a transformation from human to non-human animal. The terms human-animal transformation and shapeshifting are interchangeable, other terms used will also appear in this thesis, such as therianthrope and shape-changing. Some decide to use different terms for voluntary and involuntary transformations. An involuntary transformation is what happens to for example a werewolf, who changes into a wolf once a month whether he or she wants to or not (Guiley, 2005). But by involuntary transformation one could also be referring to a person suffering form an identity disorder. A so-called "voluntary" transformation then is a transformation that is carefully considered and executed, and is done with a specific aim. A human-animal transformation most commonly occurs on a mental, a spiritual, or on a so-called "energetic" level, which stands for the same basics as a spiritual transformation but is a term used when talking about voodoo. Physical transformations are either considered incredibly rare, dangerous or impossible, and occur mostly in mythology and folklore. In literature and popular culture shapeshifting can also be analyzed through a metaphorical approach, which will be discussed in the chapter on vampires and popular culture.

I will refer to spiritual transformations, the "voluntary" transformations, since I am discussing spiritual wellbeing, although the terms mental and energetic can also be used. It will however become evident that a spiritual transformation can be nearly physical in the sense of personal experience. The actual shapeshifting then, in the cases that I will be referring to in this thesis, happen on a so-called "inner" level. For shamans it happens though
a state of trance, but the other methods of shape-changing could also be considered states of trance, since they in a way are out of body experiences: experiences of being, or being a part of, a non-human animal.

Most shapeshifters, such as shamans and therianthropes, transform in search for spirituality, spiritual wellbeing, and/or meaning and deeper understanding of life. This is, according to them, found through connecting to an animal, and thus through this animal: connecting to one’s "inner animal", our human nature and natural instincts (Samuels & Rockwood, 2003). It is then believed that by connecting to a specific non-human animal one connects deeper to oneself. Some transform because of pleasure, or because taking the role of an animal makes them feel safer. This will be discussed in the chapter on role-play, which differs from the rest of the shapeshifters. Some, as mentioned, transform involuntarily. Except for the involuntary shapeshiftings that occur in stories, which are not the main focus of this thesis, people suffering from Body Dysmorphic Disorder want to transform into an animal; but this because they do not feel connected to their human self. The shape-changers in focus (shamans, voodoo magicians and therianthropes) are in no way escapist shapeshifters, and change shape in order to find their humanity and their place as humans in their environment – not to cease being human.

**HISTORY OF SHAPESHIFTERS**

In order to understand what shapeshifting is, and where it occurs or has occurred in the world, a short history is required. Shapeshifters can be found in Egyptian mythology, in which cats had a divine position, but the Gods were also half human and half animal in appearance. In Greek and Nordic mythology shapeshifting has usually occurred as a punishment by
the Gods, although animals have been highly respected. The Norse Berserkers were notorious fighters. The story goes that they transformed into wolves before going into battle. It is speculated that they used some drugging food in order to help them get into the state of trance they entered before a fight. The skin of animals was an important feature of their battle costumes, and were said to help them become, or connect to, the animal they transformed into. Human-animal transformations appear in many stories in Norse mythology (Grundy, 1998). According to various Asian myths, there are animals that change themselves into humans, thus differing from the shapeshifters of the rest of the world. In Japan for example, the nine-tailed Kitsune fox (image on page 15) is said to take the shape of a woman (Bathgate, 2004). Wizards, fairies and witches have also been known for their abilities to shapeshift. In the times of witch-hunting certain animals were feared because of the possibility that they were either witches transformed into animals, or demons or devils appearing in animal form to aid a witch. These animals were most commonly cats, but also frogs and dogs amongst others were feared (Briggs, 2007). The devil is also often portrayed as a half-human half-animal figure.

These are few examples and merely begin to cover the history of shapeshifters, but here it already becomes evident that it is a globally occurring phenomenon. Most research focuses on only one aspect of shapeshifting, thus focusing on only certain shapeshifters. Information on shapeshifting as a mean of spiritual guidance or connecting to oneself is somewhat scarce, as these texts also tend to focus on only one method of shapeshifting, for example through shamanism, whilst other methods and means do exist. Throughout history and mythology shape-changing is different from the shapeshifters in focus in this thesis, because of the stories being told as stories. But many of these stories also have some tangible evidence of "real" shapeshifting, as for example the Berserkers. In some cases the stories have also affected the behaviour of people, through
worshipping ceremonies in which some have involved dressing up as certain animals. One example is the worshipping that has occurred of the goddess of hunting, animals, fertility and nature Artemis in Greece, where adolescent girls where sent to live in a temple dressed as bears for a whole year, in order to satisfy Artemis because of the earlier killing of a bear caused by a young girl teasing it (Simon, 1983). In *The Handbook of Animal-Assisted Therapy: Theoretical Foundations and Guidelines for Practice* Aubrey H. Fine begins covering the use of animals within therapy by putting weight on the fact that all historical aspects of human-animal interactions need to be considered in order to understand and use this relationship today (Fine, 2006).

"Shamans appear to be the early explorers of the human mind; yet, their systems of psychology have barely been studied." (Narby & Huxley, 2001, p.6)

Shamans have existed and still exist today all over the world, thus their practices differ somewhat from each other. I will use some examples of the shapeshifting that occurs in shamanistic cultures in this chapter, but the main focus lies in the shamanistic idea of spirituality in animals, and connecting to them and to one's own spirituality by transforming into an animal. Anthropologists use the term human-animal transformation when referring to the shamanistic ritual of becoming or connecting to a spirit animal (Harner, 1990). Spirit animals will be explained in the next
paragraph. Although the transformations are described as physical transformations, it is a mental state of mind or trance that is achieved, in which the shaman is able to see through the eyes of the spirit animal. This happens through a ritual in which the shaman dresses as the animal, covering him or herself in for example feathers or fur. As the Berserkers described in the first chapter, also skin of the animal is used, as well as in some cases drugs to help enter the state of ecstasy (Harner, 1990). The accessories and clothing play an important part in finding the connection to the animal. A drum is also commonly used in all Shamanistic rituals, and in some shamanistic cultures different animals have different drumming beats. During the ritual it is also important to mimic the sound of the animal, the ritual also commonly involves dancing and chanting (Serpell, 1999). According to the writers of the guidance book *Shaman Wisdom, Shaman Healing: Deepen Your Ability to Heal with Visionary and Spiritual Tools and Practices* Michael Samuels and Mary Rockwood Lane, the more one practices a transformation, and the deeper one is able to connect with the spirit animal, the more of a physical transformation does it become, i.e. one begins to be able to feel the certain features of the spirit animal. Transformations have been done, and are still practiced today, most commonly in order to heal or gain wisdom, courage or knowledge. It is a way of connecting deeper to nature (the environment, the circle of life, instincts, human nature) and thus also connecting deeper to oneself and ones own nature, one's identity, according to the shamanistic belief. Information on how to connect to a spirit animal can be found in libraries and online. In some cultures, only the shaman is able and allowed to transform and only through a specific ritual. But most teachings on shamanistic ideas can be shared by anyone who finds an interest in the world of spirits, as long as one does it only to benefit ones spiritual life (Samuels & Rockwood Lane, 2003).
A spirit animal, also called totem animal, is an animal that one has a special connection to, one that watches over one's life or bears the spirit which one is connected to; this can also be an ancestor. Totem animals exist in shamanistic cultures, and some shamanistic tribes in America refuse to hunt these animals in fear that it will affect their lives negatively, that a part of them then would also die in this killing (Murray, 2007). One can have one or several spirit animals. As shamans exist all over the world, their practices of connecting to this spirit animal also differ. One tribe in the Amazon use a medicine man or shaman when hunting. Walter Burkert writes in his study *Shamans, Caves, and the master of animals* that researchers have found these shamans "main obligation is to enter in contact with the master of animals, the master of game in the mountains at the end of the woods, and the master of fish in the end of the river; to make them send animals for hunting and fishing" (Narby & Huxley, 2001, p.224). In the documentary *The Sharkcallers of Kontu* Dennis O'Rourke follows the men of the Kontu village in Papua New Guinea, who catch sharks with their bare hands. These men believe that their ancestors live in animals and that one has to connect with ones relatives, the game which is hunted, in order to feed the family and continue the blood lineage. In the film one is able to see the rituals used to prepare for the hunt, and how easily the shark is captured when this ritual is performed correctly. A ritual, which is partly done to show the ancestors respect, performed incorrectly often leads to the death of the hunter instead of the animal (O'Rourke, 1982). What connects shamans, regardless of location, is the belief in the spirituality in animals, and the importance of having a connection to them.

