

## **The Cat in the Shed : pets as moral and spatial features of a community**

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## **Brief introductory remarks**

Owners can *grow* worried about their cat's absence. A cat can go *missing* from a household. It can be a *lost* living thing in a neighbourhood. We can *search* for a cat that we cannot find without *hunting* for it, we can search for it because we want to recover it, not to trap it or kill it. What is that makes a cat a cat like that and not like a mole or a rat or a salmon? Just how do we care for this animal?

## **What resources are devoted to finding lost cats? / Who knows the cat is missing?**

We will look at a collection of missing cat notices posted around one city neighbourhood (see below). This neighbourhood is in Scotland, not far from the centre of Edinburgh, and is dominated by tenement style buildings. The arrangement of the buildings is important since the tenements, compared to detached suburban houses, or farmland, form substantial barriers in length to the journeying of cats and are impossible for them to climb over. The majority of the tenements have a street side and a shared garden/courtyard side. The street side in some places has the public pavement directly abutting the building while other rows of tenements have small private gardens separating the building from the road. The latter are of immense importance to cats since they provide cover and form an alley of sorts without car or human pedestrian traffic travelling along it. They are also waiting areas for cats where they can sit without a great deal of disturbance until their owners or other door openers to the tenement main doors return. The areas on the opposite side of the buildings are where cats are encouraged by their owners to go since they are traffic free and thus relatively safe for cats to roam in. In the back greens and courtyards of tenements cats are often seen hunting, fighting, sleeping, courting or just wandering along. Questions of who they can be seen by and what inferences can be made about them we will return to later.

Cat entry to the tenements is not only by way of their owners, since other people open doors for them and some cats want into tenements where their owners don't live. Cats may visit several households for food and shelter. By stationing themselves at the door cats get seen by non-residents (i.e. guests of residents, repair people, door-to-door sales people etc.) of the building entering the building's main door as potentially living there. At the very least they are seen to be wanting to enter the particular building they have selected by sitting at its door. Residents of a particular tenement grow to know which cats belong to their building, even who they belong to and may have had the cats as guests or had to look after them whilst their owners are away. Cats that enter buildings other than their own nevertheless risk getting trapped inside. Even in their owner's building they risk being trapped in the central stairwell if they are let in by someone other than their owner. Cats seems to be wary whilst traversing main door entrances which could be related to the dangers of being crushed in the door itself or being trapped on the wrong side of the door (a joke definition of a cat is that it is an animal that is on the wrong side of a door). From yeowls outside their door or sudden exits from doorways tenement dwellers learn that cats frequently get trapped in stairwells.

It is no surprise to say that much of our living relationship with cat is produced by what we do with food. Just what foods we use and just when and where we put them might offer us a little more. From a long historical close inhabitation with cats we know that they like various meats (fish, chicken etc.), some biscuits, some dairy products but are relatively uninterested in chocolate, beer and despise citrus fruit. Moreover we produce foodstuffs specifically for them in the form of cat biscuits and tinned meats. Neighbours offer cats that are not (yet) their own food by placing it on windowsills, doorsteps and on the landings of flats. These are places accessible to cats, perhaps of importance to cats though we cannot say that they have the concept of windowsill, landing or doorstep or doormat. Placing just that kind of food in just those places formulates it as for cat's consumption, yet it also provides for who it is that is offering food to the cat. It may be that a neighbour is trying to lure another neighbour's cat into their flat but it may be also that the neighbour leaves it available that they are helping feed the cat? It makes a delicate distinction offering the food in the shared space of the neighbourhood as against inside the flat. Beyond how residents try to shape the visitation and movements of other neighbour's cats, cats go into their cupboards, their open windows, sheds, greenhouses and garages. These are places that 'interest' cats. We cannot say what they are doing there on their terms yet we can say that they will go into these places. From knowing this we can lure or attract cats (hmm but we can lure fish and flies too).

