EPISTEMOLOGY OF MEASUREMENT

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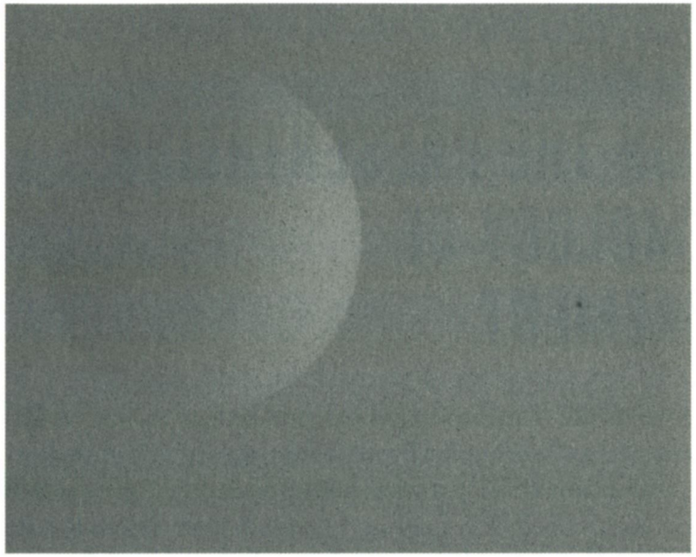
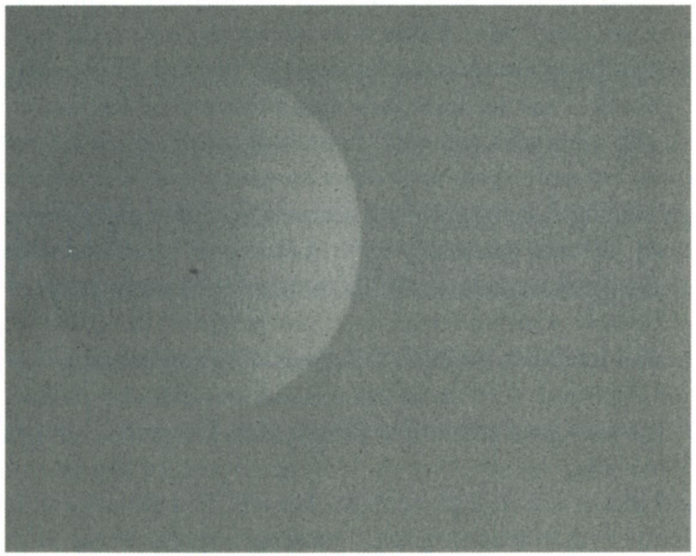
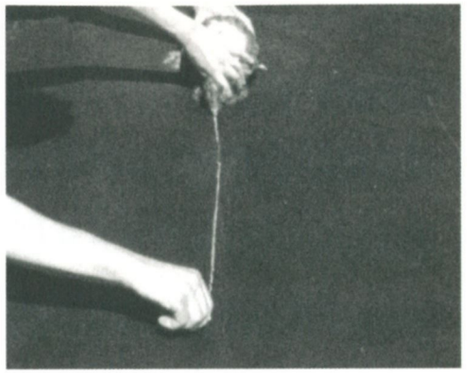
NOTES ON THE PRESENTATION EPISTEMOLOGY OF MEASUREMENT

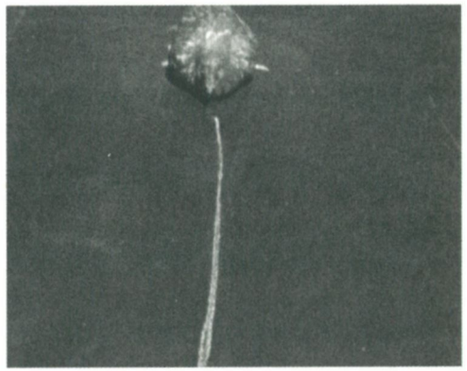
The animal/human divide. The human animal, non-human animal divide. The space between is a space occupied by metaphor, theory, anthropomorphism and, yet, at the same time, it is what John Berger called an "abyss of incomprehension" in his book *Why Look at Animals*. It is an indeterminate zone and also the space we use to define ourselves as humans, to define our human exceptionalism. And what makes it so interesting is that the gaze across this divide can be returned, most famously in the case of Derrida's cat, or blithely ignored – and we have very little influence in the matter. But this divide is also a human construct. Epistemologically speaking, we cannot say we know any more about what other humans are really thinking, feeling, and experiencing than we can with animals. And this gap is being eroded on all fronts. We now know that 99% of our genes are shared with mice – including the genes to make a tail. To summarize Timothy Morton in *The Ecological Thought,* non-human animals have language, imagination, reason, sense of mind (chimps), tool use, improved skills and learning over time, compassion, humour, a sense of beauty and wonder, and choice. Humans are fairly uniquely good at throwing and sweating. He quotes Darwin's *The Descent of Man* when he says that the differences are "of degree and not of kind". And it does not stop at animals, after all, 75% of our genetic make-up is the same as that of a pumpkin. The dragonfly, a predator with a kill ratio of 97%, is so successful because it has selective attention, something only primates were thought to have. Plants have the protein found in the neurons of higher animals, have agency, and use it in their interactions with their environment to secure their survival. The more we know, the more we have to define ourselves without recourse to binaries. Measurability within immeasurability.

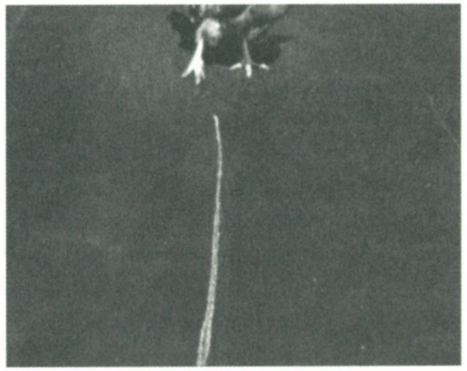




Lucy Powell, *A Place Where Things Are*, 2010, single channel video loop, 5 min., video stills, courtesy the artist







Lucy Powell, *Impossible Line*, 2009, Super 8 (loop), 3 min., video stills, courtesy the artist