All spirit animals have their specific power or symbolist meaning. A certain animal can also appear in one's life in order to give guidance in a specific matter, without being one's personal totem animal. According to the shaman wisdom and healing guidance book, everyone already has the knowledge he or she needs of their totem animal, since information about animals is
constantly present; through pictures, zoos, television, internet etc. Samuels and Rockwood Lane insist that everyone knows what their spirit animal is, if they focus on the question (Samuels & Rockwood Lane, 2003). A modern day way of having one's spirit animal present is through images or figurines in the home, or prints on clothes, in accessories etc. It is common to have a so-called "favorite animal". The importance of this animal could, and shamans would argue that they should be taken into consideration, since that favorite animal is then most possibly ones totem animal. According to shamans then, one should not disregard this animal, since it is the guide to or of ones spirit life.

4. Example of an outfit of a shaman during human-animal transformation.
Only after transforming into my spirit animal did I find knowledge on totem animals. I had known since a small child that I have a very specific and very strong connection to the hippopotamus, which it is my favorite animal, but its true importance only became clear during the making of this thesis and the project *Melamorphosis*. I will describe my transformation into my spirit animal in the following chapter. The knowledge of shamanistic human-animal transformations through trance has been an important part of the project, since shamans are some of the first known to shapeshift in order to find deeper connection to their mentality and spirituality, and because these transformations are still practiced today. The state of trance has been widely researched within art, and by shamans through art. During a state of trance the shaman is said to leave his or her physical body, that the soul is removed from the body, thus the term out of body experience. When transforming into an animal the human body then merely remains a tool through which movement and sound can be made, but the soul travels into the body of the spirit animal (Stone, 2011). Shamans are also known for being enthusiastic artists, and for making art during a state of trance, for example painting during ritualistic drumming. Shamanistic rituals can be combined with both art and human-animal transformations, and I suggest that all three need to be combined.

The question of using the body as a mere vessel for spiritual traveling also brings up the question of the importance of the human body in spiritual and mental wellbeing. This will be further discussed in the chapter on Body Dysmorphic Disorder. But also on a general level, I believe the human body should not be left out of the discussion on spirituality or the inner self. Shamans also believe that when one finds deeper connection to oneself it is to all parts of oneself, including the physical. This is an important aspect when it comes to human-animal transformations, since the body does not physically change during the transformation. But through shapeshifting one can learn new things about ones physical body, because of the different
approach one has towards ones surroundings as another animal. One could consider the human body a restriction when transforming into for example a tiger, because the human body is not the same shape or size, nor does it have the same strength or movements as a tiger. But another approach to this could however, and I would argue that it should be, to use it as an opportunity to expand ones idea of the physical human body, since many of our physical restrictions are in fact social restrictions. By moving like a tiger one might learn how to crouch or move more silently, for example. By transforming into an animal one might also be able to let go of human fears. I will write about my personal experience with fear through shapeshifting in the next chapter.
VOODOO

Another belief belonging to the world of animism is voodoo, also written vodun or vodou. Vodun is the term used in West Africa whilst voodoo more commonly stands for the Haitian practice. I will however use the term voodoo throughout this chapter in order to keep the same word for the sake of clarity, and also because it is the most commonly known term.

The information in this chapter is mostly based on my visit in Benin, West Africa, where I had the chance to attend a lecture series on West African voodoo by Kwassi Akpladokou, who is the manager at the Finnish-African cultural centre Villa Karo in the Beninese coastal village Grand-POPo (Villa Karo, n.d.). Literary information on animal transformations in West African voodoo specifically has been difficult to find, possibly for its complexity as a belief. Human-animal transformations are something one comes across only after learning the main ideas and teachings of the voodoo belief. In the
lecture series on voodoo the mere introduction to the basics of the belief was exceedingly challenging. Akpladokou described the human-animal transformations in the voodoo belief as an act of courage and strength (Akpladokou, 2013). In the Abomey Historical Museum the museum guide told me about historical stories of men who have turned into leopards, and other human-animal transformations. Here it was explained that all shapeshifting has happened, or happens, when the person is in great need of the strength the specific animal has, in a specific moment. For example the man who had turned into a leopard had been chased in the jungle, and managed to escape only through shapeshifting and the speed that this transformation gave him. Other stories also confirmed that the transformations all connected to situations where the person had been in a possible adrenaline rush. States of trance are also frequently used within the voodoo religion for different purposes and rituals, but human-animal transformations were not described as a state of trance in any occasion, rather as an actual physical transformation (Dégbèlo, 2013). In Akpladokou's lecture I also found that if someone, through voodoo magic, is to turn oneself into an animal without it having a purpose, to for example "show off" ones abilities or doing intentional harm to others, this is harmful. In fact, it is said to remove up to three years from one's life per unnecessary transformation (Akpladokou, 2013). This inevitably made me nervous. Although my transformations are all done for a greater purpose, art in itself is a way of "showing off". Who decides whether a transformation is genuine? Akpladokou insisted I should not worry, but I still do not know whether this was because I had done my transformation properly, or because he did not consider it an actual voodoo transformation.

The book Voodoo Rituals: A User's Guide mostly handles Haitian voodoo, which has its foundations in the West African voodoo but has changed greatly since it's arrival through slave trade, and is now in some parts completely different from its original belief. Here, however, the different
types of animal transformations through voodoo magic are explained. The most common transformation happens on an energetic level; only people who look very closely recognize this transformation outwardly. In a second type of transformation others can see the animal change outwardly, since the shapeshifter is able to adapt his or her features so closely to the animal. The third type transformation is highly uncommon, which is the physical transformation; here the human is no longer recognizable outwardly. The user's guide to voodoo rituals however explains the relationship with the animal which one transforms into the same way Akplodokou lectured. The animal must be highly respected, and if this pact between the shapeshifter and the animal is broken, the human may suffer from serious damage both spiritually and physically (Owusu, 2002). This is also why I had very clear instructions as to how to transform into my spirit animal through voodoo magic.

5. The lizard, Gecko: my first human-animal transformation through art in Benin.
MY TRANSFORMATION

In mid September 2013 I began what was to be a five-week artist residency at the Finnish-African cultural centre Villa Karo in Benin. After learning that human-animal transformations are a fairly common occurrence in the voodoo belief, I was thrilled to continue with my own transformations through art, which I had already been doing in Finland (for example the *Roadkill* series on page 8, or *Monkey Business* on page 70), beginning with a lizard. This lizard was significant for two reasons. Firstly, I did not speak the official language of Benin, which is French, thus I was isolated and restricted. There were small lizards everywhere, and only the non-natives seemed to pay them any attention. During my first two weeks in Benin I felt like one of those lizards: constantly present, but no one noticed because I could not communicate with anyone. When I then sewed myself a lizard’s tail out of a palm leaf, masked myself, and went crawling around the premises of Villa Karo as a lizard, I felt a massive release from finally being able to express myself artistically, and from not having to worry about acting correctly or understanding French. Secondly it was significant because I realized I could not escape my art making, as I had tried to do through drawing. Animal-transformations was a subject I was not yet done with artistically.

The second transformation was a monkey (image on page 29), in which I covered myself in fur, my own hair, and went climbing and jumping in the mangrove forest. But the third transformation was different from previous transformations, if not artistically then spiritually, although I would rather not separate the two. I have since childhood had a special connection, and a massive love and fascination, for hippopotamuses. It then occurred to me, that I had to transform into a hippo, since they are native animals in Benin. When I told the two locals helping me with the pirogue, the boats used to travel to the villages on the other side of the Mono River, that I want to...
transform into a hippo, their attitudes changed completely compared to the monkey transformation, in which they had been more indifferent and humorous. I was then taken to the voodoo village Heve along the river. In the village we bought sodabi, the liquor used for voodoo rituals amongst other occasions. From this village came along a voodoo priest, whom I found out afterwards came with us to make sure the ritual was done correctly and that the camera was used correctly. At this time I did not yet know I was about to enter a ritual. Only once I had painted my face and covered my hair, head and "ears" in mud was I told that I had to ask permission from the hippo divinity in order to impersonate a hippopotamus, and that a statue of this divinity; a sort of sacred landmark and place, was next to the river. This statue was made of rock, and did not resemble a hippo on its own. The sodabi drink was then given to me in a small glass, and I was advised to ask the hippo divinity for permission and tell the divinity that my intentions were pure. I then drank half of the sodabi, whilst the other half of the glass was poured into the river, to the hippo divinity.