In the shared greens and courtyards of the tenements there is not the passing pedestrian traffic of the street. In fact these spaces are relatively empty of the residents apart from during the infrequent hot sunny days of summer when picnics and barbecues are held in them. This is perhaps because they are looked in on by so many flats in the tenements. It is perhaps also because the ground floor flats have the most private and least invasive use of the back spaces. This is so since residents of ground level flats look directly, eye-to-eye, at anyone in the gardens and so can appear to be inadvertently snooping on them and vice versa. If it is the ground floor flat's inhabitant(s) in the back green then the problem of snooping does not arise. And it is noticeable that ground floor flats tend to use the bit of the green directly looked on to by their windows and not that of the other ground floor flats. Equally for garden users from the upper levels they can inadvertently appear to be spying on the ground floor flats since they can quite easily see into the ground flats whereas the same is not so for the upper levels where inhabitants are only visible if they actually stand at the window. Note here that we have a technology of visibility here which in its possibilities for surveillance might appear to make for a panoptic situation of the kind described by Foucault. Yet I suspect Foucault would not misapply his concepts here : whilst a neighbour worries over being reprimanded or adversely characterised as a snoop, gaoles are unlikely to worry overly much about being admonished for being nosy.

Whilst the explanations for the uneven distribution of access to the shared greens are not my central concern here, the fact that so many residents look into these zones is. It means that the cats that are let out there are heavily observed, almost like the inmates of Bentham's panopticon except that of course they have no notion that their movements are nearly always witnessed by somebody in the neighbourhood. They are legitimate objects for looking at, in the related sense, that they can be looked at without

fear of rebuke over spying on them or being excessively intrusive (Laurier et al., Submitted). Somewhat akin to children, neighbours watch over the movements of the cats, making sure that they do not get into trouble nor misbehave.

From time to time there are lost cat notices attached in the streets and in other places around the neighbourhood. I would like to say that it is about twice a year but realise that my location in and movements through a certain part of the neighbourhood makes it *my* neighbourhood, not *the* neighbourhood. Without a doubt I do not see all of the notices posted around the neighbourhood, so the missing cat notices may be more frequent than I realise. Yet my neighbourhood has shared features to which I orient as comprising the neighbourhood-known-in-common and I treat them as things that my fellow residents also see. These shared features are the bus-stops, heavily used streets (the main street), newspaper shops, pubs, cafes and pedestrian crossings. They are *mutually* relevant to residents since they are figures emergent from the background of the neighbourhood. Funnily enough, the *public* noticeboard is not one of the things that I assume my fellow residents are aware of. Although on the main street, there is only one, it is small and requires purposeful reading to find out what is on it. One does not gain an awareness of what is there inadvertantly as one does of roadworks, new shops opening or where the pubs are. (Further clarification is required of this - most residents would know where the noticeboard is, they just do not know what is written there month by month. Akin to notices posted in shop windows, inside the post office and so on.)

The putting up of notices (missing cats, neighbourhood watch, local fairs) in public spaces is done with an intersubjective sense of what residents see in their daily use of the shared spaces of the neighbourhood. It is not only residents that use these public features of the neighbourhood, they are also used by advertisers ('Carpet Auction Sat 12th October') and the council (i.e. warnings of changes in traffic zoning, water supply interruptions, street maintenance etc.) Once any of these kinds of notices have been put up with this dispersion in the neighbourhood then it fits the criteria of a public announcement. We can think of different ways notices are made to local residents, such as by mailing every address, door-to-door calling, telephoning, by using loudspeakers on cars or by writing on the sky. There are a fairly *limited* number of *practical* ways of addressing the entire neighbourhood. Their practicality is decided by the resources at hand, and for the owners of the missing cat below, they have a word processor, photocopier, plastic document covers, cellotape and string. In utilising this way of communicating their problem to their neighbourhood, the owners expect to generate an awareness with enough of their neighbours that a cat fitting this description is missing and its owners want it back.



Photo 1 – Lost cat notice on bus shelter. – ‘MISSING / Small female / Ginger cat / with blue collar / /// / Last seen 5<sup>th</sup> December Carrington Street, Please Phone xxxxxxx // ((handwritten)) *please check your gardens + sheds + garages*

Photo 2 – Lost cat notice on inside of central apartment entrance door – ‘MISSING / Small female / Ginger cat / with blue collar / /// / Last seen 5<sup>th</sup> December Carrington Street, Please Phone xxxxxxx // ((handwritten)) *please check your gardens + sheds + garages*

Photo 3 – Lost cat notice on railings outside local pub. - ‘MISSING / Small female / Ginger cat / with blue collar / /// / Last seen 5<sup>th</sup> December Carrington Street, Please Phone xxxxxxx // ((handwritten)) *please check your gardens + sheds + garages.*

