

UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL

THE HEALING CAT: FROM BASTET TO THE CAT CAFÉ

A MYTHANALYSIS OF THE SYMBOL OF THE CAT AND AN
ETHNOGRAPHY OF TWO MONTREAL CAT CAFÉS

MÉMOIRE DE MAÎTRISE

PAR

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“There is one way in which cats differ from all other animals and that is in the effect they have on human beings” (Dale-Green xv)

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I address the cat's present role and popularity through the example of two Montreal cat cafés, and the history leading up to its current status. I explore the similarities and differences that exist between the cat figures of the past and the contemporary cat café cats. This paper is thus divided into two distinct parts, which required two different types of methodology. On the one hand, I engaged in extensive documentary research in the hopes of presenting the basis for a mythanalysis of the cat; on the other hand, I undertook fieldwork. In the first part of my paper, I thus outline the history of this animal's symbolic representations from the early days of domestication to the present, focusing primarily on two themes: "healing" and "domesticity". As my central topic is the cat café, I concentrate on the Mediterranean region, birthplace of the domesticated cat, and Asia, origin of the cat café phenomenon. For the second part of my research, I undertook fieldwork in the first two permanent cat cafés to open in North America, the Café des Chats and the Café Chat l'Heureux, both situated in Montreal. In the second part of this paper, I present an ethnography of these two sites. This ethnography contains the results of extensive observation at both cafés; many informal discussions with patrons, staff, and owners; a hundred anonymous questionnaires; and multiple in-depth interviews with several regular customers and the founders of the cafés. Coupled with my documentary research, my ethnography of these two sites seeks to define the essential features that characterise the contemporary phenomenon of the cat café. I notably draw parallels between these cafés and the historical perception of the cat previously explored, and find that the cat café cat is as linked to "healing" and "domesticity" as many of its real, and mythological, ancestors.

Key words: cat café, cat in mythology, mythanalysis, healing, domesticity

RESUMÉ

Dans ce travail, je m'intéresse au rôle et à la popularité contemporaine du chat, à travers, notamment, de l'exemple de deux cat cafés montréalais, et dans l'histoire qui précède son statut actuel. J'explore les ressemblances et les différences qui existent entre les figures félines du passé, et le chat du cat café moderne. Ce mémoire est ainsi divisé en deux parties distinctes, qui ont fait appel à deux types de méthodologie différents. Dans un premier temps, j'ai fait une recherche documentaire sur les différentes représentations du chat, pour pouvoir présenter les bases pour une mythanalyse de ce symbole. Dans la première partie de ce mémoire je documente ainsi l'histoire des représentations symbolique de cet animal, des débuts de la domestication, jusqu'à aujourd'hui, en focalisant sur deux thèmes principaux : « la

guérison » et « la domesticité ». Vu que mon objet central est le cat café, je m'intéresse à la région méditerranéenne, l'origine du chat domestique, et à l'Asie, où est né le phénomène du cat café. Pour la deuxième composante de ma recherche, j'ai effectué une recherche de terrain dans les deux premiers cat café en Amérique du Nord, le Café des Chats et le Café Chat l'Heureux, tous deux situés à Montréal. Dans la deuxième partie de mon mémoire, je présente une ethnographie de ces lieux, basé sur les résultats d'observations ; de discussions formelles et informelles avec de nombreux clients et employés des cafés ; d'une centaine de questionnaires ; et de plusieurs entretiens formels avec quelques clients réguliers du café et les propriétaires. En la combinant avec ma recherche documentaire, cette ethnographie cherche à définir les éléments essentiels qui caractérisent le phénomène contemporain du cat café. Je démontre notamment que, comme ses ancêtres réels et mythiques, le chat du cat café est présenté comme étroitement lié aux thèmes de « la guérison » et de « la domesticité ».

Mots clefs : cat café, mythologie du chat, mythanalyse, guérison, domesticité

INTRODUCTION

I have always loved and been fascinated by the different cats I have encountered in my life. I am especially intrigued by their complex, often contradictory, behavioural patterns, and enamoured of their seemingly distinctive personalities. The cat can be a largely mysterious figure, enigmatic and unfathomable; along with the great amount of affection cats shower on chosen humans, this unpredictability is often an important factor in the feline's appeal. The cat is a unique animal, as much because of its physical characteristics, as because of its conduct. It is furthermore the least domesticated of all the animals that man has succeeded in taming: even in the pampered housecat of today, it is still possible to glimpse "reminiscences, inheritances, of the wild life which the cat has never lost and never will lose" (Van Vechten 4)¹. The complex nature of this animal has led to cats often appearing as symbols and characters in literature and the arts, in which the cat can represent everything from demon to angel, to "the secret wildness in every person" (Sax 57). The cat is finally also remarkable in the reactions it provokes in people: this animal, in fact, seems to have an equal capacity to attract and repel, but rarely inspires indifference; as Carl Van Vechten puts it: "One is permitted to assume an attitude of placid indifference in the matter of elephants, cockatoos, H.G. Wells, Sweden, roast beef, Puccini, and even Mormonism, but in the matter of cats it seems necessary to take a firm stand" (Van Vechten 60).

Put simply, therefore, I have chosen my topic because of a personal interest in the cat as both animal and symbol. In exploring the history of this animal, it becomes furthermore apparent that I am certainly not the first to be fascinated by the cat. The human-cat relationship is particularly complex, and these animals have always been

¹ I shall be using the internationally recognised MLA Style of citation in this paper.

unique “in the effect they have on human beings” (Dale-Green xv); cats have played a key role in human life, and the human imagination, for thousands of years, during which they have featured prominently alongside “the heroes of history and the characters of fiction” (Van Vechten 17). Their impact on human culture can also in part be seen by the multitude of words, proverbs, and expressions present in a variety of languages that are in some way connected to the animal (Van Vechten 137). Today, the mere mention of cats provokes great enthusiasm in a substantial portion of the population, and they are one of the world’s most popular household pets, their only rival being the dog, man’s traditional “best friend”. Some of the reasons for this growing popularity are, of course, pragmatic: “Cats are smaller, eat less, need less space to exercise, and are less expensive to care for than dogs” (Sax 63). However, the unique human-cat bond is also clearly valued and highly sought out in the modern world. Though the image of the “crazy cat lady” still persists, people from all walks of life have come to love cats today, creating what Grace Suriel of Animal Planet refers to as “a whole new breed of cat person” (Dredge). Online in particular, people have wholeheartedly embraced the image of the feline, and all that it entails: countless videos, photos and “memes” of cats are posted online on a daily basis, and many websites are dedicated entirely to the animal. The extreme passion expressed towards the cat on these various forums often borders on obsession. This obsession is also apparent in the equally singular, but far more tangible, phenomenon of the “cat café”: a theme café whose distinguishing feature is the presence of a number of cats with whom the clientele is encouraged to interact. Since the beginning of the 21st century, these cafés have grown in popularity and spread across the globe. There are thus at least two key ways in which our fascination with cats differs from our love for other animals today: the cat’s dominating presence on the internet, and the existence of the popular global phenomenon of the cat café. These modern trends highlight “a psychological connection we have with our feline friends that we don’t necessarily share with man’s other best friend, the dog” (Hussey).

With two cat cafés opening in Montreal, I felt it was an ideal moment to better understand the popularity of these cafés, and the nature of the singular human-animal relationship present therein. Over the past two years I have therefore been visiting these locations on a regular basis, and have gotten to know the cats and humans that frequent them. To gain a better understanding of the cat's status today, I also explored their presence on the internet, though this phenomenon is far too vast to fully analyse within the scope of this research. However, cat memes, videos, and cafés are but the most recent development in a relationship between cats and human beings that goes back thousands of years. In order to contextualise this curious contemporary cat mania, I therefore also sought to better understand the historical evolution of the status and perception of cats, and delved into the different ways cats have been portrayed throughout the ages, from the earliest days of domestication and veneration in Ancient Egypt, through their demonisation in mediaeval Europe, to their present pampered status. As YouTube cat videos, cat memes, and cat cafés are today global phenomena, I examined the cat's role not only in different historical contexts, but also in different geographical settings.

This paper is thus divided into five chapters. In my first chapter, I describe the different components of my research. In the second, I delve into the various ways in which cats have been portrayed throughout the ages, from the earliest days of domestication to the present, in the hopes of clarifying the origins of today's curious contemporary cat mania. In this section I present a historical overview of the different roles the cat has played in human society over the ages, focusing on the themes of healing and domesticity.

My third chapter concerns the place of the modern cat. Firstly, I recount the animal's return to favour, after the dark period that was the Middle Ages. I also document the creation of various animal rights organisations in the 19th century, many of which still exist to this day, and have greatly impacted our perception of the cat and other animals. I also discuss the growing popularity of pets in the modern era, and the industry that has been built around it. I then focus on another example of the cat's contemporary popularity: their presence on the internet. In particular, I focus on the connections between the role of cats on the internet and my central topic, the phenomenon of the cat café. Finally, I present a brief history of the birth and development of the now-global phenomenon of the cat café.

In my fourth chapter, I present a description and the results of the fieldwork I undertook at the first two cat cafés to open in Montreal, the Café Chat l'Heureux and the Café des Chats. This chapter contains the results of extensive observation, informal discussions, questionnaires, and multiple in-depth interviews. Based on this work, I attempt to draw parallels between these cafés and the historical contexts previously explored. The fifth chapter presents a conclusion, combining the results of this fieldwork with the results of my inquiry into the cat's past.

Coupled with my documentary research, my ethnography of these two sites seeks to define the essential features that characterise the contemporary phenomenon of the cat café. Though I could not exhaust the topic of the symbolic representations of cats and the cat-human relationship in this paper, I have addressed some of the most crucial trends in the evolution of the human-cat relationship, and present examples of the cat's real and perceived influence on human beings. As cat cafés are a very recent phenomenon, dating only as far back as 1998, there exists very little research on this topic. My dissertation thus seeks to fill a void in the current academic corpus, and

represents a step towards better understanding a modern cultural phenomenon that is growing in popularity worldwide.

CHAPTER I

RESEARCH TOPIC

1.1 Context

Of all the domesticated animals, the cat has consistently been one of the most significant, and the human/cat relationship has been “among the most important for most of the last four millennia” (Engels 1). The species we know as the domestic cat first appeared approximately 1.8 million years ago, but it was not until hundreds of thousands of years later that this animal first became domesticated, and appreciated for its skills as a mouser. Unlike many other animals, however, the cat was not easy to tame: it is a very solitary and independent creature, and does not naturally accept human hierarchy the way wolves, sheep, or cows do (Walter 24). The original pact of domestication was straightforward: humans provide comfort and safety to the cats, and in exchange the cats keep down the otherwise dangerous rodent and snake population. Over time, however, this relationship became more complicated, and the cat gradually took on a more than strictly pragmatic importance. Beginning in at least 7500 B.C., the cat began to play important roles in human society, religion, and culture. Their “equally strong power to fascinate or repel” led to great variety in the representations of cats (Dale-Green xv). At times, they were associated with benevolent goddesses, and treated as sacred beings; at others, they were massacred and persecuted, and thought to be servants of evil witches or even incarnations of the Devil himself. The cat has been a particularly popular and resilient symbol throughout its long history of associating with man, and Engels suggests that “for no other animal has there been such a remarkable persistence of pagan associations surviving into modern European folklore and folk custom” (Engels 2).

The most ancient and well-documented example of cat worship dates back to Ancient Egypt. Initially appreciated for their practical benefits as rodent and snake killers, cats later became adored family pets before being worshipped as deities. At the peak of its popularity, the cat was associated with the powerful and popular goddess Bastet; though Egyptians worshipped many animals at this time, the cat was the most sacred of sacred animals (Walter 29). Whilst the Ancient Egyptian religion is the most well-known example of cat worship, other peoples of the Ancient world also gave the creature a unique place in their beliefs. The domesticated cats of Egypt eventually made their way onto ships and caravans, and were transported all over Europe and the Middle East, and along the Silk Road to the Far East (Walter 36). They brought with them elements of Egyptian lore and culture; thus, for example, Bastet became equated with the Greek Artemis, and later the Roman Diana (Engels 32). Many countries to the East also saw cats as very special beings, and these animals indeed appear prominently in the folklore and mythology of various Eastern traditions, notably those of China, Japan, and India (Engels 23). In Asia, as everywhere else, cats were especially appreciated for their skills as mousers; they were also often kept as pampered pets. In Japan especially, cats quickly won the hearts of the locals, rapidly becoming the preferred pets of the Japanese nobility (Altman 106). Today, this country is home to the largest number of cat cafés by far, and it is also responsible for all manner of cat-associated trends and fashions, such as the globally-popular Hello Kitty. In multiple ancient traditions around the world the cat was thus a beloved and sacred animal, valued for its skills as a mouser, and often symbolically associated with healing, domesticity and prosperity. Throughout history, cats have helped humans by “protecting their houses and crops from destruction by rodents, and their persons from death by poisonous snakes”, and they were consequently believed “not only to ward off evil, but to help the oppressed, and bring health and prosperity into

human lives” (Dale-Green 58). These positive attributes will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

However, although many ancient traditions recognised and valued the cat, its symbolic connotations have certainly not been consistently positive. Though the cat’s popularity remained fairly stable in the East during the Middle Ages, its fate would be markedly different in the Christian regions of the West. At first paganism and Christianity peacefully coexisted, and cats were even protected by the early Church (Altman 108). With the crackdown on rural paganism that began in the 11th century, however, the Catholic Church began to condemn these cults’ symbols, amongst which we find the cat, sacred in the worship of goddesses like Bastet, Artemis, Diana, and Freyja (Engels 2). With the Inquisition, the cat’s situation worsened: texts such as Pope Gregory IX’s papal bull the *Vox in Rama* formalised the connection between cats and witchcraft, leading to thousands being condemned and burned alongside their mistresses (Engels 188). In Spain and North Africa, meanwhile, Islamic control protected cats from the hysterical witch hunts that went on in many parts of the Christian world. Indeed, the cat retains its positive connotations in Islam to this day, and was in fact very highly regarded in the Muslim world throughout the mediaeval period. Whereas Christianity believed them to be devoid of a soul, cats were the favourite animal of the Prophet Mohammed, and are guaranteed a place in the Muslim heaven (Walter 40-1).

In both the Ancient world and the Middle Ages, cats were therefore “treated with reserve,” and “looked upon as supernatural beings with whose power, whether divine or demonic, it was dangerous to tamper” (Dale-Green 138). Often the same characteristics of the cat were interpreted in contradictory ways. For instance, the cat’s independent aloofness made it appear “mysterious as well as independent”, which led people to interpret the animals as either divine, superior beings, or as

demonic, shameless beasts (Rogers 4). This was especially true in some Christian ideology, according to which “all animals were God’s creations, just like human beings, but they were subject to the latter”, and the independent, “untameable” attitude of the cat was therefore seen as proof that it did not follow the laws of God (Tesolin 47).

Starting in the Renaissance, cats gradually began to regain popularity in the West, and became a favourite subject for artists. This started an upward trend in the cat’s popularity, and by the end of the 19th century, the cat was once more a beloved household pet. Over the course of the 20th century the popularity of the cat continued to rise exponentially. The late 20th century saw the creation of the first cat café in Taipei, in 1998. In 2005, the phenomenon was exported to Japan, and since then cat cafés have spread around the globe, and can now be found across Asia, Europe, Australia, and North America. Since 2005, the popularity of cats can also be seen in the popular internet phenomenon known as the “lolcat”, an internet meme that combines an image of a cat with a humorous caption (Moss), and in the YouTube cat videos that have become “one of the internet’s most pervasive trends” (Hussey). Many of the characteristics for which cats were so harshly condemned in the Middle Ages, such as their fierce independence, are now idealised instead.

1.2 Research Questions

In my research, I was interested in both the cat’s present role and popularity, and the history leading up to its current status. I explored the similarities and differences that exist between the cat figures of the past, and the cat café cats, and tried to determine what, if any, elements of ancient cat lore are called on in the modern phenomenon of the cat café. Is our modern fascination with cats the resurgence of older beliefs? Do

any similarities, in fact, exist between the cat's current popular status, and ancient archetypes of, and attitudes towards, this animal?

My research questions are thus divided into two distinct, but connected, parts. The first part of my research concerns the ways in which cats have been portrayed throughout the ages, from the earliest days of domestication to the present. Across different historical and geographical settings, I have attempted to discover the variations and constants in representations of the cat, and thus determine its "core values" (Gouabault 63). Considering the many different associations of the cat over the ages, I have chosen not to present an exhaustive study of this animal's symbolic meaning in this section, and have instead focused my research on the themes of "healing" and "domesticity", key features of the modern cat café according to Lorraine Plourde's article "Cat Cafés, Affective Labor, and the Healing Boom in Japan." When I speak of the theme of "healing", I refer to contexts in which cats are presented as being able to promote physical, psychological, and/or spiritual well-being in some way. "Domesticity", meanwhile, refers to the notion of "home" and the feeling of being "at home". I hope therefore to explore different contexts in which cats have served as, physical, spiritual, and emotional healers, and have been symbolically connected with comfort and familiarity. To further narrow down the vast amount of material available on this topic, I focus specifically on the Mediterranean region, the origin of the domesticated cat, and Asia, the birthplace of the cat café phenomenon. My primary research question in this section is therefore: can we identify, in the cat-related myths and representations of the Mediterranean and Asian regions throughout history, the themes of healing and domesticity that are associated with the modern-day cat café according to Plourde? Is the contemporary "cult of the cat" (Dale-Green xvi) connected to the aforementioned concepts of healing and domesticity?

The second component of my research addresses the place of the cat in the contemporary cat café. This section identifies the principal features of Montreal cat cafés and the community that surrounds them: in this context, what are the cat's symbolic attributes, and what is the nature of its relationship with humans? Here too, I am specifically interested in the concepts of healing and domesticity evoked by Plourde, and sought to clarify what (if any) type of healing the café cats provide patrons, and in what way. More of the specific questions I tried to answer in this section appear in Chapter IV.

My research thus seeks to explore the modern perception of cats that is present in Montreal's cat cafés, and compare and contrast it with the ancient mythology of cats, in the hopes of answering the following question: if Montreal cat cafés cats serve as spiritual, psychological or emotional healers, how, and to what extent is this function is connected to their roles in older myths and representations?

1.3 Methodology

My methodology is divided into two distinct types: the first part of my research requires documentary research; in the second, I wish to present an ethnography of two cat cafés in Montreal, the Café des Chats and the Café Chat l'Heureux, and engaged in fieldwork.

To develop Chapters II and III, I explored various different types of documentary sources that discuss the different roles and representations of the cat from the early days of domestication in Egypt, through to the present-day. With the information

gathered in these sources, I present the basis for a “mythanalysis” of the cat. In my second chapter, I specifically investigate the transformations of the cat’s role in symbolic thought up to and through the Middle Ages. Given the considerable body of material already extant on this topic, rather than detailing the entirety of this long relationship, I have opted to present a few significant specific cases originating in the Mediterranean region, and East Asia.² In my third chapter, I present various elements concerning the contemporary status of the cat in Western society, notably the beginnings of animal rights movements, the cat’s status as a popular pet, and the cat’s dominating presence on the internet. I also introduce the phenomenon of the cat café.

In my fourth chapter, I present an ethnography³ of the first two cat cafés to open in Montreal, in September 2014. For this part of my research I received ethical certification. My primary method of investigation in this fieldwork was observation. Specifically, I observed the different interactions that take place between the cats, the various humans present, and the environment. As well as observing the various cats and humans, I furthermore paid close attention to the physical layout of the café, and took note of the physical elements of the cafés with reference to domesticity, comfort, and healing.

As well as extensive observation, I also used several other investigative methods to understand the cat café phenomenon. Firstly, I photographed the cats and the different “zones” of the cafés. Furthermore, I administered anonymous questionnaires to gain general information about the café customers, and their views on cat cafés and cats. Finally, I engaged in informal and formal interviews with the other patrons, staff, and

² See Engels, Walter and Tesolin for a more in-depths discussion of the historical evolution of the human/cat relationship.

³ Hammersley and Atkinson define an ethnography as being “an integration of both first-hand empirical investigation and the theoretical and comparative interpretation of social organization and culture” (Hammersley and Atkinson 1). In this case the social organisation I am investigating is the Montreal cat cafés.

cat café owners.⁴ In my interviews, I covered a number of topics related to cat cafés and cats more generally. In the interviews with the owners, I focused on their goals in opening a cat café in Montreal, and their observations about the cats and their customers. With the patrons, I primarily tried to determine in what ways regular customers viewed the bond they were able to develop with the cat café cats, and to what degree there exists a human community surrounding the cat cafés. The existence of such a community is a crucial element in demonstrating that the café cats serve as a “social lubricant” (Grandgeorge and Hausberger 398) and as a “social catalyst” (Piette 95)⁵. Further details about the nature of this fieldwork appear in Chapter IV.

1.4 Sources and Key Concepts

In order to develop my topic, I turned to a number of sources and concepts, stemming from a variety of disciplines. The different components of my research required different types of sources.

1.4.1 Mythanalysis

In exploring the historical transformations in the cat’s role throughout history, I attempted to present the basis for a partial “mythanalysis” of the symbol of cat. A “mythanalysis” is a term invented by Gilbert Durand to designate the sociological analysis of the myths and symbols of a particular culture and epoch (Gouabault 62). In this, I was especially inspired by Emmanuel Gouabault’s treatment of the

⁴ I have included appendices with my recruitment poster, the questionnaire, and the specific questions I asked the owners, staff, and regular patrons that I interviewed.

⁵ These terms will be defined in the following section.

“phénomène dauphin” in his article “Pour une mythanalyse des relations anthropozoologiques. L'étude du phénomène dauphin”. Though the cat and the dolphin are very different animals, the analysis Gouabault undertakes bears similarities to my own research into the “cat phenomenon”. Like the dolphin, the cat is a polysemous symbol, which is to say it is constituted by the link between “un symbolisant et une multitude de symbolisés, à la fois conscients et inconscients” (Gouabault 62). As with the dolphin, modernity seems to have developed a fascination with the cat, and both animals are indeed extremely popular today. Both animals have also been important figures throughout history in cultures around the world⁶.

To develop a mythanalysis of the cat one must seek out the variations and constants in representations of the cat (the “symbolisant”) across different historical and geographical settings, in the hopes of identifying the “principales valeurs constitutives de ces figures” (Gouabault 63). Gouabault proposes two approaches that are useful in developing a mythanalysis: Philippe Descola’s “comparatisme anthropologique”, which is used to reflect the transcultural nature of practices and representations, and Robert Delort’s “zoohistory”, which can be defined as the search for differences and similarities in practices and representations over time in a given culture (Gouabault 62). The first is thus used to explore phenomena that span multiple cultures, whereas the latter is interested in their historical evolution. As I was primarily interested in exploring the historical evolution of the roles and archetypes associated with the cat, I was mostly inspired by Delort’s “zoohistorical” approach.

⁶ Like the dolphin, the cat is also a crucial element in modern economy (see the economy surrounding the “phénomène de l’animal de compagnie” in Gouabault and Burton-Jeangros), in science (see Alger and Alger’s articles about the behaviour of cats), in the arts (see Rogers and Nikolajeva), and in political movements (see Franklin and White).

To construct this mythanalysis of the cat, I consulted a number of works that explore the topic of the human/cat relationship in history. There exist many books and articles on the topic of our historical relationship with the cat, from both academia and popular culture. Often, however, the contents of these two types of text overlap. Furthermore, though the latter texts may not necessarily represent the “true” situation of the cat in the pre-modern world, they do nonetheless reveal what people *think* and *thought* about the cat. These sources thus contribute to the mythologising of the cat in and of themselves, and not only reflect, but also impact, popular beliefs about this animal. Moreover, many of these texts, especially the earlier ones, serve as a “defence” of the cat, and are significant in their reliance on ancient lore in justifying a positive image. With respect to scholarly sources, my research made particular use of historian Donald Engels’s *Classical Cats: The Rise and Fall of the Sacred Cat*; Virgine Walter’s doctoral thesis “Contribution à l’étude de l’évolution historique du chat : ses relations avec l’homme de l’Antiquité à nos jours”; Laura Tesolin’s thesis “Cats: A Survey of Their Relationship to Humans from Their First Encounter to the Present Day”; Maria Nikolajeva’s article “Devils, Demons, Familiars, Friends: Toward a Semiotics of Literary Cats”; and Katharine Rogers’ *The Cat and the Human Imagination*. In his book, Engels attempts to retrace the evolution and roles of the cat in the classical world, focusing on Ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome. Walter and Tesolin’s theses, meanwhile, present a historical analysis of the place of the cat in human society from Antiquity to the modern age, and focus on the same regions and historical periods that I am interested in. Literature professors Maria Nikolajeva and Katharine Rogers, on the other hand, both focus on the cat as a character and symbol in literature throughout the ages, exploring the animal’s role in written productions, such as folklore, fairy-tales, and novels. The way the cat is portrayed in literature clearly reflects the perception of the animal at the time it is written, and these texts thus serve to flesh out the image of the cat throughout history.

Outside of academic texts, there also exists a wealth of popular non-fiction on the subject of the cat. Amongst these, early 20th century writer and photographer Carl Van Vechten's *The Tiger in the House* was particularly useful, dealing with the symbol of the cat from various perspectives, notably the place of the cat in art, music, theatre and literature, as well its role in folklore and the occult. I also used Patricia Dale-Green's *Cult of the Cat* and folklorists Hausman and Hausman's *The Mythology of Cats: Feline Legend and Lore Through the Ages* in this regard. Rather than attempting to present the historical evolution of the cat, both these books focus on its various symbolic interpretations, and thus cover a wider array of historical and geographical contexts. Dale-Green divides her work thematically, dealing first with the positive, then negative, connotations of the cat as a cultural symbol. For the purposes of my research, I was particularly interested in the positive associations she presents in her section entitled "The White Cat", especially in her presentation of the cat as "a healer". Hausman and Hausman's *The Mythology of Cats* is also divided thematically, though it notably neglects to discuss negative roles of the cat. In this book, they present a number of cat archetypes that are useful in understanding the cat café phenomenon, such as "the healing cat," "the caretaker cat" and "the working cat." There are a number of other authors that also develop the nature of ancient cat archetypes, such as journalist Roberta Altman who presents a general overview of all aspects of the "cat question" in her *The Quintessential Cat*. In *Planet Cat: A Catalog*, Choron et al. similarly cover a wide variety of cat-related topics, from the origins of the species to famous cats in history, art, and literature.

Finally, in justifying the inclusion of this historical section I turn to Eric Baratay's article "Les socio-anthropo-logues et les animaux". Baratay argues that a historical overview of the different roles and archetypes of the cat is relevant to understanding the animal's contemporary status, because "l'histoire peut fournir des données difficiles à établir ou à consolider en travaillant sur le présent" (Baratay 15).