6. Melapotamus, a documentation of my transformation into a hippopotamus in the Mono River.
I then stepped into the river, and went to lie down on my belly. Sweet water is not recommended to enter as a tourist, since the bacteria found in sweet water can be fatally dangerous to a person who is not used to them. As can the animals living in rivers, such as real hippopotamuses. So then I also entered a state of adrenaline rush that is needed in human-animal transformations through voodoo magic. Everyone was then asked to be silent and Vilma Pimenoff, my fellow residency photography artist assisting me with the project, pressed the shutter button and began documenting the transformation. I then proceeded to act like a hippo, move like a hippo and make noises like a hippo. Because of the location, situation (the adrenaline) and my relationship to the hippopotamus this was a truly intensive experience. Perhaps the most significant was the idea that as "myself" I would never have dared to step into the water. I am terrified of mud, but as a hippo – even though I could feel unidentified creatures crawling along my belly in the mud – being in the river did not scare me. Hippopotamuses love mud. Through this transformation I then found that fear is something one can overcome in a human-animal transformation. This became evident also in the monkey transformation, since I am afraid of heights. During the monkey transformation I was able to jump and climb and move in the treetops. This would otherwise have been impossible. Fear is also one of the primitive instincts the human still possesses strongly, thus overcoming or realizing a fear can be a way of finding a deeper understanding of oneself, ones "inner animal".

Once the ritual was on, once the camera was on, I was completely relaxed. I felt distanced from the rest of the people there, since I "knew" we no longer communicated on a verbal level. I also somehow felt superior to them, since the hippopotamus is one of the most dangerous animals in Africa, and I truly did feel like a hippo. This is of course my personal idea of how it would feel like to be a hippo, since one cannot know what it is like. But all shapeshifting experiences vary from person to person, and animal to animal,
because it is a personal experience. Because of the hippo transformation I believe I could also understand David Abram’s idea that language needs to be removed in order to communicate on a "real level" (Abram, 2010). This theory will be discussed in the following chapter. The language barrier did indeed feel ridiculous after this shapeshifting, perhaps because I found a way of communicating with the locals that was even more native to them than the French language (French also being a language that has arrived in Benin through colonialists).

After the transformation was done and we were on our way back to Grand-Popo, one of my helpers and guides Eustace Agbondjakin told me he no longer, after this transformation, could be able to call me a woman. That from now on I was a man, because of my great courage. He also told me that this ritual was to give me great powers, was I to stay in Africa or ever return to Africa (Agbondjakin, 2013). At that particular moment I felt the same, like I could conquer the world through my hippopotamus transformation. In retrospect I believe that was the adrenaline thinking, and the fact that I had just overcome a major fear. But I did genuinely feel, and still do, that the hippopotamus transformation gave me certain deeper knowledge of myself, and of the strength (mental and physical) that I already possess as a human, but that became evident only as a hippopotamus. Through this transformation I also suddenly received respect in the village.

In one sense the lizard transformation and the hippopotamus transformations were different from each other, because the other was done through art and the other through an ancient and very specific ritual. But excluding the reactions from the locals after the hippopotamus ritual, my personal experience as a hippo did not differ from the transformation into a lizard or into a monkey. The main feeling of release remain in both, and I begun to think of my transformations through art as my personal rituals that commence when I press the shutter button, not by drinking sodabi.
It was interesting that I did not know what a spirit animal is until after I came back to Finland from my residency in Benin, when I began to make research on the subject of human-animal transformations through an anthropological and historical aspect. I had in fact already found my own mean of transformation before realising it exists in so many other contexts: that is through art. And I believe this was an important key in the making of the project, since it all begun by me searching and finding something through becoming an animal: a personal realisation of the fact that by transforming myself into an animal I am able to feel better, learn things about my inner self and my physical body and the relationship between my inner and outer, and that I am able to connect and communicate to my surroundings and surrounding people on a different level as an animal than as a human.

7. The monkey in the mangrove.
THERIANTROPY

The term *theriantropy* stands for a physical human to animal transformation, either fully or partially. It is a mythological metamorphosis (Podolsky, 1953). The term derives from *therion*, the Greek term for "animal" or "wild beast", and has been adapted in European languages since 1901 to describe animal transformations in folklore. Also the term *zoanthropy* is used, although rarely, and as described in the introduction it is used for transformations from human to any other creature or thing, not only animals (Guiley, 2005).

In her book *The Beast Within: Anthrozoomorphic Identity and Alternative Spirituality in the Online Theriantropy Movement* Venetia Robertson discusses the phenomenon of so-called "online therianthropes" born through an online Usenet newsgroup in 1992 called *AHWW*, or *alt.horror. werewolves*. The aim of the group was to gather people interested in the appearance of the werewolf in popular culture for discussion and sharing information and ideas. However a completely new community was born, as many of the
people who gathered in this online forum identified themselves as therianthropes, and found themselves on this Internet site because of their ability to relate to the character of the werewolf. A group as such had not been officially known before, and through this group emerged the new term "spiritual theriantry". The term theriantry is however used for both physical transformations and spiritual transformations, and shall be used for both also in this thesis, since the line between what a physical transformation and spiritual transformation is, is thin. Nearly all therianthropes, or therians for short, today believe it is always a question of spiritual transformation, although some physical (sensory) changes occur (Robertson, 2013).

On the website therian.wikia.com theriantry is described as following:

"Theriantry: The belief that a person has a deep spiritual or mental connection to a certain animal... Therianthropes believe that they possess the spirit/soul of an animal or the mentality of an animals, either through reincarnation, mergence, or other means" (Wikia, n.d.).

Therianthropes do not necessarily transform easily or whenever they wish into their (spirit) animal, but they need to practice. The therian is advised to study the behaviour, the physical movements, and the surrounding habitat of the spirit animal. "Otherwise meditation, lucid dreaming, or calling upon totem or guardian spirits as guides are recommended revelatory techniques" (Robertson, 2013, p.19). Here it becomes evident that spiritual theriantry is closely related to the shamanistic shapeshifting and idea of spirit animals. Therianthropes could then be considered modern day shamans, or perhaps online shamans, but the term is still too vague and the movement too scattered for such a definition. The idea of training for a transformation, and
carefully studying the animal in question is a method I have also used when shapeshifting through art.

Robertson focuses on the online theriantropy movement. Although the online therians also arrange real life meetings, the Internet has been the number one connecting link between modern day theriantropes. In his book *Becoming Animal: An Early Cosmology* the cultural ecologist, geo philosopher and phenomenologist David Abram argues that although online forums have connected people who otherwise would remain strangers, and opened up alternative realities and possibilities, the Internet still fails to connect people in the way they should connect. As mentioned, Abram even claims that language needs to be set aside in order to communicate with people on a so-called "real level", that this real communication happens on a physical level but also on a much deeper, spiritual level. Throughout his book he refers to "what is": for example he writes "to be human is to have very limited access to what is" (Abram, 2010, p.216). With this he refers to everything that is not man-made, that is natural, and everything that exists around humans constantly. I will discuss nature, the human relationship to nature and my definition of nature later in the thesis, but when Abram refers to "what is" I would use the term nature with the same idea. In the chapter titled *Shapeshifting*, Abram recounts his experience of transforming into a raven, an experience he was able to achieve through the teachings of a Tibetan medicine man. This medicine man had a completely different approach and connection to both nature and animals than Abram had witnessed before, and he was thus able to widen his own horizons of what reality and physicality is, as I was able to widen mine in the transformations done in Benin. Here again it becomes clear that by temporarily becoming another body, on a spiritual level, one can learn more about one's own body. *Becoming Animal* can work as a guideline, or exercise book for people who want to connect with their inner self and their surroundings on a deeper level (Abram, 2010).
Venetia Robertson quotes one of the founders on the online forum AHWW, with the nickname KatmanDu:

"All humans are animals, but very few these days can look into themselves and find the animal remnants. We who believe in Spiritual Theriantry feel those animal remnants very strongly. We exist in the human world, but long to seek connections with the animal one. It contacts us through totems, through dreams, through our very souls. We cannot completely leave the human world, nor completely enter the animal one. We are in-between, half animal and half human in psyche... mental or spiritual, shapechangers. We seek to balance the two halves of our nature, so that someday we can teach the rest of humanity how to balance its drive to conquer with the reality that it needs nature to survive." (Robertson, 2013, p.16)