Photo 4 – Lost cat notice on railings beside pedestrian shortcut - ‘MISSING / Small female / Ginger cat / with blue collar / /// / Last seen 5<sup>th</sup> December Carrington Street, Please Phone xxxxxxx // ((handwritten)) *please check your gardens + sheds + garages*

Photo 5 – Lost cat notice on railing beside Hedge – MISSING / SMALL GINGER / CAT / LAST SEEN WED / 5<sup>TH</sup> / OWNERS VERY WORRIED! / PLEASE CALL XXX XXXX

Photo 6 – Lost cat notice on lamp-post - – MISSING / SMALL GINGER / CAT / LAST SEEN WED / 5<sup>TH</sup> / OWNERS VERY WORRIED! / PLEASE CALL XXX XXXX

Photo 7 – Lost cat notice on outside of central apartment door (different building) - ‘MISSING / Small female / Ginger cat / with blue collar / /// / Last seen 5<sup>th</sup> December Carrington Street, Please Phone xxxxxxx // ((handwritten)) *please check your gardens + sheds + garages*

Whilst our ‘MISSING’ cat notices (see above) were put up on lamp-posts and fences and so utilised the usual public notice spots, they were also posted on the inside and

outside of tenement public doors (2 & 7). We might say that they fit into the space of the neighbourhood, however this leaves space as a container with pre-existing hooks for hanging such notices on. More is going on in the putting up of the notices, they formulate a space. On encountering their notice while walking along the street, residents find that *this* becomes *the* space within which the cat is/was lost. The notices are put up in the places where the owners of the cat anticipate their cat might have gone. Photo 4 is in a shortcut across a railway line and between buildings where the paths of cats and residents often cross.

The owners' search impresses in its thoroughness. In my own passage from my flat to my local newsagents I passed three of their signs and when taking the shortcut to the mainstreet, five. There was even a notice on the *inside* of my tenement's main door. Finding notices there carry a different import to that of an item stuck on its outside. The inside of the door formulates its readers as the inhabitants of this building. It carries instructions about bin collection days and who to call if the stairwell lights need maintenance. Intermittently the residents leave small notices to one another such as request to be quieter in the stairwell, to make sure the door is closed in windy weather or to allow it to be left unlocked because a delivery is expected. Putting a notice on the inside of the door means that the owners asked permission of one of the tenement's inhabitants to get in the building and put the notice up. They could have put it on the outside of the main door and did so with some of the other tenement buildings (see Photo 7). From the paper trail that the owners left I acquired a sense of their attachment to this cat. It offered me a sense of their earnest effort to discover their cat's fate. I thought they would be lucky should they ever get it back. Missing cats mostly stay missing.

#### *What does this imply for the cat?*

For the cat, it has become a noticeable absence. It has become a *marked cat* (like a marked man).

The cat cannot read, it has no idea that has become a marked cat unlike the crime suspect who may find their face printed on the front of every newspaper in the country.

The cat can now be legitimately trapped, held indoors, caged or in other ways restrained by neighbours. Can the cat be killed? If it is put into the hands of those professions (i.e. vets, societies for animals) who have license to do so then there comes a time, when a cat even though it may be suspected as being someone's pet may be killed. The sign is an attempt to make sure the cat, if it is seen or if it is being restrained somewhere, is not killed and ideally returned to its owners.

As a routine matter many cats do get to enter certain neighbours' houses with some degree of invitation and leave without restraint. Cats can still be shewed away by people who do not like cats. Some neighbours do poison other neighbours' cats. Cats have these risks and moral rights for starters.

Seeing a cat outdoors / in public space in the neighbourhood. It could be a stray but has to be found to be one before certain operations (such as restraint) can be used on it. A lone cat can wander through your garden without it being a morally accountable matter where a lone child wondering through would be. If it is not a stray then it is a cat that is *allowed* outdoors. Owners say 'we allow our cat outdoors'. Once a cat is allowed outdoors it is to some extent entrusted to the community? It will go into gardens, sheds, garages and other people's homes and its owners trust their neighbours not to trap it or kill it. It is not only trust, or perhaps trust is not the most important issue, a busy road where the cat may be killed by accident is the greatest threat.