1.4.2 Cats on the Internet

There are a number of academic articles covering the history and impact of YouTube cat videos and cat memes. The subject has recently attracted the attention of various scholars and critics, who have analysed how and why this form of “low art” has reached iconic status. In a conference paper “I Can Haz an Internet Aesthetic?!? LOLCats and the Digital Marketplace”, presented at the *Northeast Popular/American Culture Association Conference*, Leah Shafer, an assistant professor of Media and Society studies, discusses the popularity of internet cat videos, and connects the phenomenon to feminist media studies (Shafer “I Can Haz” 2). Shafer also addresses the phenomenon of internet cat videos in her article “Cat Videos and the Superflat Cinema of Attractions”, in which she conducts a close reading of two cat videos, and concludes that “online video spectators are oriented toward affective connections with commercial interfaces” (Shafer “Cat Videos”). I furthermore consulted an article by Radha O’Meara, from the University of Melbourne’s School of Culture and Communication, entitled “Do Cats Know They Rule YouTube? Surveillance and the Pleasures of Cat Videos”. In this article O’Meara addresses the impact of internet cat videos and concludes that the popularity of these videos, as opposed to videos of other animals, is due to the particular attributes of cats.

Some authors furthermore argue that there is a depth and complexity to the seemingly simple content of cat videos and memes, and suggest that the positive psychological effects that pet cats have on their owners also holds true for cat images viewed online. Jonathan Gitlin’s article “Watching Cats on the Internet Is Good for You” falls into this category, and addresses the scientific research into the psychological effects of internet cat videos. He notably presents the “Emergency Kitten hypothesis”, which argues that viewing cat videos delivers a dose of well-being to the user, lessening his or her stress levels. Finally, I also consulted articles by Caitlin Dewey, Laura Moss

and Matthew Hussey. To explain the popularity of cat videos and memes Dewey calls on the German researcher Dolf Zillman's "mood-management theory" which suggests that "[p]eople gravitate toward pieces of content [...] that will either (a) make them feel better or (b) maintain their current good moods" (Dewey "Fascinating"). This use of "mood-management theory" in the context of cat videos and memes provides a framework for understanding the healing potential of online cats.

1.4.3 Ethnography of the Cat Cafés

As cat cafés are a recent phenomenon still in the process of definition, there is a fairly limited amount of pre-existing research on the topic, and on the human-animal bond that is manifested therein. There exist a number of newspaper articles, blogs, and various internet websites that address the topic of cat cafés, such as an article posted in the Japanese Lifestyle and Entertainment magazine *Nikkei Trendy*, which presents various useful statistics concerning the cat café phenomenon in Japan. However, Lorraine Plourde's article "Cat Cafés, Affective Labor, and the Healing Boom in Japan" is the only academic article on the topic to date, exploring the healing aspect of Japan's cat cafés, and presenting fieldwork undertaken in several Japanese cat cafés. In addition to Plourde, I made use of other articles and ethnographies from the growing field of anthropozoology to complement my research.

1.4.3.1 Plourde

As the only academic work on the subject thus far, Plourde's article was absolutely essential in my development of the cat café phenomenon. On a basic level, this article presents a historical timeline of cat cafés, but it is also useful in describing specific elements of the phenomenon in the Japanese context. Plourde also helped to shape my methodology, through its detailed description of fieldwork undertaken in a number of Japanese cat cafés. She suggests many of the elements that I chose to focus on in my observations, and proposes questions that are equally valid in the Montreal context. Plourde rejects the "materialist" arguments often given to explain the popularity of Japan's cat café, that is to say that "Japanese apartments typically do not allow pets, thus cat lovers have no choice but to go to cat cafés to fulfill their feline yearnings" (Plourde 118). Although this undoubtedly explains part of the cafés' popularity, Plourde suggests instead that the main reason many people frequent cat cafés in Japan is "to be healed" (Plourde 119).

In her article, Plourde explores the *means* of this cat healing, and concludes it is based around "the idea of the cat as a sensory object" (Plourde 120). Of particular interest is her suggestion that cat café cats are engaged in a type of "immaterial labour" referred to as "affective labour": this type of labour produces "a feeling of ease, well-being, excitement, or passion" and "involves the 'production and manipulation of affect and requires (virtual or actual) human contact'"; it is referred to as "immaterial" because its products are intangible (Plourde 116). In the cat café setting, Plourde argues that affect is produced and manipulated through the efforts of the cats, whose work produces "feelings of home, domesticity, and healing for patrons" (Plourde 129). This concept of "affective labour" was crucial in my own understanding of the cat café phenomenon.

Furthermore, Plourde argues that a large part of the healing effects of cat cafés comes from the café setting itself, “through the highly controlled and staged ambience of the cafés, which aim to evoke a domestic feel that is not only calm and gentle on the senses but also *familiar*” (Plourde 121). Plourde describes Japanese cat cafés as “highly domestic spaces” that seek to provide the “feeling and ambience of being in one’s apartment” through the use of carefully selected furniture, lighting, music and reading materials (Plourde 116). She suggests that cat cafés actively seek to create a feeling of “intimate domesticity,” making patrons feel like they are at “*their* home,” interacting with “what might be *their* cat” (Plourde 123). In this way, cafés present a setting and temporality positioned outside the experience of everyday life, which is just as crucial as the cats in producing the desired *iyashi* (healing) of Japanese cat cafés. This notion of therapeutic domesticity is a key focus of my research into cat cafés in the Montreal setting.

Plourde also argues that the combination of affective labour and domesticity present in cat cafés “helps solidify and create intimacy within the space, both among patrons and between patrons and cats” (Plourde 131). In this regard, the cats’ labour is crucial in developing not only patron-cat relationships, but also patron-patron bonds. Plourde suggests that, often, the “café’s primary purpose [is] encouraging and nurturing relationships between patrons” and that in this case cats serve as “intermediaries that bring patrons together” (Plourde 125). Plourde tells us that the relationships thus created between patrons are often “just as significant as the relationships that develop between patrons and cats” (Plourde 131). The healing that the cats provide in the cat café setting is thus more complex than simple co-presence: “the putative healing qualities of cats are integral to their ability to facilitate and create social (and interspecies) relations among cats and patrons” (Plourde 117). The cats thus appear to serve as a “social lubricant” and as a “social catalyst”, concepts that will be discussed

in the following section, and that were crucial in shaping my understanding of the means of the cats' healing.

Plourde finally highlights the cafés' "extensive packaging and marketing of each cat as a distinct and complex individual" (Plourde 126). The cats' individualisation is in fact "heightened by the anthropomorphic presentation and staging to a point where they become imbued with human attributes and interests" (Plourde 128). The cats' healing potential is crucially connected to the individuality of their appearances and personalities: the "commodification and packaging of cats within the space of the café as affective objects for material and psychical investment [...] intends a wholly different engagement and interaction with animals" from traditional forms of animal-assisted therapy (Plourde 121). Plourde argues that with the cat café the traditional therapeutic model of the companion animal relationship is "tipped on its head, for the café patron can only interact with the cat through the medium of commodity exchange" (Plourde 126). Plourde indicates that many cat café patrons nonetheless view the café as providing "a form of pet therapy" (Plourde 121). Plourde summarises the "therapeutic" experience provided to the cat café patrons as their being "able to perform the role of nurturer and quasi-companion for a [unique] cat they can imagine is their own, in a space they can imagine to be their home" (Plourde 132).

1.4.3.2 Anthropozoology

In constructing my ethnography, I furthermore turned to a number of writings from the growing field of anthropozoology – the study of the relationship between animals and humans. The academic interest in the history of animals and the human/animal relationship is a fairly new phenomenon that has primarily developed in the past few

decades. Anthropolzoological interactions and relationships are an important topic today, and have, in fact, become one of the “grands débats de société” (Piette 91). I consulted a number of texts from this growing field to better understand the relationship formed between humans and cats in the Montreal cat cafés.

I was, firstly, interested in an article by sociologists Alger and Alger entitled “Beyond Mead: Symbolic Interaction between Humans and Felines”. This article presents fieldwork involving pet cats and their caregivers. It seeks to determine whether or not cats are able to engage in “symbolic interaction” and concludes that “there is growing evidence that symbolic interaction is widely distributed throughout the animal kingdom” (Alger and Alger “Beyond” 65). In particular, Alger and Alger depict cats as individuals with unique personalities, in a way that echoes their hyper-personification in the cat café setting. In this article, Alger and Alger furthermore define the “satisfactory” relationship between human and cat as being one in which the human “saw that cat as initiating the interactions between them as often as they did – that is, reciprocating their love and friendship” (Alger and Alger “Beyond” 77). This is a definition I sought to validate in the cat café setting. Finally, Alger and Alger notably portray cats as “authentic family members”, a category useful for understanding cat café cats and their “pet”-like characteristics (Alger and Alger “Beyond” 77). As the category most similar to “cat café cat”, I explored many of the characteristics of the “pet”, and specifically the “pet cat” described by Alger and Alger.

In understanding the nature of the cat café setting itself, I made use of the notion of a “communauté hybride” that appears in articles by both Baratay and Albert Piette. This is a term used to refer to a community composed of both humans and animals members, “où se partagent des sens, des intérêts, des sentiments, où s’échafaude une sociabilité interspécifique complexe” (Baratay 16). Albert Piette suggests using the

concept of a “hybrid community” to designate a setting in which “l’association interspécifique entre les hommes et les animaux” is based on “des intérêts réciproques et des échanges mutuels” (Piette 91). The definition of a “hybrid community” clearly reflects the situation of the cat café. I was specifically interested in understanding the nature of the “mutual exchanges” taking place between cats and humans in this setting, and the “complex” interspecies relationships that develop there.

In considering the café cats as “affective labourers”, it is useful to bear in mind the “instrumentalisation” of animals that Antoine Doré decries in his article “Promenade dans les mondes vécus. Les animaux peuvent-ils être des interlocuteurs de l’enquête socio-anthropologique?” As workers, there is indeed the distinct possibility that the café cats are being exploited and treated as strictly utilitarian benefits (Doré 35). While the cafés are a long way from battery farms or clinical laboratories, and seem to emphasise the cat’s nature as a unique individual with agency, one must not forget that cat cafés are a for-profit business, with the cats being the star attraction: these animals are thus, inevitably, being used to a certain degree.

Meanwhile, Adrian Franklin and Robert White’s article “Animals and Modernity: Changing Human-animal Relations, 1949-98” considers larger trends in anthropozoology. Franklin and White describe the general trends in the human/animal relationship over the past five decades, and tell us that they are characterised by “rises in zoocentrism and sentimentality” (Franklin and White 235). “Zoocentrism” is “the recognition of animals as full or partial moral subjects” (Franklin 223). It is characterised by the utilitarian usage of animals fading, and being replaced by a “stress on education, protection and empathy”; furthermore, companion animals, such as cats and dogs, now often serve as “surrogates in the absence or loss of human sociability and emotional engagement,” rather than as “toys, ornaments or

amusements” (Franklin and White 224). The notion of rising zoocentrism serves to situate the cat café phenomenon in a wider context, while the notion of animals as “social surrogates”, ties in with the concepts of “social lubricant” and ‘social catalyst’ that characterise the cats’ role in the cat café.

Another useful article that presents a historical evolution of anthropozoological relationships is Emmanuel Gouabault and Claudine Burton-Jeangros’ “L’ambivalence des relations humain-animal : une analyse socio-anthropologique du monde contemporain.” It focuses on the ambivalence between zoocentric and anthropocentric trends and confirms Franklin and White’s conclusion that contemporary society is characterised by rising zoocentrism. Gouabault and Burton-Jeangros’ article is furthermore interesting in the different animal categories it proposes. Though there is no “cat café cat” category, these cats are closest to the most zoocentric and anthropomorphised category, the “pet.” Pets are anthropomorphised to a high degree, and viewed as complex individuals with whom it is possible to develop a unique relationship: this echoes the “packaging and marketing” of the cat café cats. A key difference between pets and the cat café cats, however, is their perceived “usefulness”. Gouabault and Burton-Jeangros describe the pet as being a “useless”, idle animal (Gouabault and Burton-Jeangros 302). The café cats are certainly not “useless”. They, at the very least provide the café owners with their livelihood, and possibly also serve as “affective labourers”. Nevertheless, the “pet phenomenon” provides a useful foil for understanding the cat café cats.

Gouabault et al.’s “Genuine Zoocentrism or Dogged Anthropocentrism? On the Personification of Animal Figures in the News” proposes multiple levels of personification, helpful in understanding the situation of the cats in cat cafés. This article notably suggests that some animals are hyper-personified to the point of being “starified”, a process which focuses on the personal characteristics and private lives

of animal figures in the hopes of increasing “the potential for emotional connection and proximity, and makes the treatment of general interest subjects more concrete, more available” (Gouabault et al. 78). These hyper-personified animals in fact appear as “superindividuals” that “encompass all the characteristics of a modern individual able to tell its story and to formulate an identity through it” (Gouabault et al. p.84). This is done, however, by “jettisoning most of the animals’ characteristics in the process” (Gouabault et al. 94). Gouabault et al’s discussion of hyper-personification is particularly relevant to both the way internet cat celebrities are treated, and to the manner in which each cat in the cat cafés is presented as a unique individual.

Finally, some authors have tried to address the *animal’s* perspective in understanding human/animal interactions. Kara White’s article “And Say the Cat Responded? Getting Closer to the Feline Gaze” specifically proposes a method for better understanding cat subjectivities. The fieldwork described in White’s article takes place in a “hybrid community” which, like the cat cafés, houses and cares for a certain number of cats, and her method of understanding the cats’ perspective is thus equally applicable to the cat café setting.

1.4.3.3 Animal-assisted therapy

When I refer to the topic of healing, I am in part referring to the tradition of animal-assisted therapy (AAT) which dates back to the Middle Ages and has recently become very popular in nursing homes, psychiatric hospitals, and schools (Mitchell). While I found a number of sources on this topic, only a few addressed my specific area of interest, the role of the cat as an aid in therapy from a social sciences perspective. These articles were, in particular, useful in understanding the cat café as a place where AAT takes place.

One such article is Marine Grandgeorge and Martine Hausberger's "Human-animal Relationships: From Daily Life to Animal-Assisted Therapies". This text gives a definition of animal-assisted therapy, whilst emphasising its highly variable nature. AAT indeed covers a wide variety of practices, goals, intended audiences, and animals used (Grandgeorge and Hausberger 400). Grandgeorge and Hausberger's article details the various ways in which animal therapy can take place, from animals serving as a "social lubricant" which "increases the chances of social contact with other people", making this contact more frequent and less stressful, to them providing "a source and direction for attention", helpful for people who feel overwhelmed by social situations (Grandgeorge and Hausberger 398-401). Finally, this article asserts that, rather than the frequency of interactions with an animal, "it is the quality of the bond established" that is crucial to successful therapy (Grandgeorge and Hausberger 402). Grandgeorge and Hausberger are thus essential in developing the means of the cat café cats' "affective labour".

Jérôme Michalon's article "Les Relations Anthropolozologiques à L'épreuve Du Travail Scientifique. L'exemple De L'animal Dans Les Pratiques De Soins" also deals with the topic of AAT, presenting a brief history of the phenomenon as well as its definition, and likewise emphasising the highly variable nature of its procedures and results. Michalon furthermore suggests that, in some cases, psychological therapy functions solely through the "simple situation de co-présence" (Michalon "Relations" 80). He also provides an interesting theory originating with James Serpell, which suggests "la projection anthropomorphique comme l'élément essentiel [qui explique] les effets positifs du contact animalier" (Michalon "Relations" 83). This ties in directly with Plourde's suggestion that the anthropomorphised nature of the cat café cats is a crucial component of their healing effects. Finally, Michalon also tells us of the importance of belief in the therapeutic impact of animals: the fact that people are

“convaincus que l’animal ‘apporte quelque chose en plus’” is often, he suggests, the very reason that these animals *do* succeed in healing them (Michalon “Relations” 80).

Though not dealing directly with cats or AAT, Albert Piette’s “Entre l’homme et le chien: Pour une ethnographie du fait socio-animal” expounds the potentially therapeutic benefits of the special relationship between man and dog, stating that it can generate feelings of calm, serenity and relaxation (Piette 95). He furthermore adds another dimension to the aforementioned theory that animals are often therapeutic by serving as social substitutes and as a social lubricant. Specifically, Piette describes dogs as a “social catalyst”, implying that they not only make interaction between humans easier, as does a social lubricant, but that they can also, in fact, be the reason such interaction is taking place in the first place (Piette 95). Though he is referring to the dog/human relationship in this article, Piette’s observations can be extended to the human/cat relationship, which bears many similarities to the former. The cat is indeed the only other animal to have undergone a similar, long process of domestication, and to have reached comparable levels of familiarity with humans, despite suffering from the same drawbacks, notably the lack of a common language (Piette 92). I was therefore interested in demonstrating that Montreal cat café cats serve as a social catalyst in the same way as the pet dogs described in this article.

Finally, to understand how the cat serves as a therapy animal in the cat café context, I also consulted a number of online articles, such as those by Steven Bancarz and Eve-Angeline Mitchell, which discuss the science behind the therapeutic potential of animals. Bancarz’s article argues that cats are “holistic healers”, curing not just physical ailments, but also psychological malaise (Bancarz). Mitchell furthermore tells us that “having pets can make us healthier overall, but especially when it comes

to reducing stress levels” (Mitchell)⁷. Indeed, both Laura Moss and Matthew Hussey’s articles quote a 2003 Swiss study that found that cats are, in fact, “more capable than spouses at alleviating negative moods” (Moss). Moss’s article furthermore suggests that what makes the cat unique as a therapy animal is that people often ascribe specific human traits to this animal (Moss). This echoes Michalon’s suggestion that part of the therapeutic impact of cats, and animals in general, derives from “anthropomorphic projection”.

1.4.3.4 Other ethnographies

Finally, in preparing my ethnography of Montreal cat cafés, I made use of a number of other ethnographies dealing with “hybrid communities” in the field of anthropozoology. Though some of these studies deal with very different settings to the cat café, they nonetheless helped me develop my methodology and investigative focus. I was inspired by, notably, Plourde’s aforementioned ethnographic work in Japanese cat cafés; the study of a no-kill cat shelter by Alger and Alger (“Cat Culture, Human Culture: An Ethnographic Study of a Cat Shelter”); Yves Delaporte’s ethnography of the cat population in the Père-Lachaise cemetery in Paris (“Les Chats Du Père-Lachaise”); sociologist and political anthropologist Jérôme Michalon’s ethnography of an SPA shelter in Loire (“Fabriquer L’animal De Compagnie. Ethnographie D’un Refuge SPA”); and White’s fieldwork in the cat room of an animal shelter in “And Say the Cat Responded? Getting Closer to the Feline Gaze”.

Although Delaporte’s ethnography contrasts greatly with my own, focusing on the cat population in the Père-Lachaise cemetery in Paris, it nevertheless concerns a

⁷ Mitchell affirms that contact with pets leads to the release of several “feel-good” chemicals, namely oxytocin, serotonin and dopamine (Mitchell).

community in which anthropozoological interactions between cats and humans take place on a regular basis, and in which the cats represent a role that does not quite correspond to any of the categories Gouabault and Burton-Jeangros propose. Delaporte's article is primarily significant in its descriptions of the human community surrounding the cemetery cats, and in its description of the cats' territory. Delaporte's article is furthermore notable in its detailed analysis of the territory in question, dividing the cemetery into different "zones" with distinct function, an approach I chose to imitate.

By comparison, the setting described in Alger and Alger's article "Cat Culture, Human Culture: An Ethnographic Study of a Cat Shelter" bears many similarities to the cat cafés I studied. Like the cafés, the no-kill shelter they present is a unique hybrid community that is "neither natural colony nor traditional household" (Alger and Alger "Cat" 206). Both establishments thus face many of the same challenges that come from caring for multiple cats in a relatively small setting; both are, furthermore, interested in promoting cat welfare. The cat shelter, like the cat cafés, "provides a non-threatening atmosphere in which the animals can relax and be themselves" and in which the cats are the central preoccupation (Alger and Alger "Cat" 202). Alger and Alger's in-depth study of a no-kill cat shelter is also significant in presenting an environment in which a true community appears to have formed between cats and volunteers, the former treating the latter as members of their own species. The no-kill cat shelter, however, differs from the cat café, in that the former is a non-profit organisation seeking to house homeless cats; the latter is a for-profit organisation, and the cafés for the most part represent the forever home of the cats. Thus, although these environments are similar to cat cafés, the role of the cats in these settings differs significantly.

Finally, Michalon's ethnography of an SPA shelter in Loire describes a setting with many similarities to both the no-kill shelter described by Alger and Alger and the cat café. As well as describing the historical evolution of animal rights' movements, Michalon's article provides a fascinating depiction of an SPA shelter, an organisation that, like the café, takes care of a number of animals. Despite the fact the SPA is responsible for the deaths of thousands of animals, it is an organisation that professes a great interest in animal welfare, and Michalon tells us the very design of the shelter is set up to subconsciously encourage "l'accomplissement d'un bien" (Michalon "Fabriquer" 167). The image of the cat in the SPA stands in stark contrast to the image of the cat in the cat café: unlike the "hyper-personified" figures of the cat café, the shelter animals tend to be unnamed, anonymous, and are generally designated by their physical characteristics and prominent behavioural traits (Michalon "Fabriquer" 174). This contrast provides a useful point for reflection when exploring the individualisation of the cats at the cat cafés as compared to other animals. Like Delaporte, Michalon also divides the shelter into differentiated zones; taking it one step further, however, Michalon provides very personal descriptions and symbolic analyses of the various elements of the SPA. In particular, he focuses on the sensory experience of the shelter, describing not only its intense visual characteristics, but also its sounds and smells (Michalon "Fabriquer" 168). Michalon's emphasis on his personal impressions of the shelter is particularly useful in portraying the affective experience of the environment; an emphasis I intend to mirror in exploring the therapeutic potential of cat cafés.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF THE HUMAN/CAT RELATIONSHIP

The original pact in the early days of the cat's domestication was fairly straightforward: humans provide comfort and safety to the cats, and in exchange the cats keep down the otherwise dangerous rodent and snake population (Walter 24). The pact furthermore entailed "a reasonable expectation by the farmer that the cat will do no real harm to the other animals, or at least do more good than harm" (Engels 72). The early domestication of cats has been attributed to "commensalism, where both species (human and animal) have mutual benefits (*e.g.* eradication of rodents for the former, heat or additional food for the latter) without a need for particular bonding" (Grandgeorge and Hausberger 397). Unlike many other domesticated animals, such as the dog, which was trained to help humans in a variety of ways, the cat was initially "used solely as a predator of small animals" (Engels 21). Over time, the relationship between human beings and cats became more complicated, and the cat gradually gained more than a strictly practical importance. In particular, the cat has been imbued with religious and symbolic significance around the world throughout human history. Especially in the Ancient World, cats played a pivotal role in both black and white magic (Dale-Green xv). Though the Ancient Egyptian religion and, more specifically, the goddess Bastet, is the most well-known example of cat worship, other peoples of the Ancient World also gave the creature a unique place in their beliefs. In this section, I focus on two main geographical areas, the Mediterranean and Asia, the origin of the domesticated cat and the cat café phenomenon respectively. Rather than detail the entirety of this long relationship, I have opted to present a few significant specific cases in the history of the human/cat relationship.

2.1 Mediterranean Region

2.1.1 The Cat in Ancient Egypt

A section on Egypt is absolutely crucial to any study of the domesticated cat, “since many later characteristics of the animal in iconography, symbolism, religion, and folklore have their origins in that culture” (Engels 18). What’s more, the Egyptian perception of the cat had a “profound effect on the culture and religion of the West” that followed (Engels 32). It is in Ancient Egypt that the cat was “first endowed with archetypal power” and many of these archetypes would reoccur throughout history (Dale-Green 137).

Though it is hard to pinpoint with certainty the origins of feline domestication, it is widely believed to have begun with the Egyptians during the Neolithic period when agriculture developed in the valley of the Nile (Walter 25), though recent discoveries suggest that there may have been a secondary centre of domestication somewhere in the Fertile Crescent (Engels 45). Possibly the earliest remains of a domesticated cat, dating back to around 6000-7500 B.C., were found in a tomb on Cyprus in 1983: as there are no fossil records of wildcats on the island, this cat must have been brought over from somewhere else, thus situating the animal’s domestication at an even earlier date (Altman 105). Hausman and Hausman suggest that the powers of felines were in fact recognised much earlier than Ancient Egypt, and that “cat medicine and divination existed in the Holocene epoch” (Hausman and Hausman 8). Regardless of the domesticated cat’s “true” origin, it is without a doubt the Egyptians who most developed and finalised the process of domestication.

The most well-known and well-documented example of cat worship also dates back to Ancient Egypt, and Dale-Green suggests that this civilisation in fact possessed the

“only fully-developed cult of the cat” in history (Dale-Green 1). Though the animal lacked a “strong cult early in Egyptian history”, its religious popularity would grow exponentially, and the worship of the cat would eventually surpass that of any other animal (Engels 25). Initially, the cat was appreciated for its role in killing rodents, the main threat to the Egyptians’ food source, grain. Another factor in the cat’s early popularity was their ability to kill venomous snakes (Dale-Green 27).

Over time, cats also gained an important religious significance within Ancient Egypt. One of the Egyptian pantheon’s most powerful and popular deities was Bastet, the cat goddess. The first artistic representations of Bastet date back to approximately 2000 B.C. (Nikolajeva “Cat” 268). It was not, however, until the 22nd Dynasty, over a thousand years later, that she would become “one of the most revered divinities in the Egyptian pantheon” (Engels 29). Engels suggests that the reason these animal cults experienced an “upsurge in popularity” from the Late Period onwards may have been because of the Egyptians’ nationalist values in “a period of frequent foreign invasion and occupation”: as animal cults were considered typically and uniquely Egyptian, the Egyptians “may have wished to express their national and cultural identity through this form of worship” (Engels 26). At the peak of Bastet’s popularity, temples to the goddess doubling as cat sanctuaries were found scattered all over Egypt (Nikolajeva “Devils” 249). The most famous of these was the city of Bubastis, described by Herodotus in 450 B.C., which became the capital of Egypt during the 22nd Dynasty (Engels 29). The temple was maintained through the donations of pilgrims, and the sale of various amulets and sculptures depicting cats (Walter 34). Herodotus tells us the temple featured a large live cat population, maintained by pilgrims’ donations, as well as a giant statue of Bastet to which offerings were made daily (Walter 33). Herodotus furthermore tells us that the celebration of Bastet was “the chief solemn assembly of the year, the most popular festival in the country, with

the greatest attendance” (Lawrence 630). It was held annually in the spring until the year 400 A.D., and consisted of songs, dances, and cat sacrifices (Walter 34).

Though Bastet was connected to the cat very early on, this did not, at first, “confer special protection for its species as a whole”; however, by the Late Period all cats were considered to be “potential epiphanies of divinities” (Engels 25). Diodorus tells us that these animals were in fact considered so sacred that the killing of a cat carried a mandatory death penalty (Engels 39). He recounts the example of a Roman chariot that accidentally trampled an Egyptian cat to death: even though the chariot driver was a “member of a Roman delegation to Alexandria”, nothing could prevent the enraged people from executing him (Sax 58). The worship of Bastet, however, also led to the death of thousands of cats, as can be seen in the remains discovered at Bubastis: two thirds of the cats found there were killed intentionally, by strangulation, a broken neck, or a crushed skull (Walter 35). These sacrifices were not taken lightly, and the murdered cat was believed to be “honored in becoming a gift to the goddess”: the sacrificed cat didn’t really die, but rather “became part of a spiritual force dedicated to augmenting the goddess’s power” (Engels 37).