Most therianthropes believe in the mental or spiritual connection to one or several specific animals, and that the transformation that happens is mental or spiritual. The only physical change that occurs is sensory sharpening according to the animal one is connecting or transforming into. For example the sense of hearing or seeing may increase remarkably. Also the pose and way of moving may change, but mostly the way of thinking or feeling. Therians claim that they mentally or spiritually become partly or completely this animal (Robertson, 2013). The general philosophy of spiritual theriantry is similar to shamanism, and stands for similar ideas I wish to argue for in this thesis. The authenticity of the movement itself however is somewhat questionable. Firstly: because therianthropes are found mostly on the Internet, and the fact that the movement is based on a, in a sense "fan page" for werewolves. Secondly because of the following: some therianthropes feel trapped in their human form, and go as far as saying they were born into the wrong body. Thus it would be problematic to find a therianthrope to for example interview for this thesis, since it is difficult to
know whether the therian believes in theriantropy on the same basis as a shaman believes in spirituality, or whether there lies an identity disorder or an escapist fantasy behind the need to transform into an animal, or the belief that one is born in the wrong body. Although I wish to use shapeshifting through art as a type of therapy, or as a tool of finding spiritual wellbeing, I cannot put myself in the role of a therapist or shaman (healer). One of the next steps of this project would be to involve a therapist, but at this stage - since I have only involved myself and few other people whom I have known well - it has not yet been critical.

BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDER

"Trans-species" and "Species Dysphoria" are unofficial terms used to describe the occurrence of feeling trapped in human form, which falls under the psychological diagnosis of Body Dysmorphic Disorder, BDD. The term Trans-species is used because it can, according to some analysts, be compared to Transgender. Whilst a Transgender person is born in the "wrong" gender, a Trans-species person feels he or she is born in the wrong species entirely. As I will write later this is however questionable, since the term Transgender is under a current process of being removed as a mental disease, as it is a physiological phenomenon. BDD is described by the American Psychiatric Association as:

"[Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) is...] another disturbance of body image which consists of a preoccupation with an 'imagined' defect in appearance, and is similarly influenced by biological, cognitive, affective, behavioural and cultural variables" (Veale et al., 1996, p.2).
Some people suffering from Species Dysphoria go great lengths in order to change their body into the animal they feel they should be. However some people also do this in order to connect more deeply to their spirit animal, and thus diagnosing a theriantrope, or shaman, with a mental identity disorder is exceedingly problematic.

Dennis Avner, later known by the name "Stalking Cat" holds the Guinness World Record in 2009 for most body modifications made in order to resemble an animal (image above). He was a member of the Native American
Huron nation, and felt an immense connection to his totem animal: a female tiger. The website committed to Avner, stalkingcat.com, writes:

"Professor Kevin Gournay, of the Institute of Psychiatry says he thinks it very possible that Cat’s obsession stems from an unusual type of Body Dysmorphic Disorder" (Stalking Cat, n.d.).

Whilst Avner himself said that it is a common of his tribe to honor ones spirit animal, in this case through trying to physically become this animal as closely as possible, and that he was misunderstood because ha was bringing back an age-old tradition (Huffington Post, 2014). The case of Dennis Avner is one example of the dangers of shapeshifting. How is one to know whether a person is genuinely trying to connect more deeply to oneself or one's spirituality through connecting to an animal, or whether the person is suffering from an identity disorder? The dangers could include, aside from the psychological dangers, pushing one's human body outside its possibilities. Although shamans, voodoo practitioners and ("real") therianthropes use their physical human bodies as a tool through which they can connect to the animal, it would be dangerous to actually, physically, try to "become the animal". This because of the dangers of changing one's appearance through cosmetic surgery, as Avner, but also in for example cases where the spirit animal would be a bird. The feeling of flying can be achieved through spiritual shapeshifting, but the physical human body stays on the ground (Robertson, 2013). Dennis Avner died at age 54 from possibly committing suicide, although this has not been confirmed (Huffington Post, 2014).
POPULAR CULTURE AND THE VAMPIRE

The earliest written text about human-animal transformations occur in Boio's poem *Ornithogonia*, which is about humans who turn themselves into birds. The Roman poet Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, written 8 AD, however is one of the most analyzed and read texts on "shapeshifters" (Feldherr, 2010). Human-animal transformations are found in texts from all over the world, and later also frequently in European folklore. When the werewolf hit the cinema screens in the 1930's (image on page 38), the interest for shapeshifters began to grow rapidly. Kimberley McMahon-Cohen and Roslyn Weaver have made an extensive study on the role of the shapeshifter in popular culture, and the metaphorical meanings they can bear in fiction. McMahon and Cohen mostly discuss the two most commonly occurring shapeshifters in popular culture: the werewolf, which has inspired the whole online theriantropy movement, and the vampire (McMahon-Cohen & Weaver, 2012).

The vampire is also a theriantrope, a shapeshifter, although it appears outwardly to be human. In some old stories and movies the vampire is able to turn itself into a bat, or some other creature. Theorists believe the myth of the vampire was kept alive for so long because it helped keep people inside after dark, away from other dangers in the streets (Beresford, 2008). One theory is that the myth of vampires was in fact born because of sociopaths. In a time when psychopathy was long yet to be discovered, these people lacking empathy were seen as social monsters. The most common description of a vampire is that he or she is incredibly charming and confident, hence seen as attractive, but lacks empathy for humans, thus ending up hurting or killing for their own pleasure or curiosity. This description can be directly placed on a psychopath (Thomas, 2013).
Vampires might then be considered other than human, because we define humanity and differentiate humans from other animals through our social abilities and behaviours. There are also modern day vampires, theriantropes who believe they cannot live without either; "feeding" on the energy of other
humans; sex or sexual energy of other humans; or without drinking blood (Beresford, 2008).

McMahon Cohen and Weaver argue that shapeshifters growth in popular culture is linked to what the shapeshifter can represent for an adolescent. A teenager in search for identity can strongly relate to, for example, a werewolf and it’s struggles with the transformation at hand. As can a person suffering from an identity disorder. In popular culture shapeshifters are also commonly worried about their souls or the meaning of life. If one can live forever, what is there to live for? Since the transformations that occur in popular culture are physical transformations, the body is also central. The changes that happen in the body of an adolescent can feel much like how the transformations are described in the stories of shapeshifters. McMahon Cohen and Weaver also analyse The Shapeshifters novel series by Amelia Atwate-Rhodes, and the metaphors of mental illnesses that occur in them, namely identity disorders and the feelings of despair that follows not being able to identify with oneself (McMahon-Cohen & Weaver, 2012). But I believe stories of shapeshifters can fascinate anyone regardless of age or whether one suffers from an identity disorder or crisis, or not. The search for means to spiritual or mental growth, and expanding the abilities of one’s physical body is a common trait for human beings, it is the natural way of developing and growing as a human being. Our identity develops through our whole life. One can fantasise about gaining the strength of a werewolf, and enjoy stories of werewolves through this fantasy. But one can also realize that by making a (mental) transformation, through for example a shamanistic ritual or an artistic one, into an actual wolf, one can possibly gain this strength. As for example my transformations in West Africa proved.
ROLE-PLAY

In West Africa the fetish markets are filled with spines of snakes, skeletons of lizards, dried bats, and skulls of apes, crocodiles and hippopotamuses. Also rocks and hairs appear, among the carcasses of hundreds upon hundreds of dead animals. Interestingly the word fetish connects to two major parts of this thesis: voodoo magic and sexual fetishes. The list of sexual fetishes is vast, but a common fetish is animal role-play: some of the most common ones being Puppy Play, Kitten Play and Pony Play. Although role-play differs from the human-animal transformations in focus in this thesis, I found it a necessary addition. Role-play is in a way a modern type of shape-changing. It differs from the rest because of two major reasons. Firstly: role-play is an escapist exercise. This can of course be argued against, since some people say they find sides in themselves through role-play that they would otherwise not have discovered. Secondly: people who role-play are aware that it is, as the name describes; a role. By only taking on
the role of an animal one does not transform into it. This again, can be argued against with the fact that also shamans and voodoo magicians are aware that they do not fully, physically transform into the animal. Yet they do believe in a spiritual transformation, whilst role-play could be closer compared to a more personal theatre role. Animal role-play is neither an exercise to connect more deeply to nature, although some on a certain level connect to a more primitive side of oneself. One could perhaps argue that Melamorphosis is a project about role-play, or that the transformations that are made in the project are in fact role-play. Some of course are, as Puppy Play on page 42, but these are consciously so.