The outdoor cats, like the human shared green users are mainly from ground floor flats. Visibility is, once again, bound up with the cat being allowed outdoors. Cats can come to the window of ground floor flats, which they simply cannot do on upper levels. If there is no catflap, coming to the window is the main feline/human method for cat entry and exit. At times when there is no passing human traffic cats can only make their desire to enter at the door observable to people inside the building by miaowing loudly. Cats from the upper levels of tenements tend, then, to get trapped outside their buildings unable to signal their owners. In my neighbourhood there is a white cat from the top floor of a tenement three doors down that is frequently shut out in the street and begs to get in the doors and ground floor windows of the other tenement flats. Whilst some neighbours offer it sympathy, food and shelter, others complain about it suggesting it's a nuisance and/or being mistreated.

Seeing a cat as one of the neighbourhood cats comes about through repeated observations of its presence. Indeed seeing it as the cat that belongs to a particular household is assembled through seeing outside whose flat it waits, inside whose windows it is glimpsed and who greets it by name in the street. Cats are known to greet many people, strangers included and so seeing someone stroking or greeting a cat does not place the person, though it perhaps places the cat as being in its territory. Once a cat is greeted it may run to a front door thereby giving the sense that that is where it lives or it may stay where it is or somewhat problematically for cat greeters it may follow the greeter along the road. If the latter is the case then there may be some concern from the greeter that the cat will follow them too far and get lost.

Once a cat is advertised around the neighbourhood as 'lost' then its appearance in someone's vicinity has become a reportable event to its owners. Its presence is not normally something that a neighbour would phone the cat's owners about.

We learn a lot about a cat's status by its spatial location. Indeed our problem might be seen to be one of how production and recognition tasks are done by members with no access to our concept rich language. To put this another way, cats and humans manage to co-ordinate their activities and there should be ways we can describe such co-ordination. In taking what cats do, we should not diminish their actions by treating them as if they were produced by robots nor however should we see them as doing human activities where they are not. (Wittgenstein's warning over seeing a dog staring at a newspaper and describing this as the dog reading the newspaper.)

*What does this imply for the residents of the neighbourhood?*

In the area of the neighbourhood delimited by the spread of the posters there are several hundred residents. Each of these resident is acquainted with at the most a handful of the other residents (though, as Goffman (Goffman, 1971) notes, they may at least be visually acquainted). If we look at where the posters were put up by the lost cat's owners they have been stuck on a bus stop, a short-cut over a railway bridge between two streets, outside a pub and on a lamp-post.

The notices serve to annotate these places. These become places as we have noted earlier where cats passing by should now be looked at by the inhabitants of these places no longer as 'a cat', but 'is that the missing cat?' It would be wrong to assume that all readers of the notices take up the request to try and identify the missing cat from amongst the local cat population.

Residents do not take it as their particular business to go about locating missing cats in their neighbourhood. It is nobody's job apart from the owners to search for the missing cat. You cannot imagine 30 residents combing the local railway siding or canal in the way they might for a lost child. They may on the other hand encounter a cat and come to see that it might be lost or astray. If it is either of these things then they are morally obligated to do something on the basis of their suspicions. We might compare their assembling of a cat as a missing cat with Sack's (Sacks, 1972) formulation of the policeman's problem :

'Given that

1. he encounters persons in and by way of the streets, persons engaged in undertermined activities;
2. the activities are taken to be parts of selected courses of action constructed with an orientation to their propriety ;
3. candidates for investigation are located prior to tracking their paths or knowing the courses of action in which they are engaged

Then :

How by way of their street activities can one look at persons so as to be able to use their appearances to isolate candidates for investigation, and

How can one then use what candidates do both as materials for discovering the courses of action in which they are engaged, and for determining in terms of those courses, that sense of their observable acts on the basis of which a strategy may be generated for demonstrating the observable character of their activities as the assembly of a crime?' p290

There are clear differences between a resident / neighbour whose central concern is not detecting possible criminals or possible missing persons nor, as we have here, possible missing cats. Yet residents are to an extent concerned with the state of their neighbourhood and having an appropriate level of awareness of what is going on in it. They express concern to one another over litter, burglaries, road accidents, new housing or shop developments and so on. They pay some attention to the scenes that their neighbourhood presents, though they can ignore them too as being none of their

business.

Where Sacks uses ‘persons’ we could replace ‘cats’, and note that the determining of a cat’s status as belonging or a stray/lost is done via their observations of feline activities in the street. While this may seem to be overstating the matter, we have to bear in mind that should a person on the basis of their observations determine that a cat is lost, then they can attempt to adopt the cat as their own, or surrender it to the a cat organisation that may have it put down if it is not claimed or rehomed (Laurier et al., Submitted).