Not all Egyptian cats were considered to be on the same level, and Engels distinguishes the “Temple Cat” from other cats living in the temple precinct, and those in Egyptian homes. Though all “received special treatment and veneration”, only the Temple Cat was believed to be a direct manifestation of the goddess Bastet (Engels 26). The task of caring for these temple cats was deemed so important that those responsible were exempt from compulsory labour (Lawrence 629). The reasons for the veneration of these cats were explained to Diodorus as such: “the priests responded that each one had performed some noble service in the past and many in the present” (Engels 40). It is clear, therefore, that the sacred cats were believed to *provide* something, to *aid* the devotee in specific ways.

The cult of Bastet was specifically “connected with joy and merrymaking” (Nikolajeva “Cat” 168). She was furthermore “the guardian of cats, women, children, love, fertility, birth, music, and dance” (Choron et al. 12). Bastet was generally represented as a woman with a cat’s head, and this connection between cats and women reappears throughout history – Hausman and Hausman, for instance, suggest that the cult of Bastet could be the origin of the “modern notion of cats as being female (dogs are male)” (Hausman and Hausman 1). This goddess was also believed to be the protector of the family and the home, and was thus associated with the concept of domesticity, and the notions of comfort and safety. She was specifically “the goddess of motherhood and fertility”, and the guardian of pregnant women, who protected babies against disease and scorpion bites (Walter 32). Fertility was an especially important concept in the Ancient World, with regards to not only the harvest, but also human beings: at the time, the death rate was extremely high, and life expectancies extremely short (Engels 31). This connection to mothers and children would reappear with later cat-related deities such as Artemis, Diana, and Isis, and even persists today (Engels 30-1). To ensure Bastet’s protection, families would tattoo a cat on the arms of the children, and certain magicians even injected themselves with sacred cat blood as a method of preventing disease (Walter 32).

Cats were also crucially connected to the afterlife: they helped devotees on their journey from this world to the next, and they also “protected the dead from attack in the hereafter” (Dale-Green 28)⁸. As such, these animals were inscribed on some of the *utchats* (the Egyptian symbol of the all-seeing eye) that guarded the dead, alongside bronze statues of cats (Dale-Green 50). Cats were a feature of “blessed weddings and births, and were always present at deaths”, and thus a part of all the

⁸ An example of this can be found in a painting in the tomb of the famous pharaoh Tutankhamun, in which he is depicted as being led to the underworld on the back of a “feline steed” (Dale-Green 135).

important transitions in a person's life (Hausman and Hausman ix). Bastet and her sacred cats were furthermore famed for their "oracular powers" (Dale-Green 133), and connected to the moon, a symbolic association that reappears throughout history (Walter 33). Finally Bastet could also be vengeful and wrathful, and part of the purpose of the festivals at Bubastis was in fact to appease her darker side and prevent her from taking on her angry lioness form (Walter 34). This reveals Bastet's close connection to Sekhmet, the fierce lion goddess of war, and echoes her nature as "*à la fois douce et cruelle, attirante et dangereuse*" (Walter 30-1). As the least domesticated of the domesticated animals, cats have often been seen as ambiguous beings, and connected with contradictory imagery.

Of significance amongst the numerous associations connected to Bastet, we also find the ability to heal, notably "people or animals suffering from poisonous bites or stings", and the goddess was thus sometimes referred to as "Bastet the Nurse" (Dale-Green 27). This association likely stems from the cat's long history as the enemy of venomous creatures such as snakes, and bearers of disease such as rats. In protecting the grain, a vital part of Ancient Egyptians' diet, the cat made the homes in its territory a safer place for humans (Walter 27). Furthermore, "since snakes can inflict fatal bites on humans, it would have been literally life-saving" to have cats around (Engels 20). Their presence thus served as a sort of "preventative medicine" in the fight against disease, and it is possibly because of this that they first became connected to the notion of healing. A household with cats was indeed far less likely to suffer from death and disease. These beliefs also led to the use of "magic knives" inscribed with cats whose purpose was "apotropaic": they were used to protect people from illness, accidents, and especially venomous creatures such as snakes and scorpions (Engels 26). These knives are one of the earliest examples of the cat being used in a religious setting, some dating back to 2000 B.C., and they have mainly been found in the tombs of women and children, which highlights the aforementioned

connection between cats and women and children. Furthermore, people often used the physical parts of the cat, such as its “tail, fur or blood” in various concoctions “to cure people of their illnesses” (Dale-Green 143). Finally, cat effigies were sometimes buried in the ground and walls, or carved above entrances to buildings, to protect houses and temples from evil (Dale-Green 49). In this way, Bastet and her cats were believed to ensure the “mental and physical health” of their devotees (Dale-Green 151).

Cats themselves also appear to have been an object of great affection for many Egyptians, and a favourite companion. Many Egyptians kept cats in their homes, and considered them to be full members of the family. This is attested to by the artwork on several fragments of papyrus and stone from the era, and in Herodotus’s accounts of pampered cats living in Egyptian palaces, sleeping in lavish beds, dining at the place of honour, and wearing perfume, and necklaces and earrings made of gold (Walter 28). When unwell, cats received all the medical care that they needed, and there even exists a specific spell for “exorcising poison from a cat” (Dale-Green 27). Cats were also notably mourned when they passed away, and received proper burial rituals: they were mummified just as humans were “with full honor and ceremony” (Engels 35). They were honoured by a traditional seventy-day ritual, before being placed into coffins and interred in a cemetery for cats (Walter 35). Though there existed a number of sites for cat burials, often cats were specifically laid to rest in the sacred city of Bubastis (Sax 59). Herodotus furthermore stated that the entire family would shave their eyebrows in mourning for a cat (Walter 28), and that “any food in the house was thrown out” after the death of the sacred animal (Engels 40). If a cat died during a house fire, the inhabitants of the home would “cover themselves in ashes and run through the streets, beating their breasts and tearing their clothes” (Altman 81). Moreover, some Egyptians chose to be buried with their cats, and many “fondly hoped that their pets would accompany them into the afterlife” (Engels 35).

The cat's importance in Ancient Egypt, finally, can also be seen in its connection to a number of important deities other than Bastet. The cat's gaze was believed to have mythical powers, and was specifically connected to the god Horus, god of the setting sun (Hausman and Hausman 11). Bastet was also, at times, identified with Hathor the cow-goddess, another promoter of fertility (Dale-Green 39). During an annual harvest-ritual, meanwhile, Osiris was usually represented by a cat (Dale-Green 41). The cat was thus associated with fertility, and considered "responsible for human fecundity as well as for the fruitfulness of the earth" through its connection with not only Bastet, but also Hathor and Osiris (Dale-Green 43).

Through a famous story in the *Book of the Dead*, we also find a connection between the cat and the crucially important sun-god Ra. The story goes that the sun had been swallowed by the giant snake Apops (or Apophis), thus plunging the entire world into darkness. To return daylight to the world, and vanquish this "evil serpent", Ra chooses the form of a giant tom-cat (Nikolajeva "Cat" 168). Through this narrative, the Egyptian cat thus takes its place amongst the "solar heroes of all mythologies in their fights with various forms of the Devil" (Dale-Green 8), and its connection with both a *male* "sun god" and *female* "moon goddess" further reinforces the cat's duality (Hausman and Hausman ix). Moreover, because Ra was one of the most important gods in Ancient Egypt, this association also serves to heighten the importance of cats (Walter 30).

Through its associations as a snake-killer, the cat was also significantly connected to another important Egyptian deity, the goddess Isis, who also sometimes took the form of a cat in her role as "the slayer of serpents" (Hausman and Hausman 5). The cat became strongly associated with the goddess Isis during the Hellenistic period, and her cult would endure well beyond the Egyptian period. Engels suggests that it is

through her “that the cat lore of Egypt was transmitted to Western Europe during the Hellenistic and Roman periods” (Engels 35). Isis was also significantly believed to be the “guardian of all sailors at sea”, thus tying her to the tradition of ships’ cats discussed in the following section (Engels 126).

The popularity of this animal is clear from the quantity of surviving artwork in which they are represented, and in the central importance of the cult of Bastet and other deities. Initially appreciated for their very practical benefits, cats eventually came to be associated with the most important deities of Ancient Egypt. The main symbolic aspects of the cat, well-being, healing, safety, domesticity, and ambiguity, are attested to by the symbols the goddess Bastet is generally represented with: a sistrum, an aegis, a basket, and kittens (Walter 30). The sistrum is a musical instrument, and connects Bastet with joy, merriment, and psychological well-being. The aegis is a type of shield, which reflects her role as a fierce protector of the family. The basket is a symbol of plenty and prosperity, and the kittens, finally, reflect her connection with motherhood, comfort, and domesticity. The combination of these somewhat contradictory symbols attests to the complex nature attributed to cats.

2.1.2 Ships’ Cats

Today the cat may well be the most ubiquitous mammal on earth, and can be found on every continent, including Antarctica (Engels 10). The primary factor in the early spread of domesticated cats was their common presence on ships, which can be inferred as early as 7500 B.C. thanks to the remains found on Cyprus. It is likely the Phoenicians who first smuggled out cats on their ships and brought them to their new colonies (Walter 36), though some suggest it may, in fact, have been the Egyptians themselves that began “the long and honorable tradition of carrying ship’s cats aboard

ocean-going vessels” (Engels 45). Sailors viewed these cats as “good luck for their ships, as rodent killers, and as objects of amusement and affection” (Engels 13). Ships’ cats gradually became common practice, and the tradition would continue well into the 20th century. The British Navy, for instance, required the presence of a ship’s cat on-board all its vessels until as late as 1975 (Engels 13).

The cat’s role as a mouser (and thus a combatant of disease) was key in the origins of this long-lasting tradition, and it was primarily “in this capacity [that] they were carried throughout the world on conquerors’ and merchants’ vessels,” (Nikolajeva “Cat” 168). The ship’s cat safeguarded the health of sailors by protecting their food supplies, and keeping the population of disease-carrying rodents low. Moreover, the mice and rats aboard vessels could be responsible for chewing through ropes (and later cables) vital to the ship’s functioning. In this way, the presence of a cat on-board “often meant the difference between starvation and survival” for the sailors (Engels 1). The duties of a ship’s cat, however, involved not only protecting supplies, but also lifting the morale of the crew (Walter 85). A recent example of this can be found in Simon, a ship’s cat who was the only feline to ever be awarded with the Dickin Medal, an animal equivalent of the medal of bravery, for keeping up the morale of the sailors during the Yangtze incident in 1949, as well as killing off a rat infestation (Harding 171-3). Furthermore, the cats’ presence made the ship feel like home for the sailors, and these animals can also be connected with domesticity, much like their counterparts on land. The ship’s cat was in fact the guardian of the ship in much the same way as the landlubber cat was guardian of the home: it was considered the “guardian spirit of its vessel” and often a ship without a cat was seen as “derelict” and “doomed” (Engels 13).

The tradition of the ship’s cat is furthermore characterised by many superstitions. Sailors often believed that cats possessed a number of supernatural abilities, and

would commonly draw omens from their behaviour (Dale-Green 75). Sailors sometimes believed cats had the power to predict, and even control, the weather, and these creatures' behaviour was thus closely monitored (Sax 59-60). The exact meaning of these various portents, however, varies significantly between different examples of the ship's cat tradition (Eyers 81).

The cat was uniquely suited to the role of ship's animal: the "[w]ater barriers that have prevented the distribution of most animals are veritable highways for cats, since they adapt well to ship-board conditions", and in this way, the domesticated cats gradually spread far beyond the borders of their North African homeland (Engels 84). But it was not just by ship that the cat's domain grew: they also adapted to transport by caravan, along the trade routes from West to East. In fact, any way that humans travelled, cats came too. Alexander the Great's colonisation of Egypt in 332 B.C. and his subsequent travels would, finally, cause the feline presence to expand across the Eurasian continent (Walter 36).

2.1.3 The Cat in the Greco-Roman Empires

2.1.3.1 Ancient Greece

Though the exact date of the cat's arrival in Greece is hard to pinpoint, by the Archaic period the cat was a "well-established element of the Greek natural environment" (Engels 55). Some writers suggest that the cat did not reach mainland Europe until the Imperial era (30 B.C. –500 A.D.), but Engels argues that the evidence demonstrates that cats were "a common feature of farm and village life by at least the seventeenth century BC" (Engels 80). There was a close connection between Egypt and the Aegean world, especially under the Hyksos rule from 1782 to 1570 B.C., and this is

likely when the cat was exported from Egypt (Engels 54). When the cat first reached Greek territories, it was met with curiosity, and named *ailouros* because of its “wagging tail” (Walter 36). The ferret and marten were the principal competitors to the cat's role as mouser and ratter in Ancient Greece, but rapidly the Greeks realised how much easier cats were to manage, and began to encourage the feline's presence (Walter 37). In Europe the cat would thus come to occupy a “unique ecological niche, that of a small predator, performing valuable services, who is comfortable in human association” (Engels 48). Between around 600 B.C. and 300 B.C., the Greeks began to intentionally export cats to all their colonies, and it is believed that they were largely responsible for the spread of the cat, through the tradition of the ship's cat discussed above (Walter 38). The cat features prominently in literary and artistic sources from the classical and Hellenistic eras (500-30 B.C.), though the earliest depictions of cats “on frescoes and other objects of art”, many found on the island of Crete, date back to the Late Bronze Age, between 1700 and 1200 B.C. (Engels 49-50).⁹

Rapidly the cat became a favourite, exotic pet, notably of the wealthy: a domesticated Egyptian cat was, for instance, considered to be the perfect present to give to a lover amongst the upper classes (Walter 36). Early proof that the Greeks kept domesticated cats as pets can be found in the coinage of the early colonies, Rhegium and Taras – in both cases, the coins depict the founders of these island colonies with their pet cats (Engels 55). The affectionate nature of the human-cat relationship of the time can also be seen in the numerous vases dating from the fourth and fifth centuries B.C. that depict young people playing with cats (Walter 37).

⁹ Many of these early depictions show the cat chasing ducks, as had been the case in Ancient Egypt (Engels 49-50).

In Greece, as in Egypt before, the cat was seen as “the protector of the household from evil and misfortune – especially in the form of disease and starvation” (Engels 86). In this context, the cat came to be associated with the goddess Artemis, who is presented by Herodotus as the Greek version of Bastet (Engels 32). Greek legends tell us that it was in fact Artemis who created the cat, in response to her brother Apollo’s creation of the lion (Walter 37). Another story highlighting the goddess’s connection to the cat recounts that Artemis transformed herself into this animal in order to escape the serpent Typhon. (Sax 58). Artemis was the goddess of the moon, and, like Bastet, she was also the goddess of the hunt (Walter 37). She too had two sides to her, and was both the “protector of the young of all species”, and a “merciless” huntress (Engels 78). In her primary role, however, she was the goddess of women and fertility, “who protected women in childbirth”, and with whom, in fact, “all women throughout Greece had an intimate and sacred relationship”; this included being responsible for causing and curing the diseases that afflicted women, whilst her brother Apollo took care of those that affected men (Engels 78). Artemis was a very popular goddess in Ancient Greece, much like Bastet in Egypt, and this can be seen in the fact that she probably had “more shrines, temples, and sacred precincts than any other divinity” (Engels 78). Her great temple at Ephesus was constructed so lavishly that it was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world (Tesolin 37).

Cats were also connected to other deities in Ancient Greece, such as Hecate, goddess of magic, who commonly “used cats to conjure up the spirits of the dead,” and raided tombs with the aid of a woman transformed into a cat, named Galinthias or Galenthias (Choron et al. 18). The black cat served as the vehicle of this goddess, and represented “an omen of death” (Dale-Green 72). Some Greek sources suggest that the cat was also sacred to the goddess of wisdom, Athena, in her form as “Athena of the Shining Eyes” (Engels 78). Their association with fertility meant that cats were also often associated with earth-goddesses, and in Ancient Greece, the cat was thus

one of the animals sacred to the earth deity Demeter (Dale-Green 38). Finally, the cat was also important in the Greco-Egyptian cult of Isis – this goddess, already popular in Egypt, “assumed a new prominence” in Ancient Greece (Engels 86-7). The cult of Isis would continue to grow through the Roman era, and persisted throughout the Middle Ages.

As in Egypt, the cat was also commonly used in Ancient Greek medicine for its perceived “healing properties” (Engels 73). Various parts of the cat were indeed elements of the Greek pharmacopeia, and, notably, “their dung, mixed with vinegar was highly regarded by pharmacologists as an external medicament” (Engels 76). Cats were also sometimes believed to be the cause of typical ancient Greek humour-based illnesses (Engels 75). Supposedly, Galen presented antidotes to the maladies caused by cats, but sadly this work has been lost (Engels 76).

The cat is, finally, a character in many Greek fables, such as those written by Aesop around the 6th century B.C. (Rogers 16). These fables generally typecast the cat in the role of crafty predator, opportunist, and terror to mice (Engels 65). One of the most famous of these fables is “The Cat Maiden”, the moral of which is that a cat cannot change its true nature (Sax 59).¹⁰ Another famous fable attributed to Aesop is that of the council of mice, in which the mice meet in council to decide how to outwit their common enemy, the cat: though a perfect solution (i.e. attaching a bell to the cat) is found, the mice then realise that it will be impossible to execute (Altman 4). Finally, Aesop also tells the story of a cat who tried to hide his identity and fool an aviary of birds, but failed because he could not disguise his smell (Dale-Green 114). Aesop’s fables portray “everyday encounters among barnyard animals, familiar to readers”

¹⁰ Interestingly, Engels insists that, in the original version of this tale, it was a ferret, and not a cat, that was unable to resist its urges to chase mice, even once it had been transformed into a woman (Engels 68).

and the presence of cats in these fables reveals that the animal was, by this time, a common feature of the Greek landscape (Engels 64).

Part of the popularity of the cat in Ancient Greece stems from that fact that the attributes associated with this animal were in tune with Greek values – notably, in Ancient Greece, freedom was one of the “most important human concerns” (Engels 93). Despite this association, the cat was nevertheless not the favourite domestic animal of the Greeks, this place being reserved for the dog. However, both animals were considered crucially valuable to farmers, and as their functions do not overlap, there was little competition “for a place in farmyard society” (Engels 70).

2.1.3.2 Ancient Rome

Archaeological evidence suggests that the domesticated cat reached Italy by the 8th century B.C. (Engels 56). In Ancient Rome, as in Greece and Egypt, cats would soon be accorded a special place, though references to the cat are far fewer in Latin sources than they are in Greek and Egyptian sources (Engels 91). Roman soldiers brought cats on their military campaigns, and the expansion of the Roman Empire enabled the further expansion of the domestic cat’s territory (Altman 107).

There exist a number of artistic representations of the cat that date back to the Roman era. One of the most well-known is a mosaic discovered in the ruins of Pompeii, which depicts a cat pouncing on a bird. Engels places this mosaic in the tradition of “the cat in the marshes” that began centuries earlier, in Ancient Egypt (Engels 97). There also exists a stela dating to Roman Gaul, on which a young girl is represented with a cat on her knees, in an affectionate pose, which echoes similar images in the

Greek context (Walter 39). As evidenced in this stela, domesticated cats became a pet of the Romans, especially the upper-classes, who admired the animal's independence (Walter 38). The fact that "Felicia" and "Felicula", both meaning "kitten", were very popular cognomens¹¹ for Roman women in the Western Empire also demonstrates, to some degree, the popularity of the cat in Ancient Rome (Engels 99). From archaeological evidence, we know that cats were present in a wide variety of contexts, including "forts and other military installations, towns and other civil settlements, and villas and native farmsteads", and cats were clearly, therefore, a common feature of the Roman landscape (Engels 106).

As well as exporting cats, the Romans also borrowed from Egyptian lore and culture (Walter 38). The cult of Bastet, notably, became very popular with emperors such as Caligula, Nero, and Vespasian (Walter 38). Furthermore, as cats had been associated with Bastet and then Artemis, they now became the animals of Diana, her Roman equivalent. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* presents a story in which, much like Artemis, Diana elects to shift into the form of a cat, this time fleeing giants rather than Typhon (Engels 79). Diana was the goddess of liberty, and was "often depicted with a cup, a broken scepter [sic], and a cat, the most independent of domestic animals, at her feet" (Choron et al. 18). She was furthermore a goddess of women, in the same way as Artemis and Bastet had been before her (Engels 78). As "essentially home-loving animals", cats were also closely connected to the hearth, and thus to the Roman protector of the hearth and home, the goddess Vesta (Dale-Green 45). The cat was thus "guardian and protector of the home" in Rome, as it had been in Egypt and Greece before (Engels 160). In particular, the cat was believed to be especially efficacious in protecting houses from "destruction by fire" (Dale-Green 66). The cat also appears as one of the symbols of Roman "Fortuna", or good luck (Engels 160).

¹¹ Cognomens were extra personal names given to Roman citizens that functioned as a type of nickname.

Finally, as had been the case in Ancient Egypt, there is evidence to suggest that emblems of the cat were used as apotropaic devices, “warding off evil” from soldiers in particular (Engels 107).

Also of note is the cult of Isis, which became especially popular during the Roman imperial era. The Roman Isis differed from the original Egyptian deity: she had been “suffused with Greek theological notions and artistic representations” and was represented with a “sacred cat companion Bubastis” (Engels 115). Black cats were particularly sacred to Isis, though in this context “black was not the color of evil or misfortune, but simply the color of the night [filled] with the moon and the stars and the gentle love of Isis for her creation” (Engels 123-4). Like Artemis and Diana, Isis was a goddess associated with motherhood, and fertility, but unlike these virginal goddesses of the hunt, she was a devoted wife and mother (Engels 125). Isis was furthermore connected to healing, and specifically the medical achievements of Alexandria: in fact, the “power of Isis in the field of pharmacology was widely recognized throughout the Mediterranean world” (Engels 125-6). Many features associated with the cat in the cult of Isis would survive through the Middle Ages and into the 20th century, notably her connection with healing, which caused the cat to be “frequently used in magical formulas to restore health” (Engels 128).

Pliny the Elder’s *Natural History* also suggests that cats were used in Roman medicine, and presents several remedies that involve cats’ parts, highlighting the connection between cats and healing. The cat’s liver, for example, was believed to be especially effective in treating quartan fever (Rogers 16). Pliny the Elder also presents a variety of cures made from cat dung that could treat head sores, soothe an ulcerated uterus, and even remove thorns or objects stuck in one’s throat (Engels 198).

Finally, as in Greece, the cat also appears in numerous fables, such as those by Phaedrus who modelled his stories on Aesop's in the 1st century A.D. (Rogers 17). Engels suggests that the presence of the cat in these fables highlights its popularity with the lower classes, at who these stories were directed (Engels 94).

Though attitudes towards the cat varied greatly between the vastly different regions of the Roman Empire, the cat was overall never as popular a pet as the dog. This was in part because the values associated with the cat, "freedom, independence, and autonomy", clashed with the Roman's "strong sense of duty and obligations to others, expressed in their adherence to Stoic philosophical concepts" (Engels 92). Proof of the dog's popularity, compared with that of the cat, can be found in the fact that whilst there exist Roman tombstones and "poems and elaborate epitaphs" honouring pet dogs, none exist to commemorate a cat (Engels 93). Despite some negative depictions, it is undeniable that the cat came to have an important and desirable place in Roman society, though the intensity of Egyptian veneration is clearly absent (Walter 39). During this era, cats were "useful animals, treated with some consideration because of their predatory capability, and were especially popular with women" (Engels 96).

By the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 A.D., the cat's territory reached well beyond the boundaries of the empire (Walter 40). The cat had, in fact, reached all corners of the Eurasian continent, including as far east as China (Engels 95). Despite the cat's association with the cult of Diana and Artemis, and the popularity of the cult of Bastet and Isis among certain Romans, it is clear that the animal was nowhere near as popular during the Greco-Roman period as it had been in Ancient Egypt. Indeed, Greco-Roman art generally portrays the cat in mundane situations, with no allusion to any sort of veneration or mystical powers (Walter 38). The benevolent treatment of the cat in this era may, however, have helped ensure that Ancient Greece and Rome

were never afflicted by an outbreak of the bubonic plague to the same degree as later in mediaeval Europe, even though conditions for the spread disease were present in the sprawling empire (Engels 108).

2.1.4 The Cat in Germanic and Celtic Traditions

During the time of the Roman Empire, a number of other traditions were also developing around the image of the cat. Many of the folk traditions concerning the cat, some of which survive to this day, can in fact “be plausibly dated to the time of the Roman Empire, when the cat [became] well established in western Europe” (Engels 115). Rather than present all of these, I have chosen to focus on two such traditions of the cat: the cat’s role in Norse and Germanic folklore, notably its connection to the goddess Freyja; and its place in the folklore of the Celts.

2.1.4.1 The Cat in Germanic/Norse Folklore

Norse and Germanic folklore features a cat-related goddess named Freyja. Originally a Scandinavian divinity, this goddess’ cult spread across the Germanic peoples, and remained active as late as the 13th century, in Germania and the Rhine (Walter 56). She was the goddess of fertility, love and motherhood (Engels 153). Freyja was furthermore the patron goddess of lovers, and Friday (“Freyja’s day”) was considered the “most auspicious day for weddings” (Dale-Green 38). Unlike Bastet, Artemis, and Diana, however, Freyja was never represented as a cat herself, nor is she depicted as having the ability to transform into the animal. Rather, this goddess’s connection with cats is through her portrayal as being “carried in a chariot drawn by cats” (Nikolajeva

“Cat” 168). In some versions it is a whole team of cats, in others just two, and these animals were believed to symbolise the goddess’ “qualities of fecundity and ferocity” (Choron et al. 19). As a fertility goddess, Freyja was responsible for farmers’ crops, and those who wanted a good harvest made sure to keep Freyja’s cats fed with milk (Dale-Green 164). In general, devotees specifically placed jugs of milk beside representations of Freyja, in order to attract her good-will (Walter 56). Freyja gave “special protection” to farmers who took care of cats, causing their crops “to swell and to sprout” (Dale-Green 38).

As well as being associated with “fruitfulness,” however, Freyja also “led the Valkyries to the battlefields, claiming from Odin her right to choose men destined to be devoured by death”, and she was thus also the goddess of death, war and destruction: in this capacity, she was sometimes known as the goddess Hel, and a black cat served as her vehicle, much as it did for the Greek Hecate (Dale-Green 72).

The cat also appears in a number of other Scandinavian and Germanic myths and folklore. A sinister cat significantly appears in the legend of Thor’s combat with the demonic Midgard serpent: the cat is the form taken by the giant snake, in an attempt to fool Thor and bring the downfall of the gods (Dale-Green 69-71). Another notable cat in Scandinavian folklore is a creature known as “Butter Cat”, who was a “protector and provider” who left gifts of butter and milk for devotees (Choron et al. 12). However, it was not a wholly positive figure, in that all the gifts it brought its master were in fact stolen from neighbours (Bane 309).