Puppy Play is a role-play, sexual fetish, or lifestyle to some, in which one party is the dog, the puppy, and the other is the trainer or owner. This puppy is a person who dresses as a dog, with outfits varying from leather whole-body suits and masks to mere underwear or furry coats, and acts as one. Puppy Play does not necessarily involve any sexual act, although it can, as the enjoyment is released though the activity of being the submissive animal or the dominating trainer. The same applies to Pony Play. In Pony Play there are also complex structures: owners, groomers, trainers, riders, riding ponies and show ponies. These role-plays are not necessarily sexual, and some prefer to talk about their role-play activities as an act that has nothing to do with sexual expression (Malfouka, n.d.). "It's about love and nurturing, and taking care of each other" (Taboo, 2013, 1:08min), says the puppy trainer Lillian in an episode in National Geographic's Taboo programme titled The Perfect Pet. In the episode the viewer is able to follow the trainer Lillian and her "Doberman dog", a human Puppy Player called Tyke. The clinical sexologist Dr. Amy Marsh says that power is central in Puppy Play. The trainer enjoys controlling and having a submissive dog, who unlike a real-life animal dog, understands and follows all of her commands, although these are also trained. The puppy enjoys being submissive. In this case Tyke is in real life a woman who has served ten
years in the army, and says she enjoys and copes well in structured and strict environments. Later in the episode it becomes apparent that Tyke is an introvert who suffers from anxiety and is sometimes incapable of handling social situations. When she is in her puppy role however, she feels safe, free and relaxed. She also sleeps best in her dog cage. Marsh analyses the
relationship between Lillian and Tyke to be the reason for Tyke feeling better as a puppy (Taboo, 2013). This power struggle is in a way a primitive act. The fact that some enjoy leading, dominating, and that some prefer to be submissive is a phenomenon we can find in any case in the animal kingdom. Thus for example Puppy Play can be considered a way of connecting more deeply to one's human nature, and it is important to consider it as such. The difficulties then once again lie in the fact that one cannot know whether a person exercising Puppy Play does it in order to enjoy humanity, or in order to escape humanity. It is again difficult to know whether there is an identity disorder of some type behind every case of puppy play or only some. Or perhaps none at all.

FURRY FANDOM

Furry Fandom's first steps were taken in the funny animal magazine Vootie in the mid 1960's, but it got its chance to grow rapidly only once Internet became available. Furry Fandom could be described as a type of art form, in which the artist, most commonly in a comic book type of style, draws a half animal half human creature. It also works as a role-play, where people calling themselves *furries* have their own furry personality or alter ego, called *fursona*, which is a combination of human and non-human animal, sometimes also a mix of different animals. This fursona is then drawn into the situations and fantasies of the person. Some exercise this for fun, whilst some to receive sexual pleasure. Furry Fandom should not automatically be considered a sexual fetish. Some are completely devoted to the Furry Fandom world, as they feel freer through expressing themselves as these half human half animal personas. As the spectrum of furries is wide, the online information site about Furry Fandom describes it simply as following:
"Someone who says they are furry is generally expressing an interest in anthropomorphic animals and/or creatures" (WikiFur, 2012).

A natural extension of Furry Fandom is creating a costume for the fursona. The article *The Animal Outside Us All* reminds us that anthropomorphism is an old act, the Native Americans eagle suits being one example of historical anthropomorphism. And it is interesting that the Internet is bringing back an age-old practice, much like the online forums for therianthropes (Benesh-Liu & Patrick, 2010). Furry Fandom can be, as anything else, a way of expressing sexuality, but it is a sub-culture with a perhaps perverted and misunderstood conception and reputation. In a blog article titled *11 Eye-Opening Misconceptions About The Furry Fandom* the writer interviews a furry named Allison at the annual Southern California Furry Convention. Major emphasis is put on the fact that furries are people who have a great appreciation for anthropomorphic art, and the making of it. Drawing and painting, and the delicate art of making the complex fursona costumes worth thousands of dollars are in focus at the convention, not sexual expression. Allison also explains the importance of Furry Fandom in cases of bullying or alienation: many furries have overcome difficult life situations through finding the liberating act of expressing oneself through a fursona, and having the support of likeminded people (Lowry, 2014). This fursona can then be considered an escapist role that the furry takes on, which allows him or her to be something else entirely. Or it can be an expression of the furry's inner self: this role can bring out sides in the furry that they cannot express in their "human form", thus connecting them deeper to themselves and to other furries, people, on a deeper level.

Because of the generalizing ideas around furries, for example that they are all a certain type of people, that it is a sexual fetish, or that all furries suffer from mental disorders, most commonly Body Dysmorphic Disorder, academic studies on Furry Fandom have become difficult to conduct. This
because furries have started to refuse giving information to researchers that are not involved in Furry Fandom, because of the generalization. This is also a reason why I rather write from the perspective that the average, the "real" user of any of the human-animal transformational methods in this thesis do not suffer from a identity disorder, but that they only, inevitably, occur frequently because of the nature of shapeshifting. One issue is also the term "disorder", and its use. In the first academic study on furries Kathleen C. Gerbasi et al. suggest that as much as 46% of furries suffer from Species Identity Disorder, or have a great tendency towards it, feeling they are only part-human or non-human (Gerbasi et al., 2008). This study was abruptly criticized by dr. Fiona Probyn-Rapsey in her article Furries and the Limits of Species Identity Disorder: A Response to Gerbasi et al.. Probyn-Rapsey questions the methodology of the study by Gerbasi et al. and debunks, amongst other results of the study, the percentage of occurrences of Species Identity
Disorder that Gerbasi et al. suggest, and how they resulted in these numbers. She also criticizes the comparison that Gerbasi et al., and others, make between Species Identity Disorder and Gender Identity Disorder, or Transgender, since Gender Identity Disorder is merely a political matter about to be removed from being listed as a disorder, and that the nature of the two are completely different (Probyn-Rapsey, 2011).

Furry Fandom can then be, like Puppy Play or other role-play, a modern type of shapeshifting that is made in order to connect to oneself and one's surroundings and surrounding people and animals on a deeper level. It can be a mean through which one can explore one's identity. I do not believe that the frequent occurrence of BDD or other identity disorders within role-play sub-cultures should be the central topic of discussion when considering role-play as a mean of searching for spirituality, since it immediately changes the tone of the discussion, and might become a reason for someone who would like to try Furry Fandom to choose not to do so.
ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY

Our relationship to animals has changed through time and location, and still does, as does the idea of their impact on us. Pet animals became a regular feature in English mental institutions during the 19th century, as well as elsewhere around the globe (Fine, 2006). They disappeared however again completely in the 20th century, after which animals were only present in medical studies on zoonotic diseases; i.e. diseases passable between humans and animals. Animals began to be studied from a more metaphorical aspect, perhaps due to Sigmund Freud's theories becoming relevant. Freud did compare the human to the animal, meaning that we share our basic instincts in the same way as animals, and comparing the behaviour of children directly to animals. But whilst he brought the relationship between humans and animals closer, the animals themselves were physically distanced (Serpell, 1999). Understanding of the importance that animal contact can have in therapy has however returned, and is currently being effectively studied. Serpell writes:
"During the last 20 years, and at least partly in response to the skepticism of the medical establishment, the theoretical emphasis has shifted away from these relatively metaphysical ideas about animals as psychospiritual mediators, toward more prosaic, scientifically "respectable" explanations for the apparent therapeutic benefits of animal companionship" (Serpell, 1999, pp. 14-15).