Borrowing from Sacks’s statement of the police officer’s problem then, when a missing cat notice is put up around the neighbourhood then it creates a situation whereby candidate cats are located *prior* to tracking their paths through the streets for evidence that they might be stray or lost. Cats’ activities are undetermined in their encounters with passers-by in the street. However as we have noted above, residents of a neighbourhood attend to some extent to around about *where* each of the neighbourhood cats live, even if they avoid greeting or otherwise interacting with them. This familiarity informs their noticing as to whether the missing cat is one that they have encountered themselves. What this familiarity with the neighbourhood cats gives them is cats that are new or potentially not from the neighbourhood.

I will not try and describe too many of the features of a cat once noticed that provide for further working-up of its status as lost or a stray. In brief: the absence or presence of a collar, an ID tag, whether the cat looks thin & generally battered and how the cat behaves toward someone showing it attention.

### **Reflections on worrying about a cat**

Why worry so much about an animal? How is it that the neighbourhood does not question the sanity of the people posting these notices everywhere over one small animal? ‘Animal’ is the problematic term. The household that grows worried about its cat’s absence has a cat that is a *pet*. ‘Pet’ is a special kind of animal with certain additional rights. If an animal is a pet then generally it avoids being killed for human food and being off the menu is one strong benefit for an animal that is so adopted. We will grow quickly confused though if we try and describe pets solely through a relationship of killing or by reference to a downgraded version of animals that sees them as cyphers for evolutionary explanations or calls them ‘parasites’ (Budiansky, 2001). When we call them a parasite it is clear that we aim to insult someone foolish enough to care for this animal, we are suggesting they have been duped. I say this even though others might try instead to redeem the ecological value of the parasite (it does not kill its host and may even help its host (see (Serres, 1982)),

We are not after the explanation of pets as found in the question : ‘why are there pets?’ or ‘Why do people have a pet cat rather than a pet dog?’ Such a question assumes we know enough about what a pet is already and how the life of pets manifests itself (is organised).

A pet is something which humans 'exercise benevolence on' (Christopher Smart 'For my cat jeoffrey' – 18th Century). There is no mutual dependency between a pet and its benefactor, it is only the pet that is in some way dependent on its benefactor. Whilst a benefactor shows care for their pet, the pet need not show care for their benefactor. Part of having a pet is that we should not expect the pet to like us for what we do? In our relation to a pet there is also a sense that we do for it what it cannot do for itself because it does not have the powers that we do. We are our pet's protectors and guardians. Yet the lived production of caring for cats as pets remains to be described - we do not have vague powers, we have specific ones which require their exercise.

All pets are *someone's* pet, so a pet always stands in a privileged relationship to someone in particular. For my family's last cat 'Pandora', it was on various occasions my sister's cat. It could also belong to the family too. Significant times when Pandora was my sister's were occasions where decisions were to be made about the cat. My sister was expected to be concerned with her cat's welfare and had priority over all others with respect to what could or could not be done to the cat. In what we did to my sister's cat we were primarily answerable to my sister. Although the cat always remained her pet, even during a period when they lived apart, she could have transferred her rights, entitlements and obligations to the cat to someone else. There is something about the conjunction of the unit 'family' with the unit 'cat' that makes sundering this relation to a singular member quite difficult. A lot more could be said on this matter.

Animal societies 'rehome cats', which is an interesting phrase.

In how we own a cat and how a cat is someone's pet the criteria are bound to it living its life in a dwelling place. There are cats that live in factories, in ships at sea, in universities, but are they someone's pet? They are 'the ship's cat', the 'factory's cat.' There may be several people that feed, stroke and shelter these cats. One person can adopt the cat and make it their pet and this will most likely involve trying to make it at home in their home? Once again the importance of a pet in relation to home is raised. When a cat makes a building/place that is not a human home its home then it is nobody's pet. Cats have, of course, no sense of 'building' or 'university' or 'ship.'

Are there examples of equally shared pets?

In response to this question, there are conflicts over, for whom is some cat a pet. Two neighbours treat the same cat as *our* cat, and end up in conflict as to who has rights over the cat. One takes off the other's collar. One attempts to take the cat with them when they move house. The struggle is over who this cat belongs to.