In this context, the cat thus takes on many of the qualities present in Ancient Egypt, notably the association with fertility, well-being, and the hearth, as well as the darker, more ambiguous connection to death and war. The cult of Freyja furthermore conferred a special importance to cats in the areas where she was worshipped.

2.1.4.2 Celtic Traditions Concerning the Cat

Between around 500 to 30 B.C., around the same time as the cat was being connected to Artemis and Diana, there were also a number of practices concerning the cat developing amongst the Celts (Engels 77). Many contemporary folk traditions concerning the cat in fact find their origins in the myths of Romano-Celtic Britain (Engels 87). The Celts worshipped their own versions of the Roman Diana, Minerva and Juno, and considered them all to be protectors of cats (Walter 59). The Celtic earth-goddess Cerridwen also sometimes took the form of a cat (Dale-Green 38). Cerridwen was an ancient Mother Goddess in Celtic lore, worshiped around 800 B.C., well before the era of the Roman Empire (Dale-Green 100). Further indication that the cat was venerated in these parts appears in Robert Graves, who recounts that when St Patrick arrived in Ireland in the 5th century, he discovered a shrine in a cave near Connacht, “where the oracle was a black cat upon a chair of silver” (Sax 59). This oracular “slender black cat reclined on a silver chair and gave vituperative answers to people who tried to deceive it” (Dale-Green 133). This recalls the oracular role of Bastet’s cats in Ancient Egypt previously discussed.

The Celts viewed cats as “supernatural, ‘druidic’ beasts”, and cat figures appear in some of the myths about Celtic heroes, including in the stories of Cuchulainn (Dale-Green 101-2) and Maeldune (Dale-Green 66). There exists a particularly strong tradition of cat-related legends originating from the Celtic Isle of Man, such as the stories of the monstrous cat known as the Paluc cat, who it is said brought disaster to the island (Dale-Green 100-1). The cats of the Isle of Man were furthermore believed to have their own king, who took the form of an ordinary cat by day, but turned into a monstrous beast at night, wreaking vengeance on those who had wronged him (Dale-Green 104). The villains in Irish folklore thus often take the form of “ferocious black cats with blazing eyes” (Dale-Green 102). Sometimes, however, cats appeared as the

mere victims of dark sorcery, rather than the perpetrators, and in some druidic traditions cats were believed to be humans that demonic witches had transformed (Walter 66).

In the Celtic tradition, through its connection to positive deities, such as the earth-goddess Cerridwen, and negative figures like the Paluc cat, the cat was portrayed as an ambiguous being that possessed great power, and who therefore should be treated with caution.

2.1.5 The Middle Ages

2.1.5.1 The Cat in Christianity

In multiple traditions around the world, often dating back thousands of years, the cat was a beloved and sacred animal, worshipped for its symbolic associations with prosperity, domesticity, and motherhood in the context of various pagan fertility cults. With the birth of Christianity, however, this would gradually change. For the first three hundred years of the Church, paganism and Christianity peacefully coexisted, and the cat was protected by the Church (Altman 108). Even during the early mediaeval period in Europe, the cat was often “showed a respect [...] that bordered on reverence” (Engels 139). With Constantine, first Christian emperor at the beginning of the 3rd century A.D., and continuing with rulers such as Clovis and Charlemagne, Christianity rapidly spread, gradually overtaking and eventually repressing earlier religions now deemed to be “heretical pagan cults” (Walter 55). These changes would affect human perception of the cat in important ways. Though they had not always been portrayed as wholly benevolent beings, it was not until the

Middle Ages that cats were “endowed with the power of the Devil” (Dale-Green 137).

Monks were the first to realise the great value of cats in protecting their food supplies and manuscripts (Walter 52). Their presence in monasteries is confirmed in monastic texts written in the 5th and 6th century in Wales and Ireland, which discuss the purity rules concerning “familiar animals” such as cats (Walter 48). In many cases, there were rules prohibiting monks and nuns from keeping pets, but this was clearly not always followed. In fact, the first ode to a cat in European literature, “Pangur Bán”, is a 9th century poem written by an Irish monk in honour of his eponymous cat (Choron et al. 161). Proof of the cat’s popularity in Irish religious circles in the early Middle Ages can also be seen in the presence of numerous cats in the Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne Gospels, both of which slightly predate “Pangur Bán” (Engels 148). The connection between cats and Christian religious orders would continue well into the Middle Age, as can be seen in a 13th century nunnery in England, where the sisters were instructed by the *Ancren Riwe*, a monastic manual, to keep *only* cats, but allow no other animals inside the convent (Dale-Green 46).

The domesticated cat was also a common animal in many mediaeval households and, especially in the first part of the period, was usually considered to be man’s helper, much as dogs and horses were (Walter 52). As elsewhere, though they were initially brought into homes because of their skills as mousers, cats rapidly became beloved pets in many households, becoming so popular in the early Middle Ages that they would occasionally incite vicious conflicts over ownership (Walter 49). Laws were enacted to regulate such conflicts, such as the “Senchus Mor” of the 5th century, the laws by the 10th Prince Howell Dha, and the 12th century “Fuero” of Castile, which set guidelines in determining the monetary value of cats, and determined the punishments in cases where a cat was stolen, killed or harmed (Walter 51). These

laws demonstrate that the cat was considered a valuable commodity in the first part of the Middle Ages.

However, this image of the cat would later darken. Christianity brought with it a more anthropocentric view of the world, reducing the value placed upon non-human animal life (Gouabault and Burton-Jeangros 316). The advent of Christianity brought with it the decline of all animal cults, considered heretical by the Catholic Church (Dale-Green 6). Though the cat's association to goddesses such as Diana and Artemis ensured the animal's protection during early Christianity, in the latter half of the Middle Ages this same connection "doomed the cat to suffering, cruelty and virtual annihilation in many towns of continental Europe" (Engels 77). Concerned by the importance of Pagan religions, Christians were inventing "a number of terrifying and offensive doctrines to frighten people into the worship of their faith" as early as the 2nd century A.D. (Engels 40). In the 11th century, the Church expanded even further, with the construction of countless new churches and cathedrals (Walter 61). Imposing new beliefs would prove more difficult, and was primarily achieved through various forms of the Inquisition which operated "with the use of considerable terror and violence"; the Inquisitions, however, generally resulted in more of a "[c]oerced conformity" than a true conversion (Engels 155-6).

In the Middle Ages, as in Ancient Rome, the cat's symbolic connection with "freedom, independence, and autonomy" (Engels 92) clashed with Christian morals and ideology. However, whilst Roman subjects were able to "speak any language, worship any gods, wear any clothes, dance to any music they chose with no interference from the central government", this was not the case in the Christian Empire (Engels 96). All forms of worship that went against the Church – including Jews, heretics, and, of course, the pagan religions connected to the cat – were violently suppressed (Engels 154). The cult of Bubastis, part of the Greco-Roman cult

of Isis discussed earlier, was viewed as a particular threat (Engels 123), and was banned, alongside the worship of Diana, Artemis, and Frejya. The Catholic Church condemned all the symbols of these religions, and cats thus “became associated with evil powers” (Nikolajeva “Cat” 168). The cat, along with other previously benign pagan symbols, thus came to be considered the evil idol of sinful heretics. Goscelin’s 11th century *Liber Confortarius* is one of the first texts to directly denounce the keeping of pets, specifically in religious seclusion: as one is meant to be celibate, so too should one avoid affectionate relationships with animals, who could get in the way of the relationship with God (Walter 48-9). The situation worsened with the Papal Inquisition started by Pope Gregory IX in about 1230, whose mission it was to seek out and eliminate all that is sinful and heretic, by any means necessary (Walter 61). In 1233 Gregory IX published a papal bull, the *Vox in Rama*, which “officially proclaimed the link between cats and the devil and gave divine sanction for massacring cats” (Lawrence 632). Consequently, there was a notable increase in violence towards the cat beginning in the early 13th century.

Cats were said to feature frequently in the dark rites practiced by a number of mediaeval secret societies that the Church would condemn. The most famous of these societies is that of the Knights Templar, one of the wealthiest and most powerful Christian military orders founded at the time of the crusades in the 12th century. During the trials of the Knights Templar during the early 14th century, confessions were extracted under torture which claimed the knights practiced rituals which included “kiss[ing] the rear ends of cats” – these cats were believed to embody the Devil (Engels 157). The Manicheans, Luciferans, and Waldensians were similarly accused of worshipping a Devil in feline form when the Church turned against them (Dale-Green 96-7).

As the Christian Church gained power, the treatment of cats worsened. In 1484, Pope Innocent VIII published a papal bull that built on the *Vox in Rama*, and also condemned cats: the *Summis desiderantes affectibus*. In this text the pope declared war on cats and those who cared for them, and officially excommunicated all cats (Engels 188). Burning cats during popular and religious festivals became commonplace and was highly encouraged. Fire was believed to be the surest way of purging heresy (Walter 71).

The Inquisitions thus embarked on a virulent hunt for witches and their familiars, with thousands of witch trials taking place over the course of the Middle Ages, leading to the executions of both the witches and their cats (Walter 70). Even though Christianity officially rejects animal sacrifice, the Church encouraged the cat's violent persecution in response to its perceived role as a familiar in witches' magic, and sanctioned the ceremonial killing of cats. In mediaeval Metz, for example, cats were often burnt on Ash Wednesday, to produce the ash for the mass (Sax 60). In mediaeval Germany, France and England, especially, the killing of cats was a part of many religious festivals (Van Vechten 69). While, as we have seen, cats had always been killed in religious contexts, the massacres that took place during the Middle Ages were very different from the cat sacrifice in Ancient Egypt. Whilst they had been killed "humanely" in Egypt, by a swift broken neck for example, in mediaeval Europe the killing of cats frequently took on particularly cruel forms, such as burying or burning cats alive, as well as throwing them from tall buildings (Walter 72). Cats were, furthermore, also sometimes tortured "as a sport which had no conscious significance whatsoever" (Dale-Green 127). This is in stark contrast to the sacrifices made to Bastet, which, as we have said, were never "taken lightly" (Engels 37). These attacks would continue well into the 18th and 19th centuries, despite a more positive image of the cat gradually emerging over this period (Engels 159).

However, this situation was not uniform throughout the Western Christian Empire. Though the cat was persecuted in England, as elsewhere in Western Europe, the killing of witches and cats was far less frequent, and passages from Chaucer suggest that at least some English cats may have been well cared for (Engels 163). In the United Kingdom as a whole, however, the cat's situation remained fairly dire, with Elizabeth I starting witch trials in Essex in 1566, and cats being persecuted with particular fervour in Scotland (Walter 74). Furthermore, Dale-Green tells us that during the coronation of Elizabeth I, "a wickerwork dummy of the pope was filled with live cats, carried with mock solemnity through the streets and flung into a huge bonfire" (Dale-Green 128). Choron et al. furthermore suggest that the idea of cats and witches being connected first originated in Britain, which believed that witches had animal helpers aiding them in their evil acts (Choron et al. 22).

Many attributes of the witch-cat stem directly from Christianity's early attempts to wipe out pagan beliefs, and feature a direct reversal of the symbolism found in these cults (Eyers 81). In many ways, witchcraft is a deformation of pagan moon worship: "the witch was a priestess of the moon-goddess, who had been banished by society, and the power that had once made the earth fruitful was switched over to sterilization and destruction" (Dale-Green 159). The cat's previously discussed connection with domesticity and the hearth made it an obvious symbol of women and femininity, and a reflection of the sins exhibited by the female sex according to Christian theology (Walter 61). Furthermore, witches were often believed to use cats as mounts, similarly to the way Frejya has cats drawing her chariot (Sax 60). The cat's shining eyes and ability to see in the dark were again connected with the moon, though in this context this was seen as further proof that it must be a servant of Satan, as the full moon was also considered to be a symbol of evil (Walter 62). As the image of the cat was reversed, turning a benevolent figure into an agent of Satan, so too was the image of rodents, from evil to good. In fact, some mediaeval stories portray rats and mice as

heroic, positive symbols, pitted against the evil of cats and dogs (Engels 161). Finally, even though the framework of some stories involving cats dating as far back as the Ancient Egyptians persisted, “the motif often got inverted”: in the story of Ra and the serpent, for instance, “the cat, especially a black cat, became one of the many transformations of the antagonist” (Nikolajeva “Devils” 249). The dark figure of the cat was believed to wield all manner of dark powers, notably it “poisoned people’s minds, infected their bodies with disease, and inflicted both with blindness”; this is in direct contrast with the positive image of the cat, that Dale-Green dubs “the White Cat”, who was “a healer and a nurse [who] destroyed poison, counteracted irritation and strengthened people’s powers of recuperation” (Dale-Green 140).

Despite the condemnation of the Church and the intellectual elite, cats remained relatively popular with the common folk during this period. In particular, in rural areas where the people were in close contact with both domestic and wild animals, the Inquisition was never as successful as it had been in cities and towns (Engels 25). This is in part because of the cat’s crucial role as a mouser, a quality that, in the farm setting, often trumped any claims of a demonic side. Unlike in Ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome, the cat was not the pet of the nobility, but on the contrary, that of the poor (Walter 53). Cats also retained their importance on ships during this period. Even black cats, so harshly condemned by the Church on land, were considered necessary on ships, and were in fact often considered to be “a lucky charm”, making the association between black cats and ill-fortune “one of the many landlubber superstitions which are reversed at sea” (Eyers 81).

Furthermore, despite the more familiar mediaeval depiction of cats as demons, there also existed a tradition of positive Christian folklore concerning cats during the period of the Inquisitions. Several sources present stories in which the cat is closely associated to clearly benevolent figures in Christianity. There is, for instance, an

Italian legend which states that a cat played a small role in the nativity: at the same time as Jesus was being born above, a mother cat was giving birth to her kittens under the same manger (Dale-Green 26). Some versions of the story of Noah's Ark, furthermore, depict the cat as a hero of the tale. In one story, the Devil sends a mouse to gnaw a hole in the ark and thus extinguish all life; fortunately, however, the cat is able to catch the mouse in time and save the day (Dale-Green 34). There are also some positive stories regarding the cat in relation to various Christian saints. In one, the Devil torments Saint Francis of Assisi by sending a hundred mice to nibble at him in his cell: God answers Saint Francis's prayers by sending a cat called Felix to quickly decimate the rodent population (Choron et al. 19). In Sicily, the cat was sacred to Saint Martha, the "patroness of domestic virtue" (Dale-Green 46). This connection to "domestic virtue" clearly echoes previous interpretations of the cat as a *genius loci*, or "spirit of the place" (Engels 12). Dale-Green tells us the cat was also sacred to the Languedoc version of Saint Agatha, who they called "Santo Gato", Saint Cat, and who, it was said, would take the form of "an angry cat" when she wished to punish women who had disrespected her (Dale-Green 93). Saint Agatha is furthermore significant in that her festival closely resembles that of Isis (Engels 168). As many of these stories fail to appear in Holy Texts, however, Tesolin suggests that they represent "an attempt by cat-lovers to combine their credo with their affection to cats" (Tesolin 48).

Even when they were considered creatures of Satan rather than venerated as deities, cats were still believed to have an innate connection to healing. Specifically, they were said to possess "many types of occult power, and their blood, excrement, placentas, and brains were used medicinally" in a wealth of folkloric mediaeval medicines (Lawrence 627). Cat parts were in fact one of the most common features of the mediaeval pharmacopeia, and were believed to cure everything from herpes to arthritis to paralysis (Walter 76). Cats' eyes and "grease" also appear in a variety of

mediaeval remedies (Van Vechten 69). The cat's tail was, however, the most commonly used part of the animal, and it was said that it could cure sties, itches, warts, and whitlows, and even prevent all sickness in the family (Dale-Green 29-31). Despite the common use of the cat in many forms of mediaeval medicine, there were also certain doctors at the time who, on the contrary, believed cats to be extremely detrimental to one's health. From the 16th century onwards, celebrated medics such as Ambroise Paré and Matthioli went as far as to suggest that cohabitating with a cat could be fatal to a person's health, the former specifically claiming that sleeping with a cat caused tuberculosis (Rogers 36).

This ambiguity in mediaeval attitudes towards the cat was, finally, also present in the way these animals were killed during the period, at times because they were thought of as agents of evil, but other times in an attempt to "promote good fortune and fertility" (Engels 213). Burying a cat in the foundations of a French home was, for instance, supposed to bring good luck to the inhabitants of the house (Van Vechten 69). Cats also played a part in a number of European vegetation rites, which usually ended with the animal being killed to ensure a good harvest (Dale-Green 41-2). Walter furthermore tells us about the specific example of the "feux de Brandons" which took place in certain parts of France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Switzerland on the first Sunday of Lent: the ashes of the cats burnt in these fires were kept and scattered on fields, to ensure the land's fertility and the promise of a good harvest (Walter 72).

The period of the Inquisitions ultimately transformed the role and image of the cat in Western Europe. Through the demonisation of cats by the Christian Church, the figure of the cat as guardian of the home and protector of health was transformed into the "minion of Satan", and cats were consequently massacred by the millions (Engels 160). As Christianity overthrew all the pre-existing religions in the realms it touched,

so too did it overthrow their sacred symbols: “Gods of an earlier religion become demons in the cult that supersedes it” (Dale-Green 74). Thus, the priestesses of the various cat goddesses were now portrayed as witches, and their sacred cats as the demonic steeds which bore them. Despite the virulent persecution of cats during this period, positive views of the cat remained throughout the Middle Ages, including the cults of Isis and Diana, which would persist amongst the French peasantry until at least the 11th century (Engels 141).

2.1.5.2 Cats in the Eastern Church

In Eastern Orthodoxy, the cat was not persecuted in the same way as in the West; in fact, very little opposition to the cat can be found in Byzantine sources (Engels 148). Furthermore, the Greek Church never accepted Saint Augustine’s “successionist theology”, which so contributed to the condemnation of cats in the West (Engels 154). The rejection of Saint Augustine and similar Church doctrine likely contributed in preventing the cat and its female owners in the East from suffering a fate similar to their counterparts in the West (Engels 154). The status of cats there thus did not change much from the early days of Christianity, when cats were, at the very least, tolerated.

2.1.5.3 Cats in Islam

On the other side of the Mediterranean, in the places that were governed by Islam rather than Christianity, cats had a very different experience to those in Western Europe during the Middle Ages. The cat was highly regarded in Islam, and was

associated with a wealth of positive connotations. In Muslim folklore, “cats can foretell the future and can sacrifice themselves to save humans from death” (Engels 151).

The Muslim regard for the cat likely derives from the fact that the Prophet Mohammed was said to adore the animal, and there exist many stories about him and his various cats. One of his favourite cats, Muezza, appears in the greatest number of stories about the Prophet (Dale-Green 134). This cat accompanied him everywhere he went, staying by his side whilst he prayed in Mecca (Walter 40). Indeed, the Prophet sometimes preached there whilst “holding the cat in his arms” (Dale-Green 134). According to Arabic folklore, Mohammed so loved Muezza that when the latter fell asleep on his sleeve one day, he elected to cut off that section of his robe when he was called away to prayer, rather than disturb his favourite cat’s slumber (Altman 161). The markings on the forehead of tabby cats are, furthermore, said to be marks left by Mohammed stroking a cat that cats continue to wear as a sign of their gratitude for the care the Prophet demonstrated towards them (Walter 40). Interestingly, this same legend is also present in early Christianity, though it places the Virgin Mary in the role of Mohammed (Tesolin 47). The cat’s ability to land on its feet, meanwhile, is said to be a gift from Mohammed in thanks for a cat saving him from a poisonous snake (Engels 150). Finally, the cat’s extreme resilience and its “nine lives” are also said to be a present from Mohammed to his favourite animal (Altman 162).

The Prophet’s adoration of cats would result in a number of positive beliefs about the animal. The cat is regarded as a clean animal in Islam, contrary to the dog, and is described as such in the Koran (Altman 106). The cat is believed to be so clean, in fact, that contact with a cat does not compromise man’s purity for prayer, and the cat’s “drinking water can be used if needed, for ritual ablutions” (Engels 150).

Cleanliness was an important feature of Muslim holiness, in stark contrast with the ideals of poverty and asceticism that were crucial in European Christianity (Engels 146). As such, cats are the only animals permitted inside mosques, and the presence of a cat in a mosque is believed to signify “good luck for the community” (Sax 62). In further contrast to Christianity, the killing of cats was forbidden by Islamic law, and deceased cats were believed to be granted a place in the Muslim heaven (Walter 41). Islamic control of Spain and North Africa by the year 711 thus protected the cats there from the hysterical witch hunts that began in the 12th and 13th centuries. Cats in the Christian and Muslim world suffered starkly different fates during this period in history. While cats were being massacred in Western Europe in the 13th century, the sultan of Syria and Egypt, El-Daher-Beybars, was setting up organisations and dedicating a luxurious garden to take care of cats in need (Walter 40, Engels 151).

2.2 Asia

Europe was not alone in holding the cat in particular esteem. It was in fact in Asia that the cat first became a “pet” in our modern understanding of the term (Walter 13). Many countries to the East saw cats as very special beings, notably China and Japan. The cat was exported to these countries via the sea and land trade routes that were established during the Greco-Roman era. However, Asia developed its own traditions of cat mythology, not derived from the image of Bastet, in the way the Romans’ and Greeks’ view were. Though their connotations were not always positive in Asia, cats would “never undergo that persecution they were to face in the mediaeval western countries” (Tesolin 34). Japan is today home to the largest number of cat cafés by far, and has created all manner of cat-associated fashions, including Hello Kitty. In this section, I shall focus on China and Taiwan, location of the first cat café, on Japan,

where the cat café phenomenon has most thrived, and on India, which has a particularly rich tradition of the cat.

2.2.1 The Cat in China

Domesticated cats reached China by the year 500 B.C. and it is said Confucius himself kept a number of pet cats (Tesolin 30). They were primarily transported there in the caravans that travelled the trade routes between West and East (Engels 137). As everywhere else, they were greatly appreciated for their skills as mousers, and were specifically put in charge of guarding the precious silk worms that were an ideal prey for rodents (Walter 41). As in the West, the cat was also rapidly imbued with more than a strictly practical value. By the Han dynasty, stretching from about 200 B.C. to 200 A.D., cats in China had reached the status of a pet and the favourite companion of women (Walter 41).

This animal also makes an appearance in Chinese folktales, where they are often associated with an array of magical powers, most notably healing and fortune-telling (Nikolajeva "Devils" 249). By comparison, the black cat was sometimes seen as an "omen of sickness and poverty" (Dale-Green 73). The image of the cat was believed to have power in itself, and having paintings and sculptures of cats around the home was said to ward off ill-fortune (Walter 41). In the absence of live cats, images of "silkworm-cats" were likewise believed to be just as effective in guarding against rodents" (Dale-Green 49).

Furthermore, in China, people worshipped a cat deity named Li Shou, a crucial fertility goddess like Bastet and Frejya, who was "responsible for guarding crops and

bringing rain” (Choron et al. 18). In this way, like many other feline deities, Li Shou ensured the good health of her devotees by protecting their food supplies. Walter interestingly describes Li Shou as being a *male* fertility god, but informs us there was a different female cat goddess that appears in the Confucian *Book of Rites* (Walter 41). Dale-Green also presents Li-Shou as a male figure, and recounts the “orgiastic harvest-festival” during which sacrifices were made to the cats who protected the crops (Dale-Green 41). This recalls the way in which Egyptian cats were connected to both male and female fertility deities (specifically, Bastet and Osiris), and reflects the ambiguous, dual nature of these beings.

Finally, a number of Chinese legends and folktales also feature the cat. According to one legend, at the creation of the world, it was cats who were given “the important task of taking charge of the newly created world”: ultimately, however, realising they would much rather nap and play away their time, “the cats told the gods they simply had no interest in ruling the world, and so the humans were appointed the task” (Tesolin 30). Stories from sixth-century China, meanwhile, depict evil “cat-spectres” who were believed to bewitch and kill their victims, taking all their possessions (Dale-Green 103-4).

The cat was thus a complex, powerful figure in Ancient China, valued for its remarkable skills as a mouser, and cherished as a pet. It was connected to a wealth of positive connotations, such as healing and good-fortune. However, the negative connotations of this animal were also present in this context, as can be seen, for instance, in the figure of the sinister cat-spectre.

2.2.2 The Cat in Japan

Though they reached Japan the latest, it did not take cats long to win a place in the hearts of the Japanese. Sources disagree on when exactly cats first arrived in Japan. One legend states that they first reached Japanese shores in 884, on a boat travelling from China with precious Buddhist manuscripts (Walter 43). Another account, however, suggests that the Japanese were already using cats as temple guards to protect sacred manuscripts by the 7th century A.D. (Altman 106). They may also have been introduced centuries later, by the Korean emperor Ichijo, who gifted a number of cats to the imperial family in the 10th century (Walter 43). In any case, from the 10th century onwards, they were a favourite pet of the Japanese, who paraded them about on silk leases (Altman 106). Though initially a mark of status, cats would eventually become popular with the common folk as well (Walter 44). The Japanese especially admired the beauty, poise, and cleanliness of the cat, and, as everywhere, highly prized them for their skills as mousers (Walter 43). As in China, cats were used to guard the precious silk worms, and they were also notable for protecting the temple libraries where sacred manuscripts were kept (Tesolin 33). By the Edo Period, from 1615-1857, the cat had reached the heights of its popularity in Japan, leading to an abundance of depictions in contemporary artwork (Arslanian).

Accordingly, Japan contains an abundance of shrines and temples dedicated to the cat, “tangible examples of how much the Japanese people have been worshipping the cat over the ages” (Tesolin 35). Similarly to Bubastis in Ancient Egypt, Japan is home to a cat cemetery, the Go-To-Ku-Ji Temple in Tokyo, where the cat is also venerated (Walter 43). Indeed, cats are a common feature of many Japanese temples, as people have long had a tradition of leaving kittens at Buddhist temples as a way of entrusting them “to the Buddha and to the compassion of the monks” (Hausman and Hausman 161). Another place where one finds an unusually high concentration of

cats is on Japan's various *nekojima*, or "cat islands", which have become important tourist attractions. There are number of these islands scattered around Japan, one of the most famous of which is Tashirojima. Originally brought over to protect the local silkworms, the cats on Tashirojima today outnumber the human population 6 to 1, and have a shrine dedicated them on the island (Morton). Dogs are forbidden on these islands, which "host huge families of cats" that have been fostered by the human inhabitants over centuries, because they were believed to promote good fortune (Tesolin 35).

The cat also appears prominently in many positive roles in Japanese folklore and superstitions. Orange cats are believed to be the most powerful of cats, and it was thought that they had the ability to transform into beautiful women (Choron et al. 12). Black cats were notably believed to be "curative against certain illnesses" (Tesolin 34). Furthermore, as in China, the mere image of the cat was believed to hold power, and many depictions of cats adorn Japanese mortuary chambers, where they are intended to guard the chambers from mice and rats in the same way a live cat would (Dale-Green 49). This is reminiscent of the cat's connection to death in a number of Mediterranean traditions, such as the worship of Bastet, Freyja, and Hecate.