Animal-assisted therapy, AAT, is a term that was established in the beginning of the 1990's (Uyemura, 2011). AAT is a type of therapy, usually combined with regular therapy, which enables a meeting between human and animal. AAT is most commonly prescribed to patients suffering from Alzheimer’s disease, Autistic children, people recovering from physical trauma, people suffering from depression caused by a disease, amongst many others (Fine, 2006). Animal-assisted Activity, AAA, is another type of therapy. AAA is most commonly used within elderly care, as it is a case in which an animal is added to a treatment program in order to improve the social capability of the patients. In AAT the animal is a part of the actual treatment. Both AAT and AAA have shown that the social aspect is the biggest factor in the effect animals have on patients: that animals help humans find contact with other humans, and that then by improving the social capabilities of patients the patients are more receivable of the treatments prescribed (Hultman, 2008). Studies have also proved that being in forests affects us positively. Researcher Ann Dolling at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences executed a trial in which patients suffering from stress and burnout were subscribed walks in the forest. Dolling concluded that the forest therapy did help remarkably, but the patients did not recover fully from only this. Regular therapy is still needed, but adding forest therapy to that treatment undeniably helps the process of recovery (Hufvudstadsbladet, 2014).
In *The Handbook of Animal-Assisted Therapy: Theoretical Foundations and Guidelines for Practice* the author Aubrey H. Fine begins by introducing shamanistic rituals, the out-of-body experiences of shamanistic trances, as the earliest forms of animal-assisted therapy. The book includes an entire chapter entitled *Animal Souls and Spiritual Healing*, in which Fine discusses various indigenous folk-groups that believe animals have a large importance in the spiritual wellbeing of humans, and the ideas of connecting to animals and their spirits in order to receive health and wisdom and understanding of themselves (Fine, 2006). This book has been a central finding for this thesis, since it shows evidence that human-animal transformations have been considered a form of therapy within therapeutic and medical research, as has also spiritual wellbeing and use of shapeshifting as a method of deepening ones understanding of oneself.

**HUMAN-ANIMAL TRANSFORMATIONAL (ART) THERAPY**

I wish to suggest that, as animal-assisted therapy exists and has shown positive results, Human-Animal Transformational Therapy (could be shortened HATT) could also exist, and offer therapeutic potentials. This would inevitable demand research, and also a widening of the notion of spiritual wellbeing and its meaning. Shamans, voodoo practitioners and modern day therianthropes all believe in a world of spirits, thus approaching human-animal transformations as a possible therapeutic treatment would have to be through another method. The research should be based on these spiritual transformations, but a general spiritual belief should be removed, since as earlier mentioned: spirituality is something personal, as is its definition. A human-animal transformation made in order to be used as a type of therapy should be a way of finding this personal spirituality, or meaning in life, or deeper understanding of oneself (one's identity).
Whether that be a strictly atheist belief, from a religious perspective, or anything in between does not have anything to do with the spiritual wellbeing that is the aim of a human-animal transformation. This could then offer help with other issues by being applied to a regular therapy method in a similar way as AAT or AAA.

Through my personal transformations and research I have found that one issue is our fading connection to nature, and that this could be "treated" through a human-animal transformation. Shamans make human-animal transformations in order to deepen a connection to nature, and through this to their inner selves. They, as the theriantropes and voodoo practitioners, understand that the human is part of nature and is also an animal, and that by understanding this and staying in connection to nature one is able to stay mentally and spiritually well. With nature I refer to our natural surroundings, everything that is not man-made, the circle of life, but also our instinctual behavior: the human nature. Franklin Ginn and David Demeritt define nature in their paper as following:

"Nature is a contested term that means different things to different people in different places. Generally, this contestation revolves around three main meanings: the 'nature' or essence of a thing; 'nature as material place external to humanity; and 'nature' as a universal law or reality that may or may not include humans" (Ginn & Demeritt, 2009, p. 300).

With this weakened connection to nature I then mean the separation that the modern human has done to his natural surroundings and to his natural instincts, by no longer seeing himself as part of nature or seeing himself above nature, and by creating social taboos. This separation is a result of industrialization, urbanization, digitalization, human's separating their minds from their bodies, and the human's need and feel of superiority. This
separation can be seen in the state of our global crisis, and in the way we act as humans: our state of mind and the growing problem of mental illnesses and depression. Studies have shown that this feeling of being separated from nature is a growing phenomenon (Vining, et al, 2008). I believe that deepening our connection to nature may keep a key to both resolving global issues, and reducing mental illnesses. Thus I would consider this growing separation or feeling of disconnection from nature as something that needs to be treated. As Abram refers to "what is" in his text, my definition of nature could be similar. My personal opinion on spirituality is also that it is the connecting link to our nature. I believe everyone has, in a way, their own definition but also their own nature.

Before shapeshifting could be considered a type of therapy or an addition to therapy, I believe its first steps would be through art, or art therapy. Mimi Farely-Hansen and Deborah Bowman write in their study on the connection between spirituality and Art Therapy:

"Not only did science and spirituality part company as a result of the Industrial Revolution, spirituality and mainstream art became similarly estranged. Prior to that time, art had been an acknowledged vehicle for illuminating spiritual truths, be those the visions of shamans or the sacred narratives of the great theologically based cultures; heavens and hells of other worlds came into color and form through art (Lipsey 1988). But in the newly industrialized West realism became the norm, with the technical virtuousity needed to achieve it highly valued. Not until the last quarter of the nineteenth century would large numbers of artists return to exploring dimensions of reality beyond the material. Impressionists focused on the depiction of light. Expressionists sought to portray their true inner feelings. Surrealists aligned themselves with the world of dreams" (Farely-Hansen & Bowman, 2001, pp. 17-18).
Here it becomes evident that spirituality has found its way back into art. We find many examples in contemporary art such as Andres Serrano, Marina Abramovic and Bill Viola, but I would prefer to consider all contemporary art an expression of spirituality, since the definition of spirituality in this thesis would require that. Since spirituality has found its way back into art, it should also then, through art, find its way back into our everyday life.

Animal-Assisted Therapy has been combined with Art Therapy. For example a course at the University of Lethbridge titled *Merging Expressive Arts and Animal Assisted Therapies* has allowed the students to explore the effectiveness that the merging of these two therapies can have in a treatment (Linder King & Rose, 2012). This could also be a following step that needs to be taken in order for Human-Animal Transformational Therapy to be considered: the merging of Art Therapy and AAT. Art Therapy is a wide subject on it’s own, and this thesis will not go in depth on what Art Therapy is. I will rather take for granted that the reader understands the basic concept of art being used as an addition to the treatment of a patient; through expressing creativity, being able to express oneself through physical making, the effect of colors, etc. (Edwards, 2004). David Edwards writes in his book *Art Therapy*:

"The British Association of Art therapists (BAAT), for example, currently defines art therapy as follows:

Art Therapy is a form of psychotherapy that uses art media as its primary mode of communication.

Clients who are referred to an art therapist need not have previous experience or skill in art, the art therapist is not primarily concerned with making an aesthetic or diagnostic assessment of the client's image."
The overall aim of its practitioners is to enable a client to effect change and growth on a personal level through the use of art materials in a safe and facilitating environment" (Edwards, 2004, p. 7).

In autumn 2013 I had the chance to participate in Julius Elo's and Tuomas Laitinen's participatory performance named The Circle. In The Circle, participants sit in a circle surrounding a square mattress in the middle. A theme is chosen before the performance, which I would prefer to call a workshop, begins: feeding, mating, fighting, or as in our case; the participants were allowed to choose any of the named. Elo is a doctoral student at the Theatre Academy in Helsinki, and on their website he describes the performance as following:

"The Circle – a participatory performance on human instincts. In the Circle the participants sit in the form of a ring and the aim is instinctively encounter the other. Both human and animal creatures are heterotrophic – we need other beings to live. In the Circle we study this relationship with the other through power struggle, nurture and sexuality. As we play with these forms of instinctive encountering, we play with the archetypical and the animal within us" (Elo, 2013).

The performance does not include specific human-animal transformations, but approaches the idea of deepening our connection to nature (my definition of nature), our instincts or as Elo writes the "animal within us", in a different manner. In our performance case, the first encounters were fairly careful and very similar to each other. Some experimented with each other's personal space by tickling and irritating, but it was mostly humorous play from both sides. We were supposed to push each other's and our own boundaries as far as possible. Once our boundaries were broken we could
M: Do you feel that *The Circle* has served its purpose?

Elo: "Somewhat yes.

I am also interested in bringing *The Circle* performance into another context (out of art context) and see how the different contexts would affect the actions, confrontations and experiences that occur in *The Circle*.

So maybe I am interested in gathering more information on how the art context affects a participatory performance such as *The Circle*" (Elo, 2014).

M: Do you feel that the encounters succeed to bring out human instincts?

Elo: "In the project, I wanted to explore a non-conscious of a body, and by that I mean, before we realize the body has made already choices.