Cats are nevertheless also fed and cared for by other neighbours whilst being recognised as not belonging to them but to someone else. This does not happen so easily with a dog. Dogs are not allowed to roam in quite the same way that cats do. Or rather dogs walk accompanied whilst cats walk alone? Not quite, Colette walked her cats on a lead. We can say that it is odd hereabouts (not all cultures have the same animals as pets nor do they interact with their pets under the same principles) to take your cat for a walk. It could be done but we do not try to do it and can anyway let the

cat walk and run free?

A pet is *not* a child, though its relation to humans, both adults and children, bears some instructive comparison. A child can be a pet in certain situations. The category pet is not one that develops into something else : a pet does not grow into an adult. When people say that someone's pet is a substitute child, then the modification 'substitute' is important. Once again, like calling a cat a parasite, calling it a child substitute is a mild rebuke to such owners, warning them that they are not seeing some aspect of its nature or more simply it is an insult over someone caring inappropriately for a 'mere animal.'

A child can go missing and this is an especially terrible thing, much more so than an adult going missing. A missing child is national news. Searches for children are administered initially 'locally' and then extended, often nationally as being 'lost' shifts to either being dead or abducted. Searches for cats are pursued whilst their owners worry. Cats, unlike children, can be adopted by another household or even become feral without it being a serious legal and moral matter. This is significant not just in what kind of emotions an owner of a cat can reasonably show but also in the finding of a cat. The same resources are not devoted to finding lost cats.

Returning to the request of the owners of the small ginger cat, their notice says 'check you garden sheds and garages.' Surely they do not expect this to be taken literally by all their neighbours? What are they then doing in writing this? Is it also a reminder to neighbours of what a cat's perspective is? As in some rural areas where there are road signs that say 'Drive Carefully/ Sheep are Stupid.' Competent members are being reminded that they are living amongst animals that do not share their perspective... So 'check your garden sheds' is perhaps an attempt to get neighbours to take the perspective of a cat in their inhabitation and think about where it may have accidentally trapped itself?

Or do we get something else again? We read in their notice something of their desperation - that they will ask their unacquainted neighbours to do something that they in all probability will not do. Such a request shows their commitment to their cat. It is reasonable since their cat is a pet, they are its protectors and they are the ones that act to compensate for its limited social competence.

Do we have something else here still? We have already said that there is something called the 'ship's cat'. Do cats like this become neighbourhood cats?

Then we have a living being that can be missing in and as part of the neighbourhood. Like a street monument being 'missing' but not. 'Missing' in a way that we could not have: "Mrs Stewart is missing, please check your gardens and sheds and garages."

What we have is the possible fates that can be methodically used to guess what has happened to the cat. One possibility is that the cat has been taken in by someone else, at a more extreme level that it has been kidnapped. For the former more sympathetic construction of one's neighbours, it may be that the cat has through getting trapped on the wrong side of a tenement building, sought food and shelter with strangers. These

same strangers might decide that they very much like this cat and so are not exactly overly-anxious to try and track down its owners. One way of justifying what they do is that the owners do not care enough about their pet to even put up missing cat notices.

We might say then that missing cat notices are put up by owners to show that they do not want other people to adopt the cat as their pet. They want it back. In this sense the notices also show some degree of suspicion over what neighbours may do.

Immediate neighbours who are clear over exactly which flat the cat belongs to would not be able to do such a thing. Even if they really like the cat, unless the owners in some way officially hand their pet over to them there is no way that they can take possession of the pet without it being a catnapping.

More distant neighbours have other possibilities which come about through having 'stray' as a possibility.

Intermediate neighbours may know the cat as a neighbourhood cat yet be unclear whether it is someone's pet. It may just be the neighbourhood's cat (like the ship's cat). If it is not anyone's pet then they may try and acquire those rights by giving it a collar, taking it to the vet, giving it regular access to their home, giving it a name and possibly also carrying it around, letting it sleep-over at theirs. Once they have done this then they gain a position where they could lose it, but only by doing the work of making this cat into *their* pet. In these matters it cannot be too often repeated, the cat has no sense of the rights it is acquiring or how it might exercise them. The category 'pet' recognises this.

A pet cat has a living historical relationship with its owners, then, in that it has to become a pet. Such a relationship requires so degree of mutual accomplishment (the absurdity of pet slugs, pet spiders and so on) in that some cats turn out to be bad pets. They are unwilling to be stroked, stray constantly, shit where they shouldn't and are vicious with their owners. The cat is not trying to be a pet, it is doing what it does. When pets turn out bad, owners interrogate their past history with the cat in order to assess how they might have contributed to a cat's unwanted habits. They do this with a keen sense of what it makes sense to expect of a cat and do not despair over its inability to speak, fetch a frisbee in the park or collect them from the airport.