An important cat-related Japanese figure is the *maneki-neko*, or "beckoning cat", which is "the statue of a sitting cat with a raised forepaw, in the act of inviting passersby to go towards him" (Tesolin 35). These popular Japanese figures date back to the Edo Period when cats were especially popular in Japan, and they became commonplace by the Meiji Period of the late 19th century (Arslanian). *Maneki-neko* are connected to many different myths, and their exact meaning has varied. One usage involves placing them in the entrance to Japanese shops and restaurants, where they are believed to promote prosperity, their beckoning paw drawing in customers (Altman 155). They are also believed to bring good luck to homes in which they are

displayed (Walter 127). Finally, the *maneki-neko* was also used to protect silkworms from rats and children from “pain and sickness” (Dale-Green 53). The red *maneki-neko* in particular “exorcises evil spirits and illnesses” (Choron et al. 20). Through the *maneki-neko*, the cat is a protective figure in Japan, associated with promoting general well-being and attracting good luck and prosperity.

However, as elsewhere, the cat also has a number of negative connotations in Japan. In some ghost stories, they appear as wicked beings, “akin to witches” (Tesolin 34). In others, demonic “phantom-cats” terrorise entire regions of Japan, demanding human sacrifice (Dale-Green 102-3). Japanese folklore also includes the figures of the *bakeneko* and the *nekomata* which, despite their names, bear little resemblance to actual cats. The former is an ordinary cat that has become demonic, with the power to shape-shift into human form; the latter is an aggressive “creature far bigger than a cat in size, that can stand on its hinder feet, and grows two tails”, and is connected with “death and the underworld” (Tesolin 34). Finally, Japanese folklore is also replete with tales of “cat-vampires”, such as that appearing in the legend “The Cat of Nabéshima”. These creatures are similar to European vampires in that they drain the blood and life of their victims, but they are notable in that they can take the form of any human they choose (Dale-Green 106-9).

The cat was thus a primarily positive figure in Japanese folklore and custom, highly valued because of its connection to good luck, prosperity, and healing. This can be seen notably through the enduring popularity of *nekojima* and the *maneki-neko* figurines. Despite these positive associations, the cat was also associated with a number of more sinister attributes in Japan, including vampirism. This highlights the ambiguous dual-nature of cats that has equally been observed in a number of other contexts.

2.2.3 Cats in India

The domesticated Egyptian cats reached India by around 200 B.C. (Walter 42). The first to reach India were probably ships' cats, transported along the trade routes that had developed between the Mediterranean Greek Empire and India following the conquests of Alexander the Great (Engels 86). Once again, the cat was initially prized for its skills in hunting rodents and snakes, and was kept by Buddhist monks to protect sacred manuscripts; as in other contexts, the cat rapidly became a favourite pet of the nobility, and was a common feature in princesses' courts (Walter 42-3).

The cat soon found a place in the vast Hindu pantheon, and was specifically connected to Shashti or Sashti, the goddess of birth, children, and motherhood (Sax 58). The cat served as the "vehicle" of this goddess who was the "protectress of children, childbirth, and fertility and therefore particularly linked to women" (Tesolin 31). Sashti was prayed to for the health of children, and her devotees were required to keep and care for at least one cat under their roof (Walter 42).

Within India, the cat was considered to be a "symbol of wealth and status" (Choron et al. 7). In Buddhism, the cat was sometimes believed to be the last form a body takes before its final entrance into heaven, making it one of the highest forms of reincarnation (Choron et al. 19). However, as elsewhere, the view of the cat in India was not wholly positive. In one Buddhist legend, the cat fell asleep and arrived late for the Buddha's entrance into heaven: it was therefore deemed by some not to deserve the same love and protection accorded to other animals in Buddhism (Walter 42). Another story states that the cat was, with the snake, one of the only animals to remain dry-eyed when the Buddha died, thus once again excluding it from the protected animals in the original canons of Buddhism (Choron et al. 19). An even

more negative tale blames the cat for the Buddha's death, claiming that Maya had sent a rat to him with medicine, but the cat had eaten it, thus condemning the Buddha to his fate (Sax 62). Finally, reminiscent of European folktales associating cats to witches, members of a Bengali tribe in India believed that certain women would transform into black cats and terrorise the village at night (Dale-Green 79).

Cats also appear in both Indian epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana (Choron et al. 4). Notably, in the Mahabharata, we find the story of a trickster cat, who feigns penitence to gain easy access to trustful prey (Dale-Green 114). There are also stories of cats in *The Panchatantra* and the *The Jakata Tales*, India's equivalent to the European fables by writers like Aesop and Phaedrus. In these stories, the cat generally appears as a "hypocrite, subtle, and even mean character" (Tesolin 32).

As elsewhere, the cat is therefore characterised by contradictory symbolism in the Indian context. On the one hand, they were pampered by princesses and connected to an important, benevolent deity, Sashti, who protected the health of children and women. On the other hand, they were believed to have sinister connotations, and often appear as tricksters in India fables.

2.2.4 Other Asian Cats

In other parts of Asia as well, cats featured prominently in culture and religion. I have decided to focus on two more specific cases in which cats held a special importance: the situation of the Royal cats of Siam (present-day Thailand), and that of the temple cats of Burma (present-day Myanmar).

2.2.4.1 The Cat in Thailand

In Siam, ancient Thailand, only the royal family was allowed keep cats, which they kept in golden cages and perfumed with incense (Walter 42). Thereafter, cats would develop a special symbolic connection with the Royal Family of Siam. As late as 1920, a cat played a key role in the coronation of a new king: the chosen cat was believed to embody the soul of the deceased monarch, and was thought to enable the late king to witness the coronation festivities through its eye (Choron et al. 19). The late king's favourite cat was also entombed with him, in a burial chamber with holes through which the cat could escape: it was believed this cat took the monarch's soul with it when it left (Hausman and Hausman 162). These beliefs conferred a special, royal status to cats in Siam.

2.2.4.2 The Cat in Burma

Of note there are also the sacred cats of Burma. The Birman breed of cats is in fact believed to be descended from a group of a hundred sacred cats kept in a Buddhist temple dedicated to an ancient Burmese "goddess of transmutation" (Tesolin 33). One of these cat, called Sinh, was the favourite of the high priest Mun-Ha: when the priest passed, Sinh is said to have absorbed the soul of his deceased master (Choron et al. 12). Sinh and his fellow cats were worshipped by priesthood of the Temple of Lao-Tsun, and, like many cats before, were believed to have oracular powers (Dale-Green 133). In honour of Sinh, the priests gave special protection to the Birman cats (Altman 26). In ancient Burma, the cat was thus believed to have special powers not shared by other species, and hold a unique religious importance.

All over Asia, therefore, cats were popular as both a religious and spiritual symbol, and as pampered pets. They were considered to be protectors against disease and bringers of good luck. First the pets of emperors and kings, with whom they often maintained the closest bond, they were symbols of royalty. Despite some negative portrayals of the cat in Asian folklore, these views were “seldom carried [...] to the extremes we find in the West”, and overall Asia had a more positive view of the animal (Sax 62). It is in this context that the cat café phenomenon would be born in the late 20th century.

The domesticated Egyptian cat thus rapidly spread across the entire Eurasian continent, thanks largely to the naval and land commerce that existed between these regions, as well as the tradition of the ship’s cat. Everywhere it went, the cat primarily served a crucial purpose in the fight against rodents, who would not only devour vital grain reserves, but also left excrement, encouraging the putrefaction of food supplies and the spread of disease (Walter 47). In this capacity, the cat gradually replaced its rivals, the ferret, weasel, and genet, due to its cleanliness, high fertility rates, and easier temperament (Engels 17). Thanks to its role as a mouser, the cat helped ensure the health of humans in a very literal sense.

Despite this positive impact, cats were “treated with reserve” throughout the Ancient World and the Middle Ages, believed to be “supernatural beings with whose power, whether divine or demonic, it was dangerous to tamper” (Dale-Green 138). During this time, especially in Ancient Egypt, the cat was imbued with a number of recurring symbolic attributes, including good luck, marriage, fertility, motherhood, and the moon. Most intriguing to contemporaries, however, was the connection between the cat and medicine, “both as a cause of illness and as a healing force” (Engels 74).

Family and motherhood were central to the lives of women throughout the Ancient World, and, as such, Western women believed the cat to be the “living embodiment of this divine force of nature for almost four thousand years” (Engels 31). The cat’s connection to women furthermore connected it with notions of domesticity and the hearth, and ties in with traditional patriarchal notions of the woman’s place in the home (Sax 57). In conjunction with the cat’s natural attachment to its home and territory, this has often led the cat to be considered as a kind of *genius loci*, a spirit of the home (Engels 12). Often the fate of the malevolent demon cat did not differ much from that of the divine, domestic one: “whether the animals were regarded as devils or gods, they always ended up in bonfires” (Dale-Green 173).

By the end of the Middle Ages, the cat had also spread across the Atlantic, to the New World. As the cat was still regarded as sacred in parts of England, and did not suffer the same level of horrors as in other parts of Europe, the beliefs brought over by British colonists were generally more positive than those of their French, Spanish, and Portuguese counterparts (Engels 163). With the arrival of the Renaissance, and the official end of the Middle Ages, the cat’s reputation would gradually begin to mend throughout Western Europe.

CHAPTER III

THE CONTEMPORARY CAT

3.1 The Cat's Return to Favour in the West

Following the Middle Ages, the cat's situation would dramatically change in the West. With the onset of the Renaissance, and the weakening of the power of the Catholic Church, the cat's status would gradually improve. These changes first affected the upper classes, and then gradually trickled down to the population as a whole (Engels 171). Though the actual status and rights of the cat did not change dramatically, opinions of the cat, as expressed in the arts and literature, heralded in a new age of increased popularity for the domestic feline (Walter 84).

The Black Death also played an important role in the cat's return to favour. The mediaeval exterminations of cats had led to "a great increase in rats and diseases, including bubonic plague" (Sax 61). Indeed, the "cat Inquisition" of the Middle Ages had created "something of a golden age for the rat" (Engels 161). The cat population of cities and towns had been especially decimated during the cat massacres of the Inquisition, as it was much easier to round up cats in this context (Engels 159). Unfortunately, cities were also the preferred breeding ground of the plague-carrying black rat, and the cat's absence therefore helped facilitate the outbreak of multiple deadly plagues during the Middle Ages. The Black Death of the 14th century alone caused the death of approximately two-thirds of the European population (Walter 50). When it was realised that cats were the most efficient means of combatting the plague-carrying black rat, the few that had survived the massacres "came to be highly

valued”, and their decimated population was slowly able to recuperate (Sax 61). In this way, cats were often considered to be “saviours” in the aftermath of the Black Death (Walter 50). Gradually, people would realise that cats were “not only useful but also loyal and affectionate”, and they become a crucial presence in a number of Renaissance and post-Renaissance milieus (Sax 61).

Engels tells us that the first signs of the cat’s rehabilitation can be found in Renaissance paintings of the Holy Family, in which cats began to appear as “a symbol of motherhood, if not fertility” (Engels 170). The cat also appears in many scenes of the Annunciation (Walter 82). Cats rapidly became a favourite subject for many Renaissance artists, such as Leonardo da Vinci, who depicted the Madonna and child, one of the most important images in Christianity, with a cat (Lawrence 631). During the French Revolution, the cat became a symbol of freedom and rebellion because of its independent nature (Walter 96), and many contemporary artists, such as Prud’hon, thus depicted Liberty with a cat (Dale-Green 47).

In literature, the cat’s evolving status took the form of an increase in texts devoted to describing and praising the animal (Walter 80). In 1727, Francois-Augustin de Paradis de Moncrif published the first extended defence of the cat, in which he “peruses the history of this noble animal from its Egyptian origins and underlines the cat’s playfulness and independence, but also its innate elegance” (Tesolin 91). One of the most famous poems about a cat, “To My Cat Jeoffry”, appeared a little later, in the mid-18th century. This poem, by Christopher Smart, was dedicated to his eponymous cat and “takes precisely the characteristics that have impressed people as diabolic and uses them to make the cat a symbol of Christ” (Sax 63).

Most notably, however, the cat became a sort of mascot for the writers of the Romantic Era, especially for the poets Baudelaire and Verlaine (Walter 13). Cats

were in fact an integral part of the literary salons of the 18th century, a role they were more suited to than the more exuberant and rural-based dogs (Walter 92). The Romantic Movement saw in the cat an ambiguous, mysterious and sensual being that retained much of its original wildness (Walter 97). Like Smart, these writers chose to love the cat for the exact same reasons this animal had been hated during the Middle Ages, using its sinister connotations to turn the cat “an emblem of their own rejection of conventional standards and commonplace perceptions of the world” (Rogers 64). Accordingly, the Romantics hailed the cat’s role as the companion of sorcerers and alchemists, and saw in its “lewd sexuality” the perfect symbol for the beauty of femininity (Walter 97). The symbolic connection between cats and women is especially clear in Baudelaire’s poems, in which the physical softness and perceived sensuality of the cat evoke that of an idealised woman, whilst the cat’s aloofness is compared to a woman’s rejection of a lover (Walter 100).

Cats also began to “appear as significant characters in realistic and fantastic fiction” during the Renaissance (Rogers 5). Notably they featured prominently in numerous nursery rhymes, fables, and fairy-tales (Nikolajeva “Cat” 169). Some of the most well-known nursery rhymes featuring cats are “Pussycat, pussycat where have you been?” and “Hey Diddle Diddle/The cat and the fiddle”, in which cats appear as “cute humanized felines” (Nikolajeva “Devils” 251). This is in stark contrast with the figure of the demonic witch’s familiar that had been most common in the Middle Ages. In many of these fairy-tales, the cats are portrayed as primarily benevolent creatures, who relish in serving mankind. Specifically, the fairy-tale cat is known to “bring money, jewels and treasures of all kinds” to the human it serves (Dale-Green 58). One of the most well-known fairy-tales to involve a cat is the French story “Puss in Boots”, in which, thanks to the ingenuity and loyalty of a cat, a poor miller’s son becomes the wealthy husband of a princess (Dale-Green 60). Certain benevolent human figures in fairy-tales were also symbolically associated with the cat. One of

the most prominent examples is an early version of the tale of Cinderella, in which the heroine is described as having “catlike” characteristics. Cinderella indeed guards the hearth, much like a cat, and in the oldest Italian version of the story, she is explicitly referred to as “Cinders-Cat” (Dale-Green 45). Cats also appear prominently in the work of the 17th century French fabulist Jean de La Fontaine. In some of these stories, the cat is “portrayed as a gifted actor, a first class strategist and a great fraud” who is “even more cunning than the fox” (Dale-Green 113). In his fable “The Cat’s Paw”, however, La Fontaine depicts a far less wily cat, who is convinced by a monkey to do his dirty work (Dale-Green 126).

It was also during the Renaissance that cats once again became popular as pets, especially amongst the French aristocracy (Rogers 84). Indeed, Louis XIV implemented several policy changes that were favourable to the cat’s status. Notably, he enacted a rule forcing ships to have at least two cats aboard, and he banned the cat exterminations that took place during the festival of Saint John (Walter 85). The importing of exotic breeds would make the cat one of the most popular and fashionable pets amongst the nobility of the 18th century, who regularly exchanged them as gifts (Walter 91-2). The court of Louis XV was filled with ailurophiles, including the king himself and his young wife, Marie Leszczyńska, who was largely responsible for the French court being “won over to the animal” (Engels 171). Some of these pet cats were so beloved that they began to appear for the first time as beneficiaries in people’s wills, though this was largely ridiculed by contemporaries (Walter 94). Furthermore, medals and tombstones were constructed to honour specific cats, and some even appeared in the family portraits of the French and English aristocracy (Engels 171).

It was not just the royal family that adored and kept cats at this time. They were the favourite pet of several Catholic popes, such as the 17th century Gregory XV (Van

Vechten 18). The Cardinal Richelieu also famously “kept dozens of cats at court” (Engels 171). Soon even bourgeois families began to keep pet cats, though this was often met with anger by members of the lower classes, as can be seen in Robert Darnton’s account of an 18th century massacre of cats in Paris (Darnton 75-106).

Despite these many positive changes, many negative superstitions about the cat persisted through the Renaissance. Engels tells us, firstly, that, in some cases, the “war against the animal was redoubled” following the Black Death (Engels 162). Indeed, the witch trials did not halt with the Renaissance, with Jeanne Boille executed as a witch as late as 1629 for consorting with a demon in the form of a giant cat (Finot 38). Dale-Green meanwhile reports witch-related hysteria in York Country, Pennsylvania, dating as late as 1929 (Dale -Green 121).

Similarly, despite the many positive images of cats that appear in literature at this time, there were also many more negative and sinister portrayals. Edgar Allan Poe was especially fascinated by the dark imagery surrounding the figure of the cat, and the cats that appear in his work, notably in “The Black Cat”, have an ominous, threatening quality to them (Walter 101). The second black cat that appears in Poe’s story notably “acts like an agent of Satan”, punishing the protagonist’s crime (his abuse of the first cat, Pluto¹²) “by drawing him into further evil and then damnation” (Rogers 77). Even in more positive literary portrayals, the ambivalent nature of cats was never entirely forgotten, and the fairy-tale felines “usually seemed to have something a little disturbing about them” (Sax 61).

In many contexts, the great affection and great hatred that had previously existed was largely replaced by an “unsentimental attitude toward cats” (Nikolajeva “Devils”

¹² Pluto is one of the names of the Greek god of the underworld, further highlighting the cat’s connection to death in this story.

250). This can be seen in a new willingness to eat cats in situations of famine or siege, and in some cases even outside periods of distress (Walter 52-3). Further proof of the unsentimental attitude that was prevalent during the late Renaissance can be found in the British folk- and chapbook tale of Dick Whittington which first appeared in the 17th century, but is set in the 14th century (Nikolajeva "Devils" 250). In this story, an orphan escapes harsh poverty, and becomes mayor of London, all thanks to a cat, whose abilities as a mouser gain him a place on a vessel voyaging to a foreign land. With the fortune made from the sale of this cat, Dick Whittington marries the daughter of his former master, and is elected mayor three times: it is an "early rags-to-riches tale from England [that] shows how cats were valued in the early modern period by those engaged in trade" (Sax 59). Though this story praises the animal's skills as a mouser, it does not depict the cat as a cherished pet. Rather, the cat remains nameless, and is parted with easily as it serves "solely a pragmatic purpose" (Nikolajeva "Devils" 250). Also of note is the aforementioned massacre of bourgeois cats in the 1730s in France, by which time cats had become popular, well-established pets of the bourgeoisie. In his account of the massacre, Darnton describes a family of affluent printers in Paris that kept twenty-five ridiculously pampered cats, whose masters regularly "had their portraits painted and fed them on roast fowl" (Darnton 76). Unlike earlier cat-massacres, such as those during the Inquisitions, this massacre did not appear to be inspired by negative feelings towards the animals themselves, but rather "an oblique attack on the master and his wife", in retribution for the ill-treatment of their workers (Darnton 78). The killing of these pampered cats could indeed be seen as a kind of "workers' revolt", inspired by an injustice that "seemed especially flagrant in the case of the apprentices, who were treated like animals while the animals were promoted over their heads to the position the boys should have occupied, the place at the masters table" (Darnton 79).

3.2 The Newly Elevated Status of the Cat

3.2.1 Beginnings of the Animal Rights Movement

Beginning in the Renaissance, the Western world gradually began to embrace the cat once again, and by the beginning of the 19th century, “the cat's reputation was exalted, and cats became popular pets” with the general public (Nikolajeva “Cat” 169). The cat's untameable nature became a particular source of praise, and authors and artists applauded its arrogant demeanour in the household and its unwillingness to blindly comply with human directives (Walter 111).

The late 18th century also saw the birth of a new school of thought, in which cruelty towards animals was not only discouraged but condemned (Walter 94-5). In the early 19th century, these views would lead to the creation of multiple organisations dedicated to the well-being of animals. In 1837, Queen Victoria, a cat lover, granted royal status to the SPCA, the “society for the prevention of cruelty to animals”, an organisation which represented a new way of viewing the cat and other animals (Altman 112). The first organisation of its kind, the SPCA was soon followed in 1845 by the SPA, a French equivalent that advocated for the implementation of new laws protecting animals' rights (Walter 107). Many more laws and organisations protecting animals would develop over the course of the 20th century. One of the most significant of these, from a global perspective, is the Universal Declaration of Animal Rights pronounced by UNESCO in 1978, “which recognises all animals as sentient beings, and therefore tries to relieve them of indiscriminate exploitation” (Tesolin 118).

The general fascination with cats during this period can also be seen in the creation of the “cat show”, an event during which cat owners and lovers gather to exhibit their

feline companions, and judge the beauty of their physical characteristics (“Konkai no odai”). The first cat show was organised by Harrison Weir, and held at the Crystal Palace in London in 1871; it was soon followed in 1895 by a similar show at Madison Square Garden in New York. These shows enabled “cat fanciers from distant parts [to] have a chance to meet and compare notes, breeds, medical information, and experience” (Choron et al. 11). Cat shows soon became a regular occurrence all around the world. The first “cat club”¹³, the National Cat Club, was created in 1887 by the organiser of the first cat show, Harrison Weir, and groups of this kind became increasingly common over the course of the 20th century (Walter 108-9). By 1910, such was the popularity of cat shows that the Governing Body of the Cat Fancy was set up to “settle the many disputes arising from the popularity of breeding and showing cats” (Choron et al. 11).

3.2.2 Expansion of the Pet Phenomenon

Over the course of the 19th century, animals, including the cat, began to fill a role totally detached from the original pact of domestication, in which they served no practical function other than to be doted on by humans (Gouabault and Burton-Jeangros 302). As it became a cherished household pet, it came to represent the “embodiment of domestic virtue” in many Victorian households (Rogers 101). The popularity of these pampered pets would grow exponentially over the course of the 20th century. Subsequently, the relationships between pet cats and their carers became marked by an intensity that had been absent in their previous roles as mousers or even beloved ‘ships’ cats, and represents the highest level of zoocentrism (Gouabault and Burton-Jean 311). The increasing popularity of the pet phenomenon also led to the

¹³ A “cat club” is a group of people that organises events, including cat shows, for ailurophiles to meet and share their love of cats, and compare notes. They usually also produce publications (books, articles, magazines) on the topic of cat care and cat breeds.

birth of a booming market for cat-related merchandise (Walter 102). For instance, following the establishment of Cat Fanciers' Associations like Harrison Weir's National Cat Club, there was an increased demand for publications devoted to pictures and descriptions of cat breeds (Rogers 151). In the 1930s, canned cat food was introduced, highlighting the new role of the cat as a cared-for animal, no longer expected to feed itself (Choron et al. 13).

3.2.3 The Cat in Popular Culture in the 19th and 20th Century

The cat's growing popularity in the 20th century also led to its image and symbolic connotations being used in a variety of new places. The cat and its symbolic attributes notably became a favourite figure in advertising. Its perceived cleanliness¹⁴, for instance, was used to sell LeChat soaps and beauty products in the early 20th century (Walter 121). Cats were most commonly used to advertise household products, highlighting the longstanding connection between cats and domesticity (Walter 106).

Cats also appear in various popular mediums that began to develop in the late 19th century. The cat was, for example, a favourite subject for early photographers; these photos were sometimes realistic, sometimes surreal, and appeared as works of art in and of themselves, often plastered on posters and calendars (Walter 121). This early fascination of photographers partly foreshadows the cat's popularity in the internet phenomenon of the meme in 21st century.

¹⁴ In the late 19th century, Louis Pasteur significantly applauded the cleanliness of cats that he saw as being in stark contrast to the dirtiness of dogs (Choron et al. 11). He in fact "held up its habits of cleanliness as an example for humanity to emulate" (Engels 172).

Cats also commonly featured in a new genre of literature developing at the beginning of the 20th century, the comic book. Feline heroes featured as some of the most popular figures in the comics of this period, a notable example of which is Krazy Katt, who first appeared in 1910 and was said to be a favourite of Woodrow Wilson (Walter 113). The cats in comics often played the role of the villain, as can be seen with Gargamel's cat Azraël (in the Schtroumpf series that first appeared in the late 1950s), or of antihero, such as the famously lazy Garfield and the counterculture hippie Fritz the Cat (Walter 114). Indeed, following WWII, the cat's independent nature came to be viewed as particularly admirable and desirable in what Sax refers to as the "romanticizing of alienation" (Sax 63). At this time, the cat became idealised "for the self-assured independence and the freedom from inhibitions that we feel we should restrain in ourselves" (Rogers 3). As such, the cat became an important symbol of "liberation from socially constructed inhibitions" for the Beatniks and the revolutionary counterculture movement of the 60s that followed, just as it had been during the French Revolution (Rogers 126).

Many artists, musicians, and writers were also greatly enamoured of cats during the 19th and 20th century. The cat's physique, agility, and grace notably inspired painters from all sorts of different movements, from cubism to pop art (Walter 117). As well as creating fictional cat characters, many authors also wrote loving descriptions of their pet cats, depicting them as genuine members of the family (Walter 98). The examples of 20th century literary cats are many, but one of the most enduring has to be the wonderfully perplexing "Cheshire Cat", with his mischievous grin, from Lewis Carroll's famed *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Rudyard Kipling's "The Cat Who Walked by Himself", published in 1902 as part of the *Just So Stories*, also depicts a famously "unreliable and independent" cat (Nikolajeva "Devils" 629). As can be inferred from its title, Kipling's story focuses on the unfettered, liberated nature of cats that many have admired throughout history. Poets such as W.B. Yeats and T.S.

Eliot were also particularly enamoured of the cat (Sax 62-3). Inspired by the work of the latter, Andrew Lloyd Webber created the musical “Cats” in 1982, which emphasises the long-standing sensual, exuberant, and mysterious aspects of the cat, and would go on to become one of the most popular and long-running musicals of all time (Tesolin 112). Finally, the 19th century artist Manet frequently made use of the cat to symbolise a happy, warm home in his paintings, echoing the animal’s crucial association with domesticity (Walter 104).

Outside these traditional arts, cats also proved popular with the burgeoning film and television industry of the early 20th century. Mirroring their success in comic books, cartoon cats were especially popular, and the first of these was Felix the Cat, created in 1919 during the silent-film era, and inspired by the aforementioned Krazy Katt (Tesolin 109). Felix the Cat is particularly notable because he was one of the first cartoon figures to be “supported by a real merchandising operation [...] that helped to increase its favourable outcome” (Tesolin 110): at the height of his popularity, Felix even rivalled Mickey Mouse (Rogers 116). Another noteworthy example is MGM’s 1939 pairing of Tom the cat and Jerry the mouse, which was inspired by the success of Felix the Cat (Tesolin 110). The *Tom and Jerry* cartoons went on to win seven Oscars, and remain popular to this day (Walter 119). Finally, cats have played key roles in live-action cinema, a notable example of which is the cat Solomon, the pampered pet of Bond’s arch nemesis who appears in several movies in the James Bond series (Walter 120). Some of these live cats, such as the orange cat in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, were even rewarded with a Patsy Award, the animal equivalent of the Oscar (Tesolin 108).