Defining and recognizing human instincts turned out to be a difficult task. How to for example differentiate what is taught and what is inherited behavior? With *The Circle* I was also interested in emotions and affects and their influences on human behavior, but I did not really have means nor methods with which to observe and study this.

I believe that the encounters managed to some degree in bringing out instinctual behavior, reactions and feelings. But to what extent, that is
at least now unclear to me" (Elo, 2014).

M: Would you, or could you, regard *The Circle* as a type of therapy?

Elo: "I could consider calling it so, under certain precautions.

Some participants have expressed that *The Circle* has worked like therapy for them; balancing, releasing anxiety and doing good.

In 2013 when we held the first weekly morning sessions open for all, some of the regular participants said that *The Circle* worked therapeutically for them. This because they were able to approach and handle issues that were difficult for them. They became more aware of themselves, their actions and reactions" (Elo, 2014).

I would regard *The Circle* as a success, or at least as a first step towards success in searching for a deeper connection to nature through art. Although repetition began to occur the longer the performance lasted, the personal spaces and boundaries of people also expanded. Signs of violence occurred, as did the physical contact between the participants.

We were not allowed to speak during the performance, but had a chance to reflect on the performance afterwards as a group. Some felt disturbed by the fact that the participants not currently performing became an audience. Some claimed that they forgot the other people were present when in a confrontation. It became clear that everyone had had a different experience, and that the ones who were not bothered by the "audience", even if they were aware of them, felt an immense release and shot of adrenaline through the confrontations. In the interview correspondence with Elo it becomes evident that people have found *The Circle* as a therapeutic exercise. Elo himself is careful with using this term. He says:
"For me, bodily performances are dealing with the aesthetic of risk. Bodily performances have unpredictable outcomes. The artist/performer never knows in advance what kind of affects the encounter might have on the participant. That also demerges art and therapy" (Elo, 2014).

I would dare to say that whether a person finds something therapeutic or not is up to that person's personal experience, and does not necessarily need to be defined by an outsider or a professional. This however brings us back to the issue discussed in the chapter on Furry Fandom. Using the word therapeutic is somewhat problematic because it assumes there is a condition that needs to be treated. I regard a lack of spirituality and a weakened connection to nature a condition that needs treatment, and thus searching for ones spirituality or finding a deeper connection to nature would be a therapy, and this therapy could be through art. I would also argue that one cannot know in advance the outcomes of a therapeutic treatment either: that the difference between art and therapy is the fact that art as therapy is less studied than clinical therapy, and thus the outcomes may be statistically easier to predict.
SHAPESHIFTING THROUGH ART

Art is a freer space than therapy, since anyone can and is allowed to make art without necessarily having to reflect upon the outcomes or consequences. Thus, as has been the aim of *Melamorphosis*, the first steps of Human-Animal Transformational Therapy can be made in art. Here however the difference between spiritual wellbeing and mental health needs to be more distinct. A person suffering from a mental illness should not be advised to start "self-treatment" through an artistic human-animal transformation. A person feeling a lack of spiritual wellbeing or a meaning or purpose in life or a disconnection from oneself or nature however, should or could be. Marsh, and other psychotherapists who have analyzed Puppy Play, come to the conclusion that in most cases a person exercising Puppy Play lacks certain social abilities, a feeling of safety, or suffers from some other what can be classed as a mental disorder. Similar speculations around furries suggest that it is difficult to pin point whether it is in fact an identity
disorder in every case or in only some cases, or whether it is a personal mean of expressing oneself and finding meaning in life. Whatever the analysis, it seems to always be an issue surrounding identity. One can commence a shamanistic ritual because of an identity issue, but a human-animal transformation is never done in shamanistic rituals, voodoo magic or in the theriantropy movement (or through my artistic method) in order to escape one's humanity. And, as mentioned in the sub-chapter *Popular Culture and The Vampire*, it is a perfectly normal growth process for human beings to question and consider their identity, since one is constantly changing and growing.

![Art is in many cultures believed to be spiritual, and as Farely-Hansen and Bowen write; the presence of spiritual issues have made a return also into Western art (not only into Western lifestyle or thinking). **Joseph Beuys**, 1921 - 1986, believed the artist has the same role, or that the artist is a](image)

12. Artist Oleg Kulik as a mad dog.
shaman. He spoke of himself as a healer; that being an artist can mean that one makes more than merely paintings and sculptures, that the artist can be a teacher. What later became questionable was that the story of how he had required these shamanistic healing methods. The story he told everyone, about being saved by a shaman and that this shaman had taught him everything he knew about healing turned out to be false (Verwoert, 2008). Artists appearing as animals have occurred somewhat frequently, yet these artists have used the role of an animal in order to express a certain social or political issue or standpoint, as for example the Russian performance artist Oleg Kulik. One of his performances in 1994 was titled *Becoming a Mad Dog* (image on page 58). This was an expression of the political state of Russia, the relationship between the artist and the dog was not in focus in the same way as it would be in a human-animal transformation (Kozlov, 2013). Kulik himself said:

"A man is an animal first of all. And then he is a Social animal, Political animal and so on. I am an Art animal, that's why, spectator, I need your physical and psychological efforts to make sense" (Nihilsentimentalgaia, 2013).

The photography pieces in the *Melamorphosis* project also focus on other issues through shapeshifting, not only directly on the therapeutic value of human-animal transformations. I will write about this in the next sub-chapter.

The Finnish arts collective *Other Spaces* (Toisissa tiloissa) focus on anthropomorphic transformations through participatory performances. In their manifest the convenor Esa Kirkkopelto writes about the human body in theater performances, and that the limits within which we consider the human body needs to be broadened and the boundaries broken. This is done through the various participatory performances that include for
example a performance piece called *Wolf Safari*. The performance is meant to question what it is to be wild, and understanding this through the perspective of a wolf pack (Other Spaces, 2014). The performance is described as following:

"The point of the Wolf Safari is to visit the world that is experienced by the wolf. Since the wolf is a social being, living its life in a pack, it is best to approach ‘wolfness’ through the collective experience, as a social event. The Wolf Safari is an extended collective exercise in which the participants encounter each other as wolves at night in an urban environment. To achieve this we borrow a few features from wolves that make it easier to become ‘wolf’. The change is gradual and everybody can approach it their own way without having to imitate a wolf externally" (Other Spaces, 2014).

The performances focus on finding something human through something non-human, and thus this is not an escapist exercise. The performances are also done without focusing on external matters in order to feel
"transformed", for example outfits and masking is kept to a minimal. This is in order for the human body to explore what it would mean to be something else, and thus for the transformation to be less of a performance for someone. This is in a sense exactly the same idea as a human-animal transformation within shamanism or the therianthropy movement, also through voodoo magic. That the human body is restricted by the strict notion of what it means to be human, and that this can be broadened through a non-human experience. This broadening can then be a way of getting to know oneself on a deeper level, and learn new things about oneself on a spiritual but also on a physical level.

The next step in my personal artistic practice would be to conduct a workshop in which the participants would be able to try my mean of human-animal transformation through art. In order to execute this workshop however, I felt that my personal practice needed to be thoroughly studied and analyzed. I decided that my final MA project and thesis be focused on that, and on the subject of human-animal transformations and it’s purposes. In order to have other people’s human-animal transformations on my responsibility, I need to make sure my own transformations are under careful control, and that my knowledge on the origins of the subject is as vast as possible. I have conducted transformations on other people, but these have been strictly one on one happenings. These have however been the first steps towards planning and creating a workshop for a group of people, and have resulted in interesting reactions and discussions. The next step will be to conduct human-animal transformations for groups of perhaps three people. As in the Other Spaces' Wolf Safari piece, the group transformations might have to all be of the same animal, in order to keep balance and a feeling of connection to fellow shapeshifters. A lion can for example not exist in the same space as a chicken without complications, and some animals naturally live in groups.

**MELAMORPHOSIS**

Of all the transformations I’ve made through the Melamorphosis project, the hippopotamus has been, for presumably obvious reasons, the most significant one in relation to this thesis. Whilst some of the transformations have felt more like acting, I have felt a genuine connection to my surroundings and/or to myself through other transformations. Letting go of all social boundaries and expectations is perhaps the most releasing feeling of all, and I believe releasing social pressure is what connects us to our
original human instincts, since social taboos and restrictions are partly the reason for our growing feeling of disconnection from nature or our "natural" selves. Even spontaneously jumping through a field as a deer, although no specific method of transformations lay behind it, felt as releasing and important as the transformation into the hippopotamus through voodoo magic. Thus I also consider this a valid transformation, and as a mean of connecting more deeply to my spirituality (my nature) and thus to my identity.