Another element of having a pet animal is knowing by which criteria such an animal's actions can be judged. For cats and dogs we have finely nuanced criteria and have even built formal institutions for judging excellence in these animals (i.e. Crufts). When the cat sits on the mat regularly we examine its reasons for doing so (this is the living alternate to the more abstract remarks made upon the phrase 'the cat sits on the mat'). Is the mat soft? Is the mat warm? Is the mat in a position where the cat can monitor the movements of the house's inhabitants – where seeing a human going to the fridge or cupboard may be a relevant observation for a cat.

In the application of our observations of pets we nurture a relationship with living being, we nurture this relationship without words. What are we after? What do we learn

from such a relationship? What is our commitment?

It is wrong to say it is entirely without words since we say things such as 'what's the cat thinking?' or we speak to the cat as it rubs around our legs saying 'are you hungry?'. There are two kinds of pet talk here, talk about pets and talk to pets (Goode ref).

A lost cat notice is something else again, it is writing that makes a neighbourhood cat into a missing pet. It is a reasonable show of commitment to the cats that live amongst us.

### **Leftovers**

There can be errors in these attempted acquisitions of a potential neighbourhood cat, where it does have some lax owners, especially since (outdoor) cats come and go as they please and if another neighbour's place is pleasing enough they may come there more and more often.

Lost cats need to be formulated as such since otherwise there can be some ambiguity, which the cat cannot resolve.

Cats cannot ask directions. Cats can mistakenly show something to humans which they have limited ability to repair. My brushing against your leg and following you into your home should not be mistaken for my being a stray, it is merely that I am both hungry, friendly and trusting.

*Adolfa – one of 2 family cats that had awful habits such as crapping indoors in the winter. She was not exactly cherished compared to the other better behaved cat. A neighbour also fed her, Adolfa over a period of months gradually spent more and more time at a neighbour's house, until for all practical purposes she had become the neighbour's cat and made only intermittent visits to her original 'home'. In this case the first household were only too happy to have her adopted by someone else.*

*Boris – a neighbourhood cat which paid visits to the flat that I shared with my girlfriend. We were never sure who owned him and nervous about letting him to stay too long or too often. He had a scabby head and we wanted to take him to the vet. When we did so the vet told us he was only about 9 months old and needed neutering. One day in passing another neighbour told us that she had thought about adopting him because he was a stray but she lived on the top floor and way away a lot. We adopted him and 'accounted' for his tomcat status by having him neutered. He maintained regular visits to all the neighbours but was happy to have one house that fed him regularly and allowed him to sleep over. We were privileged to be delivered many mice, birds and once a large dead goldfish.*

*Sara's mother's cat – adopted by her mother because it appeared to always be stuck outside wanting in, had no collar and was hungry though they were suspicious it was actually their neighbours. Gradually they fed it more regularly, kept it in and ultimately put a collar on it. It became their pet cat until their neighbour's daughter returned after 2 years away and promptly came to their door to tell them to take the collar off and return her cat to her. A disagreement ensued where Sara's mother said that daughter had no rights to the cat after so long away and that they had acquired those rights by feeding it, sheltering it and taking it to the vet etc. Months later the cat went missing, Sara's mother was distraught. A day or two later it was found dying on the roadside in a village ten miles away. Sara's mother always suspected the daughter had tried to kidnap it and it had escaped. Another possible explanation though was that it had gone to sleep inside a car or van and jumped out later and been struck by traffic.*

*Smokey – when my family moved house, over 2 miles away from their original house. The cat although kept inside for 2 weeks then went missing for 2 weeks. My family paid regular trips back to our old house in case she turned up there. After about another 2 weeks she was found hungry and waiting patiently at the back door of the original house. She was put in the car and driven back. She made her epic voyage 3 or 4 more times before finally staying where we had put her.*

*Toby – A cat that lives in a tenement and gets access to the stairwell as well as to the shared green. He is liked by one of the neighbours who places food for him on her landing. On the same landing another neighbour despises cats. One day Toby's owners get a knock at the door, it's the cat despising neighbour, who announces 'Toby has been seen on the landing.' In the future, the cat liking neighbour puts her food offerings downstairs from her own level.*

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