3.2.4 The Pet Cat Today

Today, the cat is widely considered a pampered pet, the likes of which has never been seen before. Indeed, contemporary cats are generally thought of as a “familiar hearthside companion and [...] mischievous playmate”, rather than the demon, deity, or simple mouser of earlier periods (Engels 1). Though some cats are still used as mousers in places such as farms, for the most part these skills are never called upon, and many cats instead live comfortably in our homes “without any attempt to conform to our standards” (Rogers 3). In fact, cats are the most popular they have been since Ancient Egypt. Approximately one in four French households is home to at least one cat, and by the 1990s the number of pet cats had greatly surpassed that of the dog in both the UK and USA (Walter 122). Furthermore, contemporary feline veterinary practice is a high-grossing industry that has attained “not merely acceptability, but prestige” (Lawrence 624).

Some of the reasons for the cat’s popularity overtaking that of dogs, mankind’s traditional “best friend”, are pragmatic: cats are “smaller, eat less, need less space to exercise, and are less expensive to care for than dogs” (Sax 63). Furthermore, the cat’s independence means that owners can leave them alone for hours on end, without fear of the animal being in distress. Coupled with their natural cleanliness, this makes cats easier to care for in the confined urban spaces that many of us live in today as compared to the more exuberant dog (Rogers 115). However, the unique human-cat bond is also clearly highly valued and sought after in its own right. For instance, Hausman and Hausman tells us that their capacity for healing means that “cats have never been in greater demand as companions to the elderly, the terminally ill, the afflicted” (Hausman and Hausman 8). Today, cats are in fact “employed by us for a variety of reasons, from health care to housemate” (Hausman and Hausman 105).

3.3 A New Medium: Cats and the Internet

With the advent of the World Wide Web, cats are more present than ever, and are in fact “one of the internet’s most pervasive trends” (Hussey). Since 2005, the cat’s popularity has soared online through the phenomenon of the “lolcat”, an internet “meme” that combines a humorous image of a cat with an equally humorous caption (Moss). Since 2007, meanwhile, videos featuring cats have become one of the most common and popular videos on websites such as YouTube (Hussey).

3.3.1 Cat Memes

The internet is full of cat memes, the most well-know of which is referred to as a “lolcat”. A “meme” is an idea, behaviour, or style that spreads from person to person within a culture. In the case of the “lolcat”, it is “a photo of a cat with a poorly written (bad spelling and incorrect subject-verb agreement are important) caption” (Moss). The captions accompanying these images vary greatly, and are constantly reinvented by users of the internet. The term “lolcat”, which comes from combining the acronym “LOL” (laugh(ing) out loud) and the word “cat”, first appeared on the imageboard website 4chan in 2005 as part of the website’s tradition of “Caturday” (i.e. posting cat pictures on Saturdays) (Moss). The website LOLcats.com, which is dedicated to the “lolcat”, was registered in 2006 (Hussey). It was not, however, until 2007, with the creation of the website “I Can Has Cheezburger?”, that the meme reached the mainstream and truly became an internet sensation, attracting the attention of publications such as *Time* and *Entertainment Weekly* (Moss).

However, the idea of taking comical pictures of cats dates back much farther than 4chan. Many early photographers were particularly enamoured with the cat, and the first photographer to combine funny cats with funny captions was Harry Pointer in the 1870s: his series of over two-hundred photos, collectively called the “Brighton Cats” combines pictures of his cats posed in ways that mimic human activities (i.e. a cat on a tricycle, cats roller-skating etc.) with comical captions (Moss). This series was so successful that it went on to feature in exhibitions in London and Dublin, and Pointer was subsequently asked to join the Photographic Society of Great Britain (Hussey). In the 1940s, Harry Whittier Frees also produced many photographs of cats combined with funny captions which appeared on postcards and in children’s books; though he also experimented with photographing a number of other animals, Frees preferred to work with cats, believing them to be “the most versatile animal actor [with] the greatest variety of appeals” (Moss).

While many other animals have been the subject of internet memes, the supremacy of the lolcat in popular culture suggests something special about the cat and the cat-human relationship. According to a Central Missouri State University study cited by Hussey, “humans ascribe the same personality traits to cats that psychologists would use to summarise the four broad personality parameters in people: extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, and openness” (Hussey). Cats are thus the perfect animals for us to relate to. For Ben Huh, CEO of “I Can Has Cheezburger?”, cats represent “a perfect canvas for human emotion” because they have “very expressive facial and body expressions”, and are thus “awesome for captioning and anthropomorphization” (Hussey). It would therefore appear that the lolcat is appealing in part due to the “anthropomorphic projection” that Michalon describes as potentially therapeutic in human-animal interactions (Michalon “Relations” 83).

3.3.2 Cat Videos

At the same time as cat memes were developing, cat videos were also becoming a common feature on the internet. First appearing in 2006, cat videos are today one of the most popular type of online videos, and are in fact “one of the defining content categories on Google’s video service” (Dredge). These videos are “generally non-narrative, like early films of people sneezing or arriving trains [they] celebrate the quotidian and are set in everyday locations [evoking] the visual pleasures of the ordinary, and [turning] the commonplace into the spectacular” (Shafer “I Can Haz” 2). They are characterised by “minimal editing [that] suggests a cinema vérité-like spontaneity and sincerity” (Shafer “Cat Videos”). One of the first videos to start this phenomenon was that of a “besieged cat crying as seven puppies warily investigate it” entitled “Puppy vs. Cat” (Wagstaff). Cat videos are today some of the most-watched videos on YouTube, receiving “more views-per-video than any other category of YouTube content”, sometimes reaching millions of views (Myrick 168). The industry of cat videos has furthermore become a source of income for some, creating a true “economy of internet cat videos” (Dredge). Wagstaff theorises that the main reason that cats are the most popular type of animal videos is because there is “something about watching a normally proud animal thrust into a humiliating situation that’s especially funny” (Wagstaff).

As with the meme, however, videos of cats have existed since long before the birth of the internet. As early as 1903, George Albert Smith made a short silent comedy film titled “The Sick Kitten”, which portrayed two children spoon-feeding a kitten medicine (Wagstaff). Possibly the earliest example of a comical cat video is a production by Thomas Edison entitled “Prof. Welton’s Boxing Cats”, created in 1894, which depicts two cats with boxing gloves play-fighting in a cat-sized boxing ring: thus it would seem that the “man known for inventing the phonograph, the

motion picture camera and the lightbulb, also happened to invent the cat video” (Tschorn “Thomas”). The first “cat in motion” media dates back even further, to 1887, when the Englishman Eadweard Muybridge, a pioneer in motion capture, included a motion study of a cat running in his animal locomotion studies (Cieplak-Mayr von Baldegg).

Research has suggested that viewing cat videos online can deliver a kind of “emotional healing”, which may also account in part for their popularity. Developing this idea, Gitlin posits the “Emergency Kitten hypothesis” (after the website of the same name), whereby websites sharing cat videos provide their users with “a dose of [...] baby cat as a palliative for stressful times” (Gitlin). Viewers of cat videos indeed “reported a decrease in negative emotions –annoyance, anxiety, sadness, guilt –after an Internet cat fix, as well as an increase in positive emotions (hope, happiness, contentment)” (Gitlin). Watching these videos may thus “function as a form of digital pet therapy and/or stress relief for Internet users” (Myrick 174).

One of the reasons for the therapeutic benefits of cat videos may reside in their simplicity: cat videos are not “trying to get you to identify with characters or follow a story or invest emotionally in an allegory: it’s showing you something to make you laugh, go ‘awww,’ and click on another cat video” (Shafer “Cat Videos”). The use of media to produce positive emotional, psychological and spiritual effects has been described by the German researcher Dolf Zillman in his “mood-management theory”, which suggests that “[p]eople gravitate toward pieces of content [...] that will either (a) make them feel better or (b) maintain their current good moods” (Dewey “Fascinating”). In this way, the video cats play an “affective” role, and generate “affective connections with commercial interfaces” in viewers (Shafer “Cat Videos”). Finally, research suggests that cat videos may also serve a social function for their audience. As there is no equivalent to the dog park in the world of the cat lover, in

some ways, the cat owner's "dog park is the Internet" (Stein). Shafer posits that the "circulation and popularity of LOLcat memes and viral cat videos suggests that ever growing virtual communities are being built around the exchange and creation of, as well as the pleasures afforded by, these cat objects" (Shafer "I Can Haz" 4). The internet is thus also "home to very intense communities of cat owners, who gather to share stories and seek answers about their pets" (Stein). In this sense, the internet cat may serve as a social lubricant and social catalyst for online cat-lovers.

3.3.3 Cat Celebrities

Some of the cats featured in Internet videos and memes have become so popular that they can be considered "celebrities". These cats have been subjected to the highest level of personification, and have in fact been "starified" and transformed into "superindividuals" in the way discussed by Gouabault et al. Furthermore, some of these internet celebrities are so popular that they even make a substantial income. Grumpy Cat, for example, "makes more money than many prominent human celebrities" (Myrick 168). The popularity of cats such as Grumpy Cat, Maru, Tara the Hero Cat, and Lil Bub has even spread beyond the vast confines of the internet. They appear in extensive amounts of merchandise, such as mugs and calendars, and even star in films and "author" books. Tara the Hero Cat for instance has her own line of yoga pants and footie pyjamas, and Maru's "bizarrely well-reviewed" book has been translated into two languages (Dewey "Grumpy").

In the digital age, cats have become the "Internet's mascots" (Wagstaff). In this context, cat videos function as a kind of "low -cost and easily distributed" pet-therapy (Myrick 168). This stems not only from the cats' cuteness, but also the comic value they often provide. As Mitchells reminds us, laughter is a "great stress-reducer" that

has been proven to “boost immunity, reduce stress (thus reducing its effects), and even reduce pain” (Mitchell).

3.4 The Cat Café Phenomenon

After the cat on the internet, we come to the equally singular, but far more tangible phenomenon of the cat café. These theme cafés are “cafés where customers can get their drink, sip their coffee, have a snack”, but whose distinguishing feature is the presence of a number of cats who freely roam about, and with whom the clientele can interact (Tesolin 35). These cafés are a relatively new phenomenon, the first appearing in Taipei in 1998, where it was an instant success (Plourde 118). It was so successful, in fact, that it became a popular attraction for Japanese tourists (“Konkai no odai”). Eventually, the phenomenon was exported to Japan, and the first Japanese cat café opened in Osaka in 2004, soon followed by a second in the Tokyo area in 2005 (Plourde 118). The popularity of these cat cafés led to an exponential growth of the phenomenon in Japan, and there are currently around 150 cafés in Japan alone, mostly in the Tokyo area (Galloway). Since 2012, cat cafés have also opened in many Western countries, “notwithstanding the difficulties encountered with some country laws on the vicinity of food and animals” (Tesolin 36). In late 2014, the first two cat cafés in North America, the Café des Chats, and the Café Chat l’Heureux, opened in Montreal (Muther).

Though these places generally serve some form of food and drink, the primary attraction is the feline presence, and many cat cafés around the world, notably those in Japan, charge a cover fee per time spent with the cats (Plourde 117). The popularity and profitability of cat cafés is clear in Japan, where they are an industry unto themselves (Plourde 131). The simplest explanation for this popularity is

“materialist”: “many flats in Japanese cities forbid pet ownership, so cat lovers are drawn to these places to get a furry cuddle” (Tesolin 36). However, even in Japan, many visitors to cat cafés are people who already have cats at home (“Konkai no odai”). Indeed, many of the Japanese cat café customers encountered by Plourde justified their visits with reasons far beyond “materialist explanations”: the purpose of all Japanese cat cafés, though they may “vary in terms of design aesthetics and overall concept”, is to provide “healing (*iyashi*) and “contact (*fureai*)” through the intermediary of cats (Plourde 118)¹⁵. This is also suggested by an article on *Nikkei Trendy*, in which a number of respondents explicitly state that they go to the cat café *to be healed*, referring specifically to the happiness that is generated by being surrounded by cats (“Konkai no odai”). Plourde explains that the “stagnant economic growth and increasing social and economic precarity” that characterises recent Japanese history has led to a “sense of loneliness and ‘affective malaise’” in much of the population, a void which some attempt to fill with cats (Plourde 116-9). In this way, cat cafés are “marketed and predicated on a sense of loss, the loss of social relationships and contact” and the cats themselves are an “affective object through which customers can receive ‘healing and stimulation’ to cope with such loss” (Plourde 132). The café cats are therefore engaged in a type of “affective labour”, a type of “immaterial” labour that produces “feelings and sensations of healing, relaxation, and calm for the customers” (Plourde 116). The use of the term “cat staff” to designate the cats in some café demonstrates “a clear recognition of the cats as laborers on some level by the café employees and owners” (Plourde 129).

Part of the healing impact of the cat café cats is “premised on the cat itself as a sensual commodity in which the patron invests over time, both materially and imaginatively”; as such each cat must thus be presented as “a distinct and complex

¹⁵ The latter is a recent Japanese term that “invokes mutual (and emotional) contact between two parties, including contact between human and nonhuman actors” (Plourde 118)

individual” for customers to invest in (Plourde 126). The café cat is in fact individualised “to a point where they become imbued with human attributes and interests”, their personalities and physical characteristics becoming “sensual and fantastic sites of investment and imagination” for patrons (Plourde 127-8). Plourde tells us that most regular café patrons come to spend time with a specific cat, *their* cat, and that this animal serves as a sort of surrogate pet (Plourde 124), in which “they invest, both materially and psychically, while actual ownership of any of the cats is an impossibility” (Plourde 132). In some Japanese cat cafés, however, resident cats can change on a daily basis, making such affective relationships between particular cats and visitors more difficult (“Konkai no odai”).

While much of the “healing” aspect of cat cafés comes from contact with the cats, Plourde suggests the café itself might also function as a healing environment. She argues that cat cafés are “highly domestic spaces that evoke the feeling and ambience of being in one’s apartment, through a carefully staged use of furniture, lighting, reading materials, and background music” (Plourde 116). Through this staging, cat cafés attempt to produce “a sense of familiarity and comfort for patrons that lets them engage in such intimate yet banal (and unproductive) behavior as sleeping and snoring in front of other patrons and cats” (Plourde 124). Specifically, cat cafés seek to provide a “nonproductive yet homey and intimate public space” (Plourde 132). Plourde suggests that to achieve this illusion of home, many Japanese cafés “draw on design themes that are childlike, innocent, and non-threatening, often evoking the ambience of preschool environments” (Plourde 122). If successful, patrons “should feel as if they are at *their* home (or at least, a generalized and recognizable sense of home), playing with what might be *their* cat” whilst at the cat café (Plourde 123). The cats themselves are also integral to producing this sense of alternative domesticity. As we have seen, they have long been symbols of domesticity and the home, and the affective labour they perform through their mere presence “produces feelings of

home, domesticity, and healing for patrons” (Plourde 129). The mode of domesticity created in cat cafés is, furthermore, much like the cat, flexible, unpredictable, and unruly: it contrasts with the traditional home in that “patrons can enter, connect, disconnect, and exit the space freely” (Plourde 131). In this way, cat cafés intentionally seek to represent a temporality that is “positioned outside the frenzied and presumably stressful experience of everyday life in Tokyo” (Plourde 122).

Despite the popularity of cat cafés, they have not always been well-received. Animal rights movements in particular fear that the cafés are exploiting the animals in their desire to please human patrons, and that they neglect to focus on the cat’s well-being. Japanese animal rights and animal welfare organisations particularly object to the cat café’s commodification and packaging of cats, and see in it a potential for serious abuse (Plourde 121). Many specifically fear that “cats are overstimulated by the constant attention from customers” in the café setting (Plourde 121). Cat cafés in the West are similarly met with opposition from animal rights movement, and must additionally deal with the complications of “laws on the vicinity of food and animals” (Tesolin 36). Despite these difficulties, however, the cat café phenomenon has become popular around the world, and continues to grow.

CHAPTER IV

ETHNOGRAPHY OF TWO MONTREAL CAT CAFES

4.1 Description of Fieldwork Undertaken

In this section, I present the results of fieldwork undertaken at the two first cat cafés to open in North America, the Café Chat l'Heureux and the Café des Chats. To gain a better understanding of, and a first-hand perspective on, this new phenomenon, I have been visiting these two sites casually since they opened in late 2014, to observe and interact with the people and felines in these unique settings. From March 2015, I officially began my fieldwork, and visited each café once to twice a week until April 2016. My primary method of investigation at these sites was observation, complemented with the results of interviews and questionnaires. I also photographed the cats and the different “zones” of the cafés for persistence and to enable later analysis. Some of these photos will appear in an appendix following the results of my fieldwork below.

In my observation of the cafés, I was interested in a number of different things. Firstly, I paid attention to how many people were present at the café at any given time, and just who these people were. Were they on their own or in a group? In this way, I sought to mimic Plourde's fieldwork, and gain an understanding of the cafés' regular schedule: who is there, when and for how long? I was also interested in the types of activities these people were engaged in, and where they were exactly in the café: do people stay in one place, or wander around? Do they try to interact with the cats? In what ways do the cats and patrons use the space available? Are there visible

signs that distinguish regular from casual patrons of the café, in the same way as regular visitors to the cemetery are distinguished by their behaviour (for instance, by how much food they bring) (Delaporte 40)? In what ways does the cat café, in fact, differ from any other café?

Naturally, I was also interested in the different interactions taking place between the humans and cats present at the cafés. In particular, I attempted to investigate the relationship between the cats, the various humans present, and the cats and humans. In observing the interactions between cats and customers I was particularly interested in discovering whether the café cats serve as a “social lubricant” (Grandgeorge and Hausberger 398) and as a “social catalyst” (Piette 95). To determine whether the cats were social catalysts, I watched to see whether any interactions were initiated because of the presence of the cats. To see whether they were social lubricants, I investigated the nature of these interactions: were people relaxed, despite the fact they were dealing with strangers? Plourde tells us that, sometimes, the human staff is also trained to serve as a social catalyst, and specifically “to interact and engage directly with the patrons, which it sees as crucial in facilitating interaction among patrons” (Plourde 130). Do such measures exist in the Montreal cafés?

As well as observing the various cats and humans, I also paid close attention to the physical layout and characteristics of the cat café settings themselves. Plourde tells us that the therapeutic impact of cat cafés is due not only to interaction with other people and cats, but also “the highly controlled and staged ambience of the cafés, which [aims] to evoke a domestic feel” (Plourde 121). Given the importance of the cafés’ physical characteristics to the *iyashi* of Japanese cafés, I sought to determine whether they similarly impact the “purr-therapy” of the Montreal cafés. I therefore took note of the physical elements of the cafés that contribute in creating the cafés’ ambience, such as the type of seating, the lighting, the presence of blankets and cushions, the

choice and volume of music, the colours, the shapes used in the décor, the proposed reading materials, etc. In imitation of Michalon's study of an SPA shelter, I also attempted to document the full sensory experience of the setting, including the sounds, smells, and tactile elements of the cafés, in order to gain a more complete understanding of the affective experience of the environment (Michalon "Fabriquer" 168). Similarly, I attempted to divide the cafés in my fieldwork into different "zones", as done by Delaporte and Michalon in their respective ethnographies, to better comprehend the organisation of the space and its division into its various functions: cat space, staff space, customer space etc. However, because of the constant renovations the cafés (notably the Café des Chats) went through during the time of my fieldwork, this was not always easy. I observed in what ways both cats and humans utilise the available territory, and to what extent this takes place harmoniously.

To complement my observations, I also made use of the multitude of surrounding primary sources associated with the cafés, such as the cat "menus", the café websites, and the café guestbooks. The first of these, the cat "album" or "menu", is a sheet of paper presented to patrons of the Montreal cafés, on which the name, birthdate, and other key facts about the café cats are collected for the benefit of the customers. It is essential to "flesh out [the cats'] personal history and temperament" (Plourde 117). These menus provided a starting point for investigating the marketing of the cats in the Montreal café, and whether they were depicted, like in Japan, as "simultaneously healing, laboring, and sensory objects" (Plourde 118). I also regularly consulted the cafés' official websites and Facebook pages, which were crucial in revealing the ways in which the cafés present their goals and their cats, and in understanding the image the cafés wish to project of themselves. Finally, I used the guestbooks present at the cafés and online reviews of the café on Facebook, and other websites such as Tripadvisor, to gather additional information about the patrons'

perception of the cat cafés and the cats. These sources were useful in understanding the opinions of people on the café and its cats, and in establishing the most common complaints and praises of the cat cafés.

Finally, I administered a hundred anonymous questionnaires and conducted formal and informal interviews with the patrons and creators of the cafés, in order to gather information directly from the various parties involved in the cat cafés. In designing my questionnaires, I took inspiration from a similar study conducted by the Japanese publication *Nikkei Trendy*. These questionnaires were particularly useful in gathering statistics about Montreal cat café patrons. When recruiting for interviews, I made use of recruitment posters, included a request for interviewees in the questionnaires I distributed, and asked the owners to point me in the direction of regulars. I have given these customers pseudonyms in my discussion below and attempted to redact any personally-identifying information. As I only examined two cat cafés, however, keeping the owners anonymous the way Plourde does was impossible.

In my interviews with the patrons, I was firstly interested in determining whether the “materialist” explanation, which Plourde rejects in the context of Japanese cat cafés (Plourde 118), has any validity in the Montreal setting. Why do these people come to the cat café? What do cat café patrons expect and desire from the cats when they visit the cafés? Do they have cats of their own at home? I also asked what kind of behaviour customers of the café engaged in during their time at the café: do they try to interact with the cats, and if so, how? Do they take photos of the cats? Or do they mostly ignore the cats, and read or consume the food and drink that the café sells? Is the mere fact of being around cats still deemed satisfactory and/or therapeutic, or is it necessary to develop a special bond with the cats before one can benefit from the “purr-therapy” that is advertised on the Café Chat l’Heureux’s website? Do café patrons feel the effects of this “therapy”? How do they see the effects of the cat café

setting on the development of human-cat (and human-human) interactions and relationships?

In particular, I was interested in determining whether regular customers found their time at the café to be therapeutic, and whether they felt it was possible to develop a “satisfactory” bond with the cat café cats, and if so, of what nature? Do they ascribe to the definition found in Alger and Alger, in which the relationship is only deemed satisfactory if they see the “cat as initiating the interactions between them as often as they did –that is, reciprocating their love and friendship” (Alger and Alger “Beyond” 77)? Or does the healing result from simply being around the cats, from “la simple situation de co-présence”, as Michalon suggests can sometimes be the case (Michalon “Relations” 80)? What impact, if any, do the regulations and rules of the cat café have on the possible therapeutic benefits one can gain from a cat? If the cafés’ rules forbid people from aggressively seeking out direct physical contact, can customers of the cat café still benefit from any type of healing without touching the cats? Patrons’ understanding and valuation of the human-animal relationship plays a central role in any therapeutic effect the cat café may have: Grandgeorge and Hausberger assert that rather than the frequency of interactions with an animal, “it is the quality of the bond established” that is crucial to successful therapy (Grandgeorge and Hausberger 402). Determining whether the patrons are satisfied with their relationship with the cats is thus crucial in testing the therapeutic potential of cat cafés.

Furthermore, following Plourde’s suggestion that regular customers generally seek to build a relationship with one cat in particular as a crucial component of cat café healing, I was careful to include related questions in my interviews with patrons. In particular, I asked patrons whether they had developed, or wished to develop, a special relationship with a specific cat. I was likewise interested in whether regular customers are loyal to a café, and thus to a group of cats, in particular. Like Plourde I

was also interested in determining what specific aspects of the cat attract customers. Is it, like in Japan, “their perceived unruliness and carefree nature [...], a sense of charm that is distinct from the more ‘obedient’ (and implicitly, submissive) personalities of dogs” (Plourde 119)? Does the relationship between customer and café cats reached the same levels of intensity Gouabault and Burton-Jeangros describe in reference to the “pet phenomenon” (Gouabault and Burton-Jeangros 310)?

The final focus of my interviews with regular customers revolved around discovering whether the same sort of community that Delaporte describes in the context of the cemetery exists between patrons of the café (Delaporte 39). Like Delaporte, I was therefore interested in any feelings of community that developed between regular patrons, and by what sort of interactions take place between them. Do the regulars know each other by name? How often do they end up at the café at the same time? Do they, like the visitors to the cemetery, primarily discuss cats amongst themselves, or do conversation topics vary (Delaporte 40)? Are the relationships between regular café patrons similar to those between regular cemetery visitors, in that “[o]n se connaît sans se connaître” (Delaporte 48)? Finally, is there any sort of rivalry between regulars for the cats’ attention (Delaporte 47)? I was also interested in discovering whether regulars of the café behave differently to non-regulars: do they, for instance, come at specific times or comport themselves in different ways? Is there a preferred section of the cafés that regulars will choose to sit in? The existence of such a community is a crucial element in investigating whether the café cats serve as a social lubricant.

By comparison, in my interviews with owners and staff, I was primarily interested in discovering what the goals of these cafés in Montreal were. As such, questions focused on what type of audience the cafés’ creators hope to attract, and the criteria that went into choosing the café cats. I was also interested in discovering to what

degree the owners acknowledge that the cats are “instrumentalised” in this setting (Doré 35). Furthermore, I sought to determine whether the owners and staff encourage cat-patrons interaction by engaging in “theatrical events” to artificially stimulate the cats’ behaviour (making the cats do tricks, for example), and attract customers’ attention when the cats aren’t interested in interacting with them (Plourde 125). Are there any other ways that the cafés encourage interaction between the cats and patrons? Similarly, I was also interested in determining to what extent café staff encourage human-human interactions in the café. Do they host special events, such as birthday parties for the cats, in an effort to bring regular patrons together (Plourde 127)? As Plourde focuses on the crucial impact of rules in the Japanese cat café, I likewise sought discover what their impact is in the Montreal setting and on the interactions that take place therein. I asked about the ways these rules are communicated to the café patrons, and to what degree, and by whom, they are enforced. Naturally, I was also interested in the extent of adherence to the rules. In what ways do the rules in Montreal’s cat cafés differ from those described by Plourde in the Japanese context?

Finally, I also investigated the relationship between the cafés’ human staff and the cats, and the views of the staff on their feline counterparts. Are the cats recognised as affective labourers, and thus staff, in the Montreal cafés? If so, what measures are taken to ensure the well-being of these working cats? What balance exists between the immaterial work of the cats and the material work of the humans? In some Japanese cases, cafés prefer to consider cat and human staff as part of one “family” (Plourde 129). Does this reflect the situation in Montreal’s cafés?

4.2 Description of the Cat Cafés

4.2.1 Café Chat l'Heureux

The Café Chat l'Heureux was the first cat café planned in North America. The idea was suggested in August 2013 by Clément Marty, who had been inspired by his experiences of cat cafés during his travels, notably in Japan and South Korea. In January 2014, Clément started a crowd-funding campaign on indiegogo.com, which amassed \$45000 in 45 days, thanks to the support of 1200 contributors. It would take many more months, however, before the café finally opened its doors to the public, in September 2014, with seven cats adopted from different shelters around Montreal: Luna, Luciole, Luzerne, Milady, Gustave, Sheldon, and Chopin. A few months after the café opened, a new cat was introduced, a shy Himalayan by the name of Boris. Meeting for the first time at the café, some of the cats inevitably came into conflict, in particular Gustave and Boris; the latter was eventually rehomed as a result. Chopin likewise soon revealed himself to be unsuited to the cat café setting, and was adopted by Clément himself. The two cats have been replaced by Pumpkin and Mousse, two kittens originally only intended to stay at the café a short while, but who were adopted after winning the hearts of the café staff.