As mentioned earlier, I began thinking of my transformations through art as my personal rituals that commence by pressing the shutter button. Perhaps the presence of the camera does change the situation, although I have argued that it does not. But then, at least in my case, I would argue that it does not affect it negatively. I believe that if the camera does affect me, it merely helps me focus, helps me know when the "ritual" has begun (instead of drinking sodabi, for example). When the record button is pressed, I must concentrate completely on the transformation, and thus it is easier to transform. My relationship to the camera does not come from a photographer's background, which I also believe affects my work positively. My aim has never been to catch the perfect photograph or video shot, but merely to have a tool with which I can share my work with others. When I see a picture or video of a transformation I have made after they have happened, I do not recognize myself. This because I am always as surprised of how much I change physically during the transformation. Although I feel it in the transformation, I cannot view it as an outsider. It is a pleasant feeling to see that the transformation is visible outwardly, not only because of the masking (and masking is not always present), since it feels as a somewhat physical transformation (depending on the transformation). I would consider my transformations through art to be on the second level of transforming according to Owusu.
I would compare my method of working to Elo's *The Circle*, in which the issue of spectators is also present. As written earlier, before engaging in the performance I was certain the spectators would affect the confrontations in *The Circle*, and in some sense they of course did. I believe only in a good way however, since the presence of the other people, who also engaged in the performance, made the confrontations easier to focus on. As soon as the human is in contact with another human we are in a sense performing. Social situations require us to act. Perhaps this is another reason why the camera affects my work positively. I would still however not prefer to describe my transformations through art as acting.

15. The "were-artist" self portrait.
In the final exhibition in Gallery AVA in Helsinki, November 2014, I exhibit the video piece also titled *Melamorphosis*, in which my artistic journey through shapeshifting can be seen. The video is a type of documentary of my journey through shapeshifting, in a sense the thesis put in practice. I also exhibit photographs, which differ somewhat from the written part and the video. Through the images I express several issues through shapeshifting, not only focusing on using shapeshifting as a method of therapy. All the photographic pieces however connect to the issue of feeling connected or disconnected from nature. Only afterwards did I myself realise the sexual connotation that all the images seem to bear. But I wish to leave the analyzing of the pieces up to the viewer. I also exhibit a painting. Painting for me is a type of meditation, and could perhaps be compared to the state of trance that shamans enter when making a human-animal transformation. The painting is a self-portrait of my artistic personality: the "wereartist". *Melamorphosis* is a mix of mediums, since I believe all mediums show their own perspective of a subject. This thesis could not have been written had I not tried the transformations in practice during the writing process, nor could the "performances", the transformations, have been made without the thesis.
CONCLUSION

This study has shown that human-animal transformations can have therapeutic value, although it seems incredibly important to make the difference between escapist transformations and transformations that aim to deepen the connection to oneself, to nature or one's personal nature. Human-animal transformations are an old act, but they are still being practiced, and can still have the same aims and outcomes as the ancient rituals. Also through art.

What all the various types of shapeshifters discussed in this thesis have in common is a search for identity, for one's meaning and place in the world and in life: one's personal spirituality. Shamans reach for knowledge and acknowledge that they by transforming into a spirit animal learn more about themselves. Voodoo practitioners who transform into animals are able to gain power, and the "good" transformations occur when one is in great need of it, thus it is a way of searching for the strength one already possesses. This power can be compared to mental strength. Modern day therianthropes feel that they are lacking a part of their lives, a connection to life and nature, and are able to find it only through their spirit animal, much like the shamans. But neither this is an escapist way of transformation. By having studied these shapeshifters and understood their means of transformations I have been able to apply this knowledge to shapeshifting through art. The artist is also knowingly searching for his or her identity through his or her artistic practice, since one expresses oneself through art. Also studying role-play has helped my journey through shapeshifting through art. As written, I believe that breaking social behavioural norms is the first step to take in order to re-connect to ones primitive instincts, our "inner animal". Role-players in a way do this. Letting go of the somewhat new, Western definition of what it means to be human can be set aside through role-play.
and shapeshifting, without this meaning that one escapes one's humanity. Rather the opposite. The physical body also plays a central role in the breaking of these norms, through breaking the boundaries and testing what it means to be human, physically.

What this thesis then can conclude in is that human-animal transformations can be a way of searching for one's personal spirituality, one's personal nature or deepening one's connection to nature, and that art is a field in which somewhat questionable methods of therapy or methods of "searching for oneself", such as shapeshifting, has free space to be explored. Art has no rules, and is therefore a space in which Human-Animal Transformational Therapy can be put in practice and studied, and the connection between humans and animals and nature can be questioned. The Melamorphosis project has done this, and has to some extent succeeded in finding the basis for Human-Animal Transformational Therapy through art. The following step that is conducting workshops and sharing my method of shapeshifting through art with groups of people can now be done on the basis of this project. The aim of Melamorphosis has preliminary been to find my way of shapeshifting through art, and to study and refine this method before it can be applied to others. In the cases where I have "transformed" others than myself, these people have been close to me (for example Paula, the fox on page 61). Thus a feeling of safety has already existed, as a good knowledge of how these people react in certain situations. It will be different conducting these transformations for people whom I do not know from before. Also conducting them for more then one person at a time will be challenging, but the in depth information I have required during the making of Melamorphosis drastically reduces the risk factors that these group workshops, or participatory performances, may hold.

Some might perhaps argue that I myself suffer from some type of identity disorder or crisis, based on the works in Melamorphosis. The reader of this
thesis however hopefully understands that this project has been a search for my own spirituality, and that through this search I have simultaneously studied a way that could also help others in search for their so-called "meaning in life". One question could also be whether Human-Animal Transformational Therapy could work as a treatment for people suffering from identity disorders. Could a person suffering from Body-Dysmorphic Disorder be cured through shapeshifting, when the patients need to "change shape" is the issue at hand? This is perhaps a concern that needs to be examined within therapeutic studies, were Human-Animal Transformational Therapy to make it as far as getting recognised within health care. But I believe that the most defining difference between someone suffering from an identity disorder and someone who is not, is merely that the first mentioned has a more difficult time in finding his or her own identity than the latter. That we all to some extent are, constantly, searching for and learning new things about our identity – and that this is then the real definition of spirituality (as Bennet suggests).

The world of shapeshifters is a wide, and yet a fairly unexplored area. It is however an area that I suggest should be explored, since the research could give vital advantages to Western medicine and psychology, and as mentioned in the introduction, also to global issues. I propose that spirituality is extremely relevant in today's society, because of the apparent lack of it. Or because of the apparent growing concern of it. Humans should not forget that they, we, are animals too. One could then also argue that by knowingly transforming into another animal one automatically distances oneself from the other animals and nature, and not connects to them. But I insist that a transformation into a non-human-animal is a method that teaches us how to be human again, through returning to an instinctual level and through breaking the physical boundaries of the human body. Through learning from our fellow animals and re-placing ourselves as humans in the environment that we all share. The human mind is different from the
animal, and humans could of course not return to a more primitive state since we have already evolved. But it has at no point been about going back to a more primitive state, merely to re-connect or deepen our connection to what some could then call our "primitive side" (our inner human animal). As the theriantrope KatmanDu argued: everyone should, and will hopefully realize, that we live in union with nature. In order to be well, and in order for our surroundings (our planet) to be well, we must be in connection with all aspects of our surroundings and ourselves. The various animistic beliefs all agree on this, and so do many modern day shapeshifters and makers of art or literature on shapeshifting. I also agree, and I would argue that the Melamorphosis project has managed to find a starting point from which human-animal transformations could become a more widely known term, and genuinely considered as a method of searching for and finding mental and spiritual wellbeing.

I hope that I have managed to make the reader interested in trying a human-animal transformation (this can also be just by jumping through a forest as a deer when nobody is watching). I hope that I have managed to broaden your, the reader's, idea of spirituality as a part of one's identity. And I hope that I have, most of all, managed to propose an idea, or a beginning of an idea, through which the world, or at least someone, could benefit: spiritually, artistically, mentally, physically, or on some other level of consciousness. Or hopefully – all combined.
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LIST OF IMAGES


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