On its website, the Café Chat l'Heureux describes itself as “a cafe/restaurant open to everyone where one can enjoy the company of cats while savoring beverages and quality products” (“Café Chat l'Heureux”). The website frames the café as “a relaxation space to enjoy a prolonged contact with cats in an optimized space for human/feline interactions” that seeks to “provide the benefits of cat-therapy” (“Café Chat l'Heureux”). Specifically, in the video made for the crowd-funding campaign, Clément advertises the café as providing “purr-therapy”. The concept of “purr-therapy” suggests that the mere presence of a purring cat can alleviate stress and

anxiety, and has been addressed in a number of scientific studies discussed in articles by Lyons and Bancarz. The Café Chat l'Heureux thus explicitly connects itself to the theme of healing in its marketing. It also situates the healing theme within its “social mission”, offering “educative and informative events, conferences with veterinarians, workshops for kids and zootherapy for disabled people and elders” as part of the café’s positive engagement with the community (“Café Chat l'Heureux”). Sadly, however, these conferences were discontinued a few months after the café opened, due to flagging attendance.

Entering the Café Chat l'Heureux, patrons find themselves in a lobby area in which a number of things are on display. Firstly, the café displays laminated newspaper articles that discuss the café, as well as the café rules for customers to peruse before coming into contact with the cats. There are also portraits of the resident cats, with their names underneath, as well as the names of their official sponsors. Sponsoring a cat was one of the suggested tiers of donation during the crowd-funding campaign, and afforded funders an invitation to pre-opening events, loyalty cards, a custom keychain as a “Café Chat l'Heureux contributor”, and the prize of having their name included on the “cat’s card” (“Café Chat l'Heureux Campaign”).

The interior of the Café Chat l'Heureux is covered in cat-themed artwork. There are paintings on the wall, bearing titles such as “Octopussy”, “Whistling Cat”, and “Flying Kitten”, and the cushions on the couches are shaped like cats’ faces. Cat-related merchandise is on offer at the counter, including cat-themed jewellery and bowties for their cats to wear. Several screens are also installed around the café, on which photos and videos of the café cats play on a constant loop. Many of these photos and videos actually originate from patrons of the café, who thus help to shape the environment they then consume. Online, the café explicitly describes itself as a “warm environment”, and the space has evidently been crafted to exude a “homey”

air for its customers, with comfortable couches, rugs on the floor, bookshelves full of books (some of them cat-themed), and a fake fireplace in the winter. The atmosphere desired by the café is also apparent in its name, which is a pun: “Café Chat l’Heureux” (“the happy cat café”) but also “Café Cha(t)l(h)heureux” (“the warm, inviting café”).

The café is also especially designed to suit the needs of cats. There are toys scattered about the café, and boxes, baskets and scratching posts placed strategically around the place. The bookshelves, meanwhile, cater not only to patrons’ desire to read, but have also been designed to accommodate the cats. They have holes cut out of them to allow the cats to climb up through the shelves, and some are in the shape of steps that the cats can thus scale. Most notably, however, there are several walkways and ledges just below the ceiling, on which cats enjoy sleeping and observing the clientele below. The cats also have a separate area, accessible through small passageways, that is not visible to patrons.

On a fairly regular basis, Clément himself makes an appearance, often with a cat balanced on his shoulders. To entertain the clientele, he shows off the various tricks he has taught the café’s cats, which include high-fives and spins. He also regularly converses with the patrons, many of whom come to him for general cat-related advice and to ask about the various residents of the café.

4.2.2 Café des Chats

The Café des Chats holds the title of first permanent cat café in North America. It opened mere weeks before the Café Chat l’Heureux, in late August 2014, with eight

cats, all adopted from the SPCA: Peace, Big Foot, Munchkin, King Kong, Snow, Sidibou, Séa, and Sauvageon. A year and a half after it opened, the Café des Chats welcomed a new cat, Zoopa. Unlike at the Café Chat l'Heureux, there has been little to no conflict between the cats at the Café des Chats, most of whom had already become acquainted with each other whilst at the SPCA.

The Café des Chats describes itself on its website as having a relaxing atmosphere, in which cats are free to roam about as they please ("Café des Chats"). The website elaborates on the origins of the café, situating it in "notre amour inconditionnel des animaux de compagnie en général et des chats plus particulièrement"; it claims that the café's objectif is to offer patrons "un espace plaisant, un menu varié et d'excellents thés" ("Café des Chats"). Though there is no explicit mention of "healing" or "therapy", the café therefore presents itself as a relaxing environment, aligned with the animal rights movement in terms of their love and care for cats.

Though a lot smaller than the Café Chat l'Heureux, the Café des Chats is equally devoted to its cat-themed decoration and a number of images of felines are scattered around the café. Entering the café, patrons must first pass through a lobby area, where the rules are prominently displayed next to a series of portraits of the different cats with their names written underneath. The café primarily seeks to evoke a cosy atmosphere. There is a corner with bean bags and rugs on the floor, where people can get down to the level of the cats and play with the toys laid about the place. There is also a corner with several comfy chairs, and several bookshelves on the surrounding walls, containing books mostly related to cats.

The café is, furthermore, set up to cater to cats, though the space has not been renovated to the same degree as the Café Chat l'Heureux. As stated on the website, "petits recoins et accessoires leur sont dédiés, des arbres, des paniers et des circuits en

hauteur, des jouets...” (“Café des Chats”). There are no walkways, but there are a number of ledges on which the cats can elevate themselves; however, with lower ceilings than the Café Chat l’Heureux, cats in the Café des Chats are always accessible to humans, no matter the ledge they choose. There is also a separate room for the cats, but unlike at the Café Chat l’Heureux, this space is fully visible to patrons of the Café des Chats, by virtue of a glass divider through which patrons can observe the cats during their alone time. To further highlight the central importance of the cats in this setting, the café’s slogan, “The cat is king!”, is scrawled across a wall near the entrance, one of the first things patrons see as they enter.

The staff at the Café des Chats occasionally make the cats perform tricks to entertain the customers, much like at the Café Chat l’Heureux. They also make a deliberate performance out of feeding time, summoning all the cats at once and laying out their bowls in a place where people can, and do, come to watch.

4.2.3 Key Differences and Similarities between the Cafés

Unlike the rowdy greetings from shelter dogs described by Michalon (Michalon “Fabriquer” 168), the greeting patrons get from the cats whilst entering either café is often somewhat cold. Indeed, a particular feline rushing up to a patron as they enter is more likely to signify that that cat is trying to “escape” the café, rather than any interest in the newcomer. Depending on the time of day, patrons are instead often greeted by the sound of loud conversations or music. Though it is often difficult to hear over the sound of people, the Café Chat l’Heureux generally plays soft rock, pop, and reggae music, much of it Francophone in origin. The Café des Chats, meanwhile, seeks to create a laid-back atmosphere through various forms of lounge electronic music, which is usually audible in the quieter setting.

Both the Café Chat l'Heureux and the Café des Chats seek to provide a comfortable atmosphere for their patrons. The Café Chat l'Heureux has couches, cushions and soft rugs on the ground. The Café des Chats notably features the area with bean bags previously described. In winter, customers must remove their shoes before entering the cafés and are offered slippers to wear instead. This reinforces the cosy, homey atmosphere of the cafés. Finally, the cafés are also characterised by dim lighting, which induces a relaxed, sleepy atmosphere for patrons.

Both cat cafés attract a diverse group of people, and seek to appeal to both cat lovers and cat novices. Most age groups were represented at both cafés during the many hours I spent there, despite primarily appealing to different age groups. Whilst the rowdier Café Chat l'Heureux primarily attracts a young audience, notably including university students and children under ten, the Café des Chats, on the other hand, appeals mainly to university-aged students, and retirees over the age of 60. In general, the Café des Chats attracts a quieter audience, including many people on their own, studying, reading, or playing with the cats, whereas the Café Chat l'Heureux often hosts large groups of people. Despite this difference, many of the activities that take place at the cafés are the same. A favourite activity of patrons at both cafés, for example, is taking photos of the cats, often while they sleep.

One key way in which both Montreal cat cafés are different to those described by Plourde is in their choice not to charge patrons a cover fee, but instead make purchasing something mandatory. This enables customers to have more flexibility in deciding the amount of time they wish to stay at the cafés. Otherwise, the rules at both cafés are quite similar to each other and to those in most Japanese cat cafés (Plourde 117). Two key differences between the Montreal cafés and the Japanese ones are the admittance of children under twelve and the restrictions on patrons picking up cats.

Both cafés are characterised by different “zones”, some more popular and sought-after by patrons than others. At the Café des Chats, one of these areas is the corner with the bean bags and cushions on the floor. This area puts patrons on the same level as the cats, apparently increasing their potential for feline contact, while also enabling them to benefit from soft, comfortable furnishings not as present in the rest of the café. By comparison, at the Café Chat l’Heureux the couch areas are a clear crowd favourite, though large groups often favour the tables where they can all sit together. Many people also choose to eat at the Café Chat l’Heureux, ensuring the tables are used more often than at the Café des Chats. The cats at both cafés make use of all the space available to them, and are just as likely to be sleeping by the bean bags as they are to be sitting on one of the tables.

The owners at both cat cafés have come up with strategies to entertain patrons, especially when the cats are all sleeping or ignoring patrons, which is most of the time. Both cafés make a show of giving the cats treats and making them do tricks, such as giving high-fives. The staff will also often produce a favourite toy or snack to coax a cat down from a ledge it has taken refuge on, much to the delight of the clientele. Sometimes they will then give the toy or treat to a nearby patron to encourage their interaction with the cat. Unlike in Japan, however, customers are only rarely allowed to feed the animals themselves. Despite artificially stimulating the cats by creating these “theatrical events”, both cafés highlight their efforts to present hybrid communities in which the cats are free to make their own decisions about where they want to be, and what they want to do.

The two cafés, however, differ significantly when it comes to the food they offer patrons. The Café Chat l’Heureux boasts an extensive menu, with a variety of drinks, main courses, side dishes, and desserts on offer. The Café des Chats, on the other

hand, only offers snacks and beverages. Whilst the menu is entirely vegetarian at the Café Chat l'Heureux, the Café des Chats offers a panini with tuna, and used to have a turkey sandwich. Both cafés nonetheless offer some vegan options, though they are far more numerous at the Café Chat l'Heureux. The menus at both café are furthermore similar in that they feature a number of cat puns, especially the one at the Café des Chats, which offers customers a choice between, amongst others, a “meowchiato” (macchiato), an “espurresso” (espresso) and a “chat-colat chaud” (hot chocolate). The menus at these cafés also have a number of items named after the resident cats: all the smoothies at the Café Chat l'Heureux take their name from one of the cats, and each cat at the Café des Chats has a particular snack named after them.

The way the names for the cats were chosen also differs significantly between the cafés. At the Café des Chats, the names were selected by the two creators of the café. At the Café Chat l'Heureux, by comparison, names were decided by an online vote in order to highlight the café's “social message”, and the communal nature of the cats. Another key difference between the two cafés is the inclusion of cats for adoption. All the cats at the Café des Chats are permanent residents, whereas the Café Chat l'Heureux began fostering kittens up for adoption approximately a year after opening

At the Café Chat l'Heureux, the “cat menu” is presented to customers along with the food menu. This is not a menu of food for the cats, as the name might imply, but a catalogue of the cats in the café, featuring their names, photos, attributes, a little description, and the name of their sponsor. During one of my research sessions at the café, one of the patrons asked a staff member about the cats' names and was presented with the cat menu. “Ahh,” he joked, “la carte des chats.” “Oui, exactement ! Après la carte des desserts, la carte des chats”, responded the waitress”. They initially had “menus” of this sort at the Café des Chats, but over time they were

lost or damaged, and the café now merely lists the names of the cats on the wall and in a portrait gallery in the entrance waiting area. As a result, the Café des Chats website is the only place to view the blurbs accompanying each of the cats, previously featured on the menu.

Finally, both cafés are very active on social media, and boast not only official websites, but also Twitter accounts, Instagram, Pinterest, and Facebook pages. The Café Chat l'Heureux is far more active on social media than the Café des Chats, regularly posting photos and updates. By comparison, the Café des Chats Instagram and Facebook pages are only updated infrequently, with updates often weeks apart. Both cafés often repost photographs and videos taken by customers, highlighting their engagement with the community.

4.3 Results

4.3.1 Are cat cafés therapeutic?

One of the primary objectives of my fieldwork was to determine whether the café cats serve a therapeutic function, and could be considered “affective labourers” as suggested by Plourde. The situation in cat cafés differs markedly from that of pet ownership, as do any respective therapeutic benefits the café cats may produce. Research suggests that the therapeutic benefits of pet therapy weaken over time without the animal’s presence (Grandgeorge and Hausberger 403). To fully benefit from any therapeutic effects stemming from cat café cats, patrons would therefore need to spend a great deal of time at the cafés. This suggests that occasional visits are not sufficient to produce therapeutic effects equivalent to traditional animal-assisted

therapy, a view echoed by one of my interviewees, Dave¹⁶, a student doing a PhD on the human/cat relationship who has a particular interest in the topic of animal-assisted therapy. In Dave's experience, "true" zootherapy was not possible in the cat café setting, as it is impossible to build a relationship with the cats based on occasional visits, especially considering the limitations placed on interactions in the café setting. Another key difference between traditional AAT and the "purr-therapy" offered in Montreal cat cafés is the shift in focus from humans to cats. This focus is explicitly stated in the Café des Chat's motto: "the cat is king!"

Nevertheless, the owners of the cafés told me that the positive effects that cats have on human beings played an important part in their reasons for opening the cat cafés, whether animal-assisted therapy in a "classical" sense, or simply as an aid to relaxation. According to Nadine, one of the founders of the Café des Chats, zootherapy is the "whole idea" of cat cafés, and was a key factor in planning and designing that café. This notion was also apparent in the Café Chat l'Heureux's explicit advertising of zootherapy and in Clément's promise of "purr-therapy" in the video he shot as part of the crowd-funding efforts.

Furthermore, although the cat cafés do not provide traditional AAT, a majority of questionnaire respondents described the cat cafés as "therapeutic" or at the very least "relaxing". One woman credited a visit to the café with helping her "forget all her problems" and lifting her mood after a bad day. I also met a couple of women at the Café Chat l'Heureux who told me they had travelled all the way from Sherbrooke to experience the zootherapy the café has to offer. The therapeutic impact of the cats and the café was also evident in my interviews with regular and semi-regular patrons, who all expressed the positive impacts of the cat café experience.¹⁷ Nadine

¹⁶ I have given pseudonyms to all my interviewees, except for the founders and owners of the cafés.

¹⁷ As Enid put it: "For me, it's impossible to leave here unhappy".

furthermore told me that many people use her café as a form of non-regimented, non-traditional animal-assisted therapy: “we have people that are sick that come here and use the cats as therapy. I have a lot of clients that have special needs; they come here and it’s very therapeutic for them”. Nadine specifically told me about the elderly residents of a nursing home near the Café des Chats, where pets are forbidden, who frequently visit the café to engage in “therapy”. This was supported in my questionnaire results, which showed that many of the Café des Chats patrons were indeed retirees, at least some of whom are likely from the nursing home Nadine references.

Research suggests that rather than the frequency of interactions with an animal, it is the “quality of the bond established” that is essential successful therapy (Grandgeorge and Hausberger 402). Though Alger and Alger’s definition of the “satisfactory” human cat-relationship requires reciprocal and affectionate interactions (Alger and Alger “Beyond” 77), in my interviews and questionnaires, many people expressed satisfaction from merely observing the café cats. One such respondent, Patricia, told me that the joy of the cat café experience was, often, simply to see that a cat “*a choisi d’être pas loin de moi*”. Likewise, Rachel told me that she found observing the cats and the other patrons therapeutic and enjoyable in itself, in particular “looking at the people’s faces light up” in response to the cats. For the most part, patrons deemed direct interaction with the cats unnecessary to their enjoyments of the café, but a definite bonus when it occurred. One patron, Enid, vividly described an incident when the cat Luzerne chose to sit on her sister during a visit, to their shared delight. However, despite the fact such incidents were rare in Enid’s experience, she insisted that she never leaves the café unhappy. This reflects Michalon’s statement that psychological therapy can function through the “simple situation de co-présence” (Michalon “Relations” 80). Though other researchers have emphasised the

importance of touch in human-animal therapy¹⁸, and some patrons surveyed did complain of infrequent physical contact with the cat café cats, most found their café experience therapeutic even with only minimal direct contact.

Despite the fact that the cat cafés specifically offer “purr-therapy”, many of my interviewees told me they had never witnessed the cats actually purring. This was the case for Dave, even though he had been going to the Café Chat l’Heureux on a biweekly basis since it opened in September 2014. Personally, I did witness the cats purring on multiple occasions, especially the kittens at the Café Chat l’Heureux. However, for the majority of respondents, purring clearly did not play a role in the café’s therapeutic impact. Rather, research has suggested that animals have a therapeutic effect in and of themselves, by virtue of being perceived as non-judgmental, thus reducing human anxiety (Bancarz). This was confirmed in my interview with the owner of the Café Chat l’Heureux, who emphasised the healing impact of cats’ non-judgmental nature.

Plourde tells us that part of the therapeutic impact of the cat café experience comes from the fact that patrons are “able to perform the role of nurturer and quasi-companion for a cat” (Plourde 132). In the Montreal cat cafés, however, this did not appear to be the case. Rather, patrons found it difficult to form a co-dependent relationship with café cats due to the limitations placed on their interactions in the café setting, and none of those interviewed said they came to the café with the intention of forming a nurturing relationship with a specific cat. At the Café Chat l’Heureux, the cats are more the community’s than any one person’s. This is reflected, in part, by the fact that the cats’ names are chosen by an online vote. Moreover, there seemed to be no consensus in either café over the “favourite cats”. Though Plourde

¹⁸ Mitchell, for instance, argues that one of the reasons that cats are great for therapy purposes is that they “fulfil a basic human need to touch” (Mitchell).

talks about there being a “star” cat in Japanese cafés (Plourde 127), and the majority of respondents to the article on *Nikkei Trendy* were able to choose a favourite without hesitation (“Konkai no odai”), this is not the case in the Montreal cafés. For the most part, people refused to name just one cat. When people did choose a favourite cat, it was often based on its physical resemblance to a cat from their past, rather than its specific personality. Unlike in the settings described by Plourde, therefore, it would appear that patrons in Montreal cat cafés did not experience therapeutic effects from feeling a bond with any specific cat.

Finally, in my interviews with Patricia and Dave, the belief that a cat has *chosen* you to engage with emerged as potentially therapeutic in itself. Despite believing that classical zootherapy could not take place in a cat café, Dave asserted that a person’s “croyance que le chat l’a choisi pour interagir avec lui, ça peut jouer comme zoothérapie”. This echoes Michalon’s assertion that the belief in the therapeutic properties of an animal is often exactly what makes that animal therapeutic (Michalon “Relations” 80).

Not all regular patrons make use of the café’s “purr-therapy” in the same way. My interview with Clément revealed that there exist two types of regular cat café customers. One type of patron, such as Patricia, usually go to the café alone, while the other type, embodied in Rachel, use it as a meeting place between cat-loving friends. Both, however, seemed to find the cat café equally therapeutic, despite engaging in very different types of activity while there. Plourde tells us that there are certain times regulars prefer, and other times when the cafés will be flooded with newcomers (Plourde 124), and this was confirmed in my interview with Clément: he told me that the regulars “know the good times to come”, i.e. early in the morning and late in the evening, when the cats are most active. Even if they do not necessarily seek physical contact with the cats, both types of regular customers nevertheless hope for more than

just sleeping cats, and derive some form of well-being from their experience at the café.

The cat café experience was not, however, universally therapeutic. Most new visitors to the cafés were not drawn by the locations' therapeutic properties, but rather came out of curiosity. Though a few had heard of the phenomenon, most were unaware of cat cafés until the Café Chat l'Heureux began its crowd-funding campaign, when they learnt of the café through online channels such as Facebook and other cat-related media. Although the vast majority of surveyed patrons were positive about the cafés, some criticised certain aspects of the experience. The biggest criticisms of the café related to the rules, and specifically the amount of contact patrons were allowed to have with the cats. Though most people accepted, and sometimes even praised the rules, describing them as “reasonable”, “appropriate”, and “necessary”, there were also some who bemoaned not being able to pick up the cats, and others who complained that the cats slept too much and they weren't allowed to wake them. Without this direct contact, many were unable to fully benefit from the therapeutic potential of the cafés.

4.3.2 Do the café cats serve as a social lubricant/catalyst?

The two cat cafés I studied in Montreal served as an ideal meeting point for lovers of cats to share their common interest in the animal, in much the same way as dog-owners have the dog park. The creation of such a community around the cat café is especially encouraged by the Café Chat l'Heureux's active role on social media and their decision to have the community choose the names of the cats. The owner of the Café Chat l'Heureux furthermore made a conscious decision *not* to have Wi-Fi available at the café, in the hopes of encouraging socialising with both the cats and

the other patrons. He specifically told me that he hopes the cats can take the place of the internet in connecting or disconnecting people from the world. In this way, Clément hopes to heighten the cats' capacity to serve as social lubricants and catalysts, as this is the potential of cat cafés that most impressed him. To illustrate this, Clément shared one of his first cat café experiences in South Korea, in which the presence of cats enable him to connect with other locals in the café, overcoming the language barrier that separated them¹⁹. Connecting people in this way is one of his goals in the Café Chat l'Heureux.

Plourde suggests that often the "café's primary purpose [is] encouraging and nurturing relationships between patrons," and that the cats thus serve as "intermediaries that bring patrons together" (Plourde 125). This does indeed appear to be the case for some patrons in the Montreal cat cafés. One questionnaire respondent explicitly stated that she had made many friends at the cat café. This woman started going to the Café Chat l'Heureux soon after her cat passed away, and said that the place has since served as a second home, the cats as surrogate pets, and the other patrons as friends.

None of the people I interviewed more formally, however, said that they had formed any lasting connection with the other café patrons, though quite a few had formed a friendship with the owners and the staff. Delia, Judith, Rachel, Patricia, and Dave all said that they had bonded with the cat café's staff, and that this bond was a factor in their enjoyment of the cat café experience. Nadine told me she encourages the creation of such bonds, and regularly speaks with the café patrons because "it also

¹⁹ Clément recounted: "je m'en rappelle, c'était l'une des premières fois en Corée du Sud où je me suis retrouvé autour d'un tapis, avec une dizaine de personnes, à jouer avec les chats. Même si je ne parlais pas un mot de leur langue, on a échangé des sourires puis... ça redonnait ce sens-là un petit peu de lieu social. Ça reconnectait un petit peu les gens. Plutôt que tout le monde soit devant son téléphone, tout le monde soit devant son affaire, les gens reconnectaient un petit peu. Les chats avaient cette faculté de faire ça"

helps to bring people back, because people like that relationship”. Furthermore, all interviewed patrons said that they found themselves forming temporary bonds with other customers during their time there. At times, the clientele exchanges smiles over their mutual appreciation of something the cats are doing; at other times, conversations take place between, for instance, patrons playing with the same cat. For these patrons, it was the presence of cats in the cafés that made these pleasant, casual interactions possible, giving them a “great conversation starter”. Another patron observed that “with the cats around, people get more social, you know? They kind of... interact more. They let go of their cell phones a bit, and everyone goes cat crazy. And then people start talking”. This supports the theory that animals can serve as both a social catalyst and a social lubricant, and that cats do so in the context of the cat café.

One respondent, reflecting on the café as a social lubricant, said that she felt it would be ideal for dates, “since it’s perfect for awkward moments”. Another respondent specifically said he used the café for dates, and over the course of my research, both cafés seemed to be frequently used for this purpose. For one couple in particular, the Café des Chats was their date location of choice. I saw them there multiple times, and especially on the first few times, the cats were crucial in bringing them closer together. The cats of the cat café represent “a source and direction for attention”, which serves as a perfect escape from awkward social situations (Grandgeorge and Hausberger 401). Furthermore, their often fleeting appearances in the busy café never fail to interrupt on-going conversations, and their mere presence in the windows often stops people passing by on the street.

I also experienced the cats’ potential as social lubricants first-hand during my interviews. At uncomfortable moments both myself and my interviewees turned to the cats. Fairly large portions of some of my interviews are thus filled with the sounds

of cat appreciation and small talk about the various cats in our lives. This was especially apparent in my interview with Delia and Nadine, when we were alone in the café, save for the cats. Various cats entered the room throughout the interview, interrupting our discussion as we turned our focus to them. The cats' antics made us laugh, and relieved the stress of the situation. The cats' impact as a social catalyst was also personally apparent. During my many hours at the café, countless strangers initiated conversations with me on the same topic: the café cats.

Much like Plourde describes in Japan, I discovered some "theatrical events" staged by the café owners to attract customers' attention away from the fact that the cats aren't always keen to interact with them (Plourde 125). These "theatrical events" artificially stimulate the cat's behaviour, draw the attention of the café patrons, and often to lead to casual conversation between the customers, and between customers and staff. Plourde describes the ways cats that are "unproductive" are "often made productive", and forced to interact with patrons in Japanese cat cafés (Plourde 130). Fortunately, I found the methods employed in the Montreal cafés were far less aggressive, and for the most part sleeping cats were allowed to sleep undisturbed. Patrons are in fact forbidden by the rules to wake sleeping cats. Strategies were nonetheless applied which sought to encourage the cats to *want* to be more "productive", such as throwing a treat across the café for them to chase after.

In the two Montreal cat cafés I examined, cats therefore appear to serve a social function for patrons. The presence of cats helps establish positive relationships between customers, staff members, and customers and staff. Despite this, everyone I spoke to said they went to the cat café first and foremost for interaction with the cats, not with other human beings. The situation thus clearly differs from the one described by Plourde, in which human-human interaction sometimes formed a greater part of the cat café's appeal, such that one patron asserted that regular patrons would

continue to patronise the café even if the cats were not present (Plourde 125).

4.3.3 What is the cat café setting like?

The homey, domestic aspect of the Montreal cat cafés was evident, first and foremost, in the design of these settings. Both cafés, in different ways, sought to provide a comfortable, intimate setting for their patrons. A notable example of how the Café Chat l'Heureux attempts this is the fake fireplace. Its symbolic warmth serves to “domestify” the setting for the human patrons. As the most comfortable areas of the Café Chat l'Heureux, the couches also play this role, and are accordingly the most popular with patrons. These sections are designed to provide a comfortable ambiance for both humans and cats. The Café des Chats, meanwhile, has a section with bean bags on the floor, which once again attempt to mimic the comfort of home, while also allowing customers to be on the same level as the cats. The domesticity of the cafés can also be seen in the fact these places provide books for the clientele to read. At the Café des Chats, one of the co-creators, Nadine, even donated some of her childhood books to the café, reinforcing the intimate feeling of the café. The Café des Chats also provides card games and both cafés provide slippers in winter. The latter especially reinforces the feeling of comfort and domesticity. Finally, the cats themselves can also be considered part of the setting, especially when they are sleeping. The sleeping cats represent a comforting presence in the cafés, which subconsciously relaxes patrons. According to Delia, the presence of sleeping cats is in fact an integral part of the homey feel of the cat café: “I left my cat that was sleeping, to come here and be around cats that are sleeping. It’s just like home”.

The homey aspect of the café was also often brought up by the patrons themselves. In an informal conversation at the Café Chat l'Heureux, a girl in her twenties described

being at the café as “kind of just like being at home.” Several questionnaire respondents also described the cafés as domestic or “home-like” in their responses. One said they felt like there were “in someone’s house”. Another said she almost felt as if she was entertaining in her own home whilst at the café, just with extra cats. Another described the Café Chat l’Heureux as having “une ambiance très calme et chaleureuse, comme à la maison”, while another said that she appreciated how the cat café had “l’air de notre propre maison”. This was also confirmed in my interviews, with Rachel stating she considered the cat cafés to be “a home away from home”, whilst both Delia and Nadine specifically used the adjective “homey” to describe the Café des Chats. Finally, Judith commented that the Café Chat l’Heureux lives up to its name: “comme le nom l’indique, c’est vraiment *chaleureux*”.

The homey aspect of the cat cafés was also made evident through the types of behaviour that I witnessed patrons engaging in. In my fieldwork, I encountered many instances in which the Montreal cat cafés were able to provide a sufficiently comfortable and home-like space for patrons that they felt comfortable engaging in intimate, “unproductive” behaviour, typically reserved for home (Plourde 124). This was most clearly evidenced in the behaviour of the numerous couples I observed at both cafés, who often felt comfortable enough to engage in public displays of affection. A few times I even saw couples falling asleep in each other’s arms. This highlights how comfortable and relaxed certain patrons feel in the café setting: they are, in fact, so “at home” that they are able to fall asleep in public. Furthermore, many people sit or even lie on the soft rugs and cushions on the ground in order to get closer to the cats, a behaviour not witnessed in most cafés, and far more reminiscent of home. Finally, whilst I often saw people studying at the Café des Chats, the “unproductive” aspect of cat cafés was particularly evident at the Café Chat l’Heureux. In fact, Clément told me that although he does not ban people from working at the café, he is careful not to encourage it either, believing it is “not the

right reason to come". Instead, Clément wants café patrons to interact with the cats and each other, rather than remaining trapped in what he called "work mode".

When asked what they found appealing about the cat café setting, patrons highlighted the cats first, closely followed by the ambiance and design of the cafés. People particularly praised the cat-friendly design of the Café Chat l'Heureux, notably "the ceiling structures to have cats looking down at us". One respondent reduced the appeal of the cat café to a simple equation, "cats + coffee = happiness", referencing the long-established role of cafés in serving as a "refuge for patrons to seek sensory relief [...] from the stress of everyday life", and a "public space for [...] coffee connoisseurship" (Plourde 121-2). For the patrons of the Montreal cat cafés, the physical characteristics of the café thus seemed crucially important to the "purr-therapy" experience, just as they are to the *iyashi* of the Japanese cafés described by Plourde.

4.3.4 How are the cats described?

In my questionnaire results, many respondents used similar language to describe the cats, reflecting the patrons' shared perception of café cats. In particular, respondents overwhelmingly described the cats as "aloof" and "independent", attributes which respondents also, somewhat paradoxically, described as an essential parts of the cat's charm. Delia described the relationship with her beloved pet cat as follows: "I come home, and she *kind* of cares". The reciprocity alluded to by Alger and Alger was entirely absent here, with my results suggesting that patrons were content with their predominantly one-sided affection for the cats. The cats were also often described as "cute", "warm", "soft", and "fuzzy", echoing their age-old connection to comfort and domesticity, and the homey feel of the cat cafés. For one respondent, the connection

between cats and domesticity was so significant that they used just one word to describe the cats: “home”. Finally, many respondents also described the cats as “peaceful”, “calm” or “zen”, drawing attention to the animals’ role in creating the cat cafés’ relaxing atmosphere. Many of the reasons Japanese café patrons find cats an appealing source of healing were thus also present in the Montreal settings.

As in Japan, the cat cafés in Montreal promote an image of the cat as a unique individual, and this is in fact a crucial part of their mission statement. An individualised perception of the café cats is encouraged in a number of different ways, such as the descriptions found in the cat menus and on the café websites, which list each of the café cats along with their unique names, birthdays, and personal histories. The marketing of café cats as distinct individuals is thus present in Montreal cafés, as in the Japanese ones described by Plourde. Furthermore, it appears equally effective: when asked whether they had come up with their own names for the cats, most patrons responded that they had not, one even going so far as to assert that “tous devrait les appeler par leur vrai noms!”, while another claimed to “respecte leur nom d’origine, c’est leur identité!”. People’s insistence on using the cat’s *real* names highlights their perception of the cats as unique individuals.

I discovered in my formal and informal interviews that a significant portion of café visitors have cats of their own at home, though this was not what the owners had expected. Both Nadine and Clément specifically told me that they had imagined the location as a meeting point for people who could not have cats of their own. Part of the reason people with cats supplied for coming to the café was because they viewed each cat as an individual, and thus the relationship with the café cats was very different to the relationship with their pets. Though Rachel, and most people I spoke to, described the relationship with their cats as “cuddlier”, Delia, on the contrary, said that the café cats were more inclined to displays of affection than her own. In an

informal discussion with a fellow customer, I furthermore learnt that this patron enjoyed going to the cat café because their kids found the café cats to be “funner” than their own. Similarly, in my interview with Patrick and Sarah, I was told that they come to the café because of how much their young daughter enjoys interacting with cats that are so different from the ones at home. All these responses suggest that cats are viewed as unique individuals by the patrons of the Montreal cat cafés.

The cafés’ emphasis on considering each cat as a singular and complex individual evokes the “starification” process Gouabault et al. describe in the context of animal figures in the media. The cat café menus stage the cats as complex individuals with unique biographies. The detailed information that is presented in these menus validates my hypothesis that the cat café cats are “hyper-personified” and thus ideal candidates for the therapeutic impact that comes from anthropomorphic projection as suggested by Michalon (Michalon “Relations” 83). Indeed, almost all the patrons interviewed used language suggesting they were empathising with the café cats, for instance when justifying the café rules: many began their arguments with phrases like “well how would you feel if...”. The individualisation of the café cats thus encourages the patrons to identify with them, and strengthens the potential for bonding. This high level of personification endows the café cats with a complex interiority, and increases the personal nature of the cat-human relationships formed in the cat cafés.

Of the different categories of animal presented by Gouabault and Burton-Jeangros, the intimacy of the human/pet relationship (Gouabault and Burton-Jeangros 310) is that which most closely recalls the situation of the cat café cat. Despite the strong belief in the café cats’ individuality, however, patrons stopped shy of considering the cats an “alter-ego”, or symbolically demolishing the human/animal barrier in the way Gouabault and Burton-Jeangros describe in the case of the pet phenomenon. This

recognition of the cat's animal nature was most clear in my interview with Patricia, during which she portrayed the café cat as "un animal avec une certaine... personnalité. Pas une personnalité humaine, mais une personnalité quand même". For some, however, the café cats do serve as a lesser form of surrogate pet. Namely, many patrons told me that they visit the café because they are away from their own cats, and miss them. In my informal conversations with café patrons, this explanation surfaced frequently. Sometimes, it was specific cats that patrons longed for, such as cats that had passed away or were living outside the city. At other times, patrons simply missed being around cats in general. This was, notably, a motivator for both Patricia and Judith, with the former living with a partner allergic to cats, and the latter only in Montreal temporarily. Though it is not possible to develop the pet/human relationship they miss with the cat café cats, both Judith and Patricia told me that their primary reason for going to the cat cafés was to get a "cat fix".

Finally, the owners and staff of the Montreal cat cafés rejected the notion of the cats as "staff". Nadine seemed especially appalled that the cats would be expected and obliged to "work", even when I specified that all their work involves is being themselves. Instead, staff and owners were more inclined to conceive of the cats and staff as belonging to one "family". Indeed, both cat café owners explicitly described the cats as being family members. Nadine specifically referred to the cats as her and her partner's "children", while Clément said he felt the cats were his family, and sometimes wasn't sure whether he felt more at home in his house or at the cat café. Supporting this claim, Clément recounted his decision to spend New Year's Eve at the café "en famille", with his girlfriend and the cats.

The cat cafés I discovered in Montreal thus echoed many of the features described by

Plourde and documented in the article on *Nikkei Trendy*. For the most part, those I surveyed found the cat café experience at the very least relaxing, if not therapeutic. The highly domestic and comfortable setting of the cafés, complete with the comforting presence of the cats, leads many to feel very much at home in these settings. In the cafés, each cat is presented and thought of as a unique individual, with a distinct personality. Through anthropomorphic projection, many patrons feel especially close to these cats, some of whom they have watched grow up from kittens. Though the specific term of “affective labour” was dismissed by the owners of the cafés, this is clearly what these cats engage in: their presence makes patrons happy, generating feelings of well-being for those at the cafés, even when all they do is sleep. They are a focus for people’s attention, and through their role as social catalysts and lubricant, they facilitate the creation of bonds between strangers; some temporary, some more permanent. The presence of cats in cat cafés gives these locations a different feel, one that is closer to home; it is also responsible for the creation of bonds that one could not form at any other café.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Historically, the domestic cat's "traditional place" was "as defender of the household from disease and rodent depredations" (Engels 88). This is clearly no longer the case in the modern-day cat café, where the cat has no use for its hunting abilities, except in play. However, other elements of the cat's traditional role do still appear to be relevant. Despite the wide variety of representations of the cat that can be found across time and space, there are, as Dale-Green points out, "certain patterns recurring in the ancient stories and beliefs which 'strike a chord' when we read them, for they still operate in our lives" today (Dale-Green 146). The notion of cats as "healers" and "spirits of the place" are two of these recurring archetypes.

Although the cafés I examined are not situated in Japan, and therefore not affected by the same social and historical conditions that have led to the need for the Japanese "healing boom" (Plourde 119), it seemed apparent that Montreal's cat cafés serve a "healing" function. Though not fulfilling the requirements to be considered AAT, the cat café was nevertheless experienced as therapeutic by many of the patrons and staff I spoke to. At the very least, the cat café presents a relaxing atmosphere in which people can take a break from their hectic lifestyles. I would also suggest that cat cafés serve as a form of non-regimented animal-assisted therapy, in much the same way as cat videos and memes (Myrick). If the mere viewing of cat videos can make users experience "a decrease in negative emotions [and] an increase in positive emotions" (Gitlin), then surely even limited contact with live cats must have the same effect. This notion that cats generate healing is not a new concept, and appears at least as early as Ancient Egypt, where Bastet was sometimes referred to as a "nurse" (Dale-

Green 27). The specific notion of “purr-therapy” that the Café Chat l’Heureux advertises in its crowd-funding video, is also not new: Hausman and Hausman in fact suggest that the purr of a cat has always been seen as soothing to humans, evoking “bliss and music and [the] metaphor of mother and child reunion” (Hausman and Hausman 156). The Hausmans suggest that people today still subconsciously believe in the mystical healing powers long attributed to the cat, but choose to refer to it using terms such as “insight, intuition, empathy, and love” (Hausman and Hausman 11). The cat’s role as an “affective labourer” in the cat café not only recalls the traditional archetypes of the “healing cat”, but also that of the “working cat”, “the playful cat”, and the “caretaker cat” proposed by Hausman and Hausman.

The cat’s enduring association with domesticity was another symbolic attribution that appeared to remain relevant. The comforting presence of the café cats themselves was a key component in establishing the cafés’ domestic, familiar, relaxing ambiance. As we have seen, domesticity is a theme that has been associated with the cat since ancient times, in many different parts of the world. Cats have long represented a *genius loci*, or “spirit of the home” leading them to be associated with various deities connected with the hearth, and home. In the modern-day cat café, they help create a “homey” atmosphere for patrons to relax in. The cat’s association with domesticity is also closely related to its connection to women, children, and the elderly, whose traditional place was the home in many societies, and with whom cats have always formed the strongest bonds (Walter 49). The perception of cats as “women’s pets” persists today²⁰, and helped to explain the discrepancy I noted between male and female presence at the cat cafés. Nevertheless, both Montreal cafés were at least co-founded by men, and Clément in particular speaks passionately about the strong connection he has always felt towards cats. Moreover, the negative connotations of

²⁰ For more information on the contemporary connection between cats and women see Clea Simon’s *The Feline Mystique*.

the image of the “crazy cat lady”, and the link between women and cats more generally, seem to be receding. Nadine was notably unashamed in telling me that: “I would totally call myself crazy cat lady. My friends would probably say that I’m insane. I own it!”.

Just as cats have retained their association with healing, domesticity and femininity, so too has their cultish status endured in modernised form. According to Dale-Green, many people currently “betray signs of a cult of the cat, making these animals the centre of their lives, and treating them with a respect or dread that would seem appropriate only in relation to a supernatural being” (Dale-Green xvi). Many of those surveyed symbolically placed the cat above the human in the human/cat relationship. Delia, for instance, told me her cat had trained her, rather than the other way around, a point with which Nadine emphatically agreed, stating that “the cats totally train the humans”. In a similar vein, Rachel stated “my cat adopted me”, rather than the reverse, and the Café des Chats makes this hierarchy explicit in its motto, “The cat is king!” When asked to explain in what way cats are the kings of the Café des Chats, Nadine’s response cast the cats as objects of modern-day worship: “Cats are always in charge, wherever they are. They rule, we are their slaves. We want them to love us *so much* that we are pretty much willing to do *anything, anytime*”. While this modern-day “cult of the cat” does not include the processions or singing of historical cat-worship, the café cats are similar to those ~~kept at Bubastis~~ and elsewhere in the way they are visited by an adoring public and well-cared for by a dedicated group of humans, for whom they generate a financial profit. Moreover, in most ancient mythology, it is clear that the cat is believed to *provide* something, to *aid* the devotee in specific ways. This is not any less true in the modern-day cat café, with its advertised “purr-therapy”. The cats in this present-day “cult” appear to be benevolent “deities” that rewards their carers through their therapeutic abilities.

Furthermore, modern perceptions of the cat café cats overlapped considerably with historical perspectives. In my questionnaires, patrons used many of the same adjectives to describe the cats that have been associated with them for millennia. Firstly, “independent” was overwhelmingly the most commonly-used word to describe the cats, and the belief in the independence of the cat dates back to the original pact of domestication, in which cats were “left on their own to kill the rodents for food, with little or no human intervention” (Engels 65). Respondents to my questionnaire also often described cats as “mysterious”, which echoes the wealth of myth and folklore associated with the cat throughout history. In one questionnaire, the word “ethereal” appears, explicitly echoing the animal’s long-held connection to otherworldliness. Adjectives such as “beautiful” and “graceful” were also very common, evoking attributes long-associated with the cat, notably since the artists of the Renaissance. Finally, the cat’s ambiguous, dual nature continues to resonate with modern-day cat-lovers, with one respondent describing the cats as “Predators wrapped in cuteness”, while another described them as both “social” and “independent”, without apparent contradiction. The cat cafés also showcased the darker side of the cat for some patrons; the words “devious”, “manipulateur”, and even “evil”, for instance, appear in some of the questionnaires. Furthermore, customers at the Café Chat l’Heureux are warned to respect the wishes of the cats or else risk being scratched, a tame version of the wrath many of the deities discussed in chapter II were sometimes believed to exhibit. Even when the language was explicitly negative, this still seemed to be part of the cat’s appeal, highlighting the “dual nature” long attributed to this animal.

Nevertheless, there are also many differences between ancient perceptions of the cat and those found today in the Montreal cat cafés. According to Clément, some of this is intentional: through the café, he hopes to help debunk some of the long-held, but erroneous myths about this animal. A specific example of this can be found on the

website where Clément writes that “This beautiful black cat [Sheldon] will demystify all preconceived ideas [about] black cats. He likes being with his friends and human contact” (“Café Chat l’Heureux”). This specifically contradicts the common belief in black cats’ sinister powers, particularly prevalent in Western Europe during the Middle Ages. Dave also spoke out against “cat archetypes”, and praised the potential of the conferences held at the Café Chat l’Heureux to “démystifier toute la construction sociale qu’il y a autour du chat”. In particular, Dave criticised the “pseudo-indépendance du chat”, a trait which still resonates with many patrons of the cafés. Furthermore, though ancient cat mythology was occasionally referenced in my interviews, interviewees rarely had more than a superficial grasp of the cat’s long history. For instance, though Rachel explained the appeal of cats with reference to an indescribable quality that “the Egyptians had figured out long ago” and posited that this must have been connected to the therapeutic properties of the cat’s purr, she was simultaneously unaware of Bastet. This leads me to the notion that the cat café phenomenon may well be reinventing the cat, creating new symbolic connotations, a new “cat archetype”, to borrow Hausman and Hausman’s phrasing. Dave highlights the unique role of the cat that is constructed in the café cat setting, and its distance from the original pact of domestication: “Mais qu’est-ce que c’est que cette nouvelle manière de penser l’animal en venant le voir sans rien donner en contrepartie?”. Though the cats provide benefits for the café patrons, the patrons are not expected to give anything in return. This differs from early conception of the cat as a mouser, and even its contemporary role as a pet: indeed, the mutual exchange present in “hybrid communities” since their inception is no longer present in the contemporary cat café.

Finally, cat cafés can also be viewed as part of a general trend in the human/animal relationship, which has recently been characterised by “rises in zoocentrism and sentimentality” (Franklin and White 235). Indeed, the popularity of cat cafés seems especially connected to the growing popularity of the “pet phenomenon”. The

countries which have most strongly embraced cat cafés tend to be the more developed and wealthy countries, where birth rates have been plummeting. In these countries, animals more and more often serve as surrogate family members²¹. Though the cat café cats are not pets, the cat café promotes an image of the cat as a unique individual, worthy of such a role. Moreover, both Clément and Nadine situate their cat cafés within contemporary environmentalist trends. Clément told me that he actively caters to this trend by offering a vegetarian menu, without explicitly stating or advertising the fact that it is vegetarian. In this way, he encourages people to subconsciously change their eating habits. Nadine likewise told me that the Café des Chat's menu responds to the demands of people, notably through its inclusion of vegan desserts. Finally, the cat café phenomenon is evidence that the strict utilitarian usage of animals is fading and being replaced by a "stress on education, protection and empathy" (Franklin and White 224).

I have greatly enjoyed my time writing this dissertation, and learning more about the cat café phenomenon and the history of the cat. Though further research is needed to fully explore this topic, I have attempted to examine some of the most important trends in the recent cat café phenomenon, such as the cat's perceived connection to the themes of healing and domesticity, and some of the different ways in which these themes have manifested throughout history.

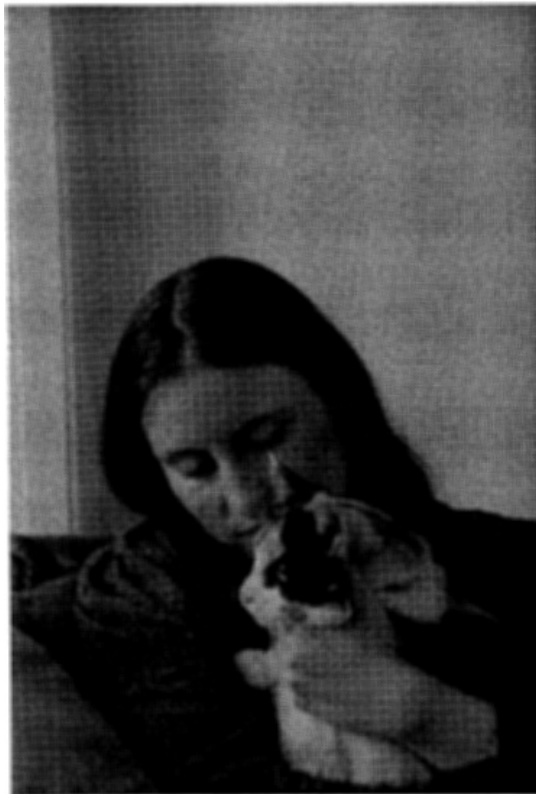
²¹ See Velkamp and Hansen for a discussion of this in the context of Japan.

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT POSTER

Bonjour ! Je m'appelle Katherine Radecki et je suis une étudiante à l'UQAM. Je fais une recherche sur les cat cafés dans le contexte de ma maîtrise, et j'ai besoin d'effectuer plusieurs entretiens avec des clients des cafés Montréalais. Si vous êtes intéressés à parler de chats et de cat cafés, n'hésitez pas à venir me parler au café. Vous pouvez aussi me contacter via mon adresse email Kat1107@hotmail.com. Merci beaucoup !

Hello! My name is Katherine Radecki, and I'm a student at UQAM. I'm doing research on cat cafés as part of my master's degree, and I need to conduct several interviews with patrons of the Montreal cafés. If you're interested in talking about cats and cat cafés, feel free to come up to me at the café. Otherwise, you contact me via email: Kat1107@hotmail.com. Thank you very much!



APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

Cat café questionnaire

Hello! My name is Katherine Radecki, and I'm a student at UQAM. I'm doing research on cat cafés as part of my master's degree. If you can take a little time to fill out this questionnaire about cats and cat cafés, it would be very helpful to my research. If you're interested in discussing further, please contact me at Kat1107@hotmail.com.

Thank you very much!

Bonjour ! Je m'appelle Katherine Radecki et je suis une étudiante à l'UQAM. Je fais une recherche sur les cat cafés dans le contexte de ma maîtrise. Si vous avez un peu de temps pour remplir ce questionnaire sur les chats et les cats cafés, ça m'aiderait énormément dans ma recherche. Si vous êtes intéressé(e)s à en parler plus, n'hésitez pas à me contacter via mon adresse email Kat1107@hotmail.com.

Merci beaucoup !

Questions

I.

What is your age?

Quel est votre âge?

Which gender do you identify with?

A quel genre ou à quel sexe vous identifiez-vous?

What is your occupation?

Quelle est votre occupation?

II.

Do you have much experience with cats?

Avez-vous beaucoup d'expérience avec les chats?

Do you have pet cats at home?

Avez-vous des chats à la maison?

Do you have any other pets at home?

Avez-vous d'autres animaux de compagnie à la maison?

If yes, what pets, how many, and for how long?

Si oui, quels animaux, et depuis combien de temps ?

What words would you use to describe cats?

Quels mots utiliserez-vous pour décrire les chats?

III.

Where did you hear about the cat café?

Où avez-vous entendu parler du cat café ?

Is this your first visit to the café?

Est-ce que c'est votre première visite au café ?

Have you ever been to another cat café?

Etes-vous déjà allé(e) à un autre cat café?

If yes, where, when and how did it compare?

Si oui, quel café, et comment le comparez-vous à celui-ci?

If no, what are your first impressions of cat cafés?

Si non, quelles sont vos premières impressions des cat cafés?

Is the cat café what you expected? Please explain why.

Est-ce que le cat café correspond à vos attentes ? SVP expliquez pourquoi.

What do you think of the cat café rules?

Que pensez-vous des règles du cat café?

Are you satisfied with the amount of contact you've had with the cats?

Etes-vous satisfait(e) du contact que vous avez eu avec les chats?

What is the appeal of the cat café?

Quel est l'attrait du cat café?

Do you find the cat café "therapeutic"?

Décrivez-vous l'expérience au cat café comme « thérapeutique » ?

Are you satisfied with your experience at the cat café? If yes, why, if no, why not?

Etes-vous satisfait(e) de votre expérience au cat café? Si oui, pourquoi, si non, pourquoi pas?

Do you think you will return to the cat café?

Pensez-vous revenir au cat café?

Are you here alone, or did you come with friends or family?

Etes-vous venu(e) au café seul(e), ou avec des amis ou de la famille ?

What are your reasons for visiting the cat café?

Pour quelles raisons êtes-vous venu(e) au cat café?

How long do you plan on staying at the cat café?

Combien de temps comptez-vous passer au cat café?

Do you use the “cat menu” to identify the different cats?

Utilisez-vous la « carte des chats » pour identifier les chats?

Do you have your own way to identify one or more of the cats?

Avez-vous nommé un ou plusieurs chats à votre propre manière?

Do you have a favourite cat? Which one?

Avez-vous un chat préféré? Lequel?

Do you consider yourself a regular of the cat café?

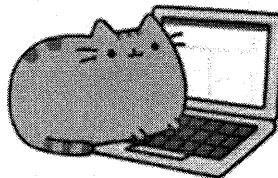
Etes-vous un(e) client(e) régulier du cat café?

If yes, would you be interested in being interviewed? You can either contact me, or leave me your contact info: _____

Si oui, seriez-vous intéressé(e) par un entretien? Vous pouvez soit me contacter, soit me laisser vos contacts: _____

Thank you for your time !

Merci de votre temps!



APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS FOR THE CAT CAFÉ OWNERS

Where did you get the idea to open a cat café in Montreal?

Have you visited other cat cafés?

What (if any) model did you use in designing the café? What did you do differently?

What are your goals in opening a cat café?

Does the café have a particular mission statement?

What are the challenges of opening a cat café in Montreal?

How do these challenges differ from the challenges encountered in opening a cat café in an Asian or European setting?

Did you encounter any opposition to the opening of the café (animal rights activists etc.)?

How difficult was it find and design the perfect setting for a cat café?

Did you consult any type of specialists during the planning stages of the café?

Is the cat café really an ideal setting for interaction between humans and cats (lots of sounds, strangers etc.)?

In what way have you chosen to divide the space between cats and humans?

Were you attempting to create a particular ambiance in the café?

How do you find managing a cat café in Montreal?

What were your criteria in choosing the cats for this café? How did you determine the cats possessed the desired traits?

What measures have you put in place to safeguard the cats' well-being, especially during the busiest times?

Have there been any conflicts between the cats? How are they dealt with?

How did you determine what aspects of cat care the customers see and do not see (litter etc.)?

What measures have you put in place to safeguard the customers' well-being?

Describe the balance between catering to customers who want to interact with cats, and taking care of cats who do not always want to interact with customers?

Have there been any complaints from customers about a lack of contact with the cats?

What are the rules of the cat cafés? How did you establish/decide the rules? How and by who are they enforced? What is the main concern?

Are the rules generally respected? Have there been any cases in which they were not respected?

How much do you survey/control the interactions between humans and cats?

How many customers do you get on average?

Do you have many regular customers?

Describe the ideal cat café customer? Do you have many such customers here?

Do you try to encourage interaction between patrons? How?

What training is required to be able to work here? Do you ensure the cats accept new employees?

Can you tell when a cat is in discomfort or distress? How do you react?

What rules are imposed on the cats? Do you train the cats?

What is considered cat misbehaviour? How is misbehaviour handled?

Do you consider the cats to be staff (i.e. affective labourers)?

What relationship do you have with the café cats?

Do you have a favourite cat at the café? Is there a cat who emerges as the café's most popular cat?

What happens to the cats when the café is closed?

How much do you know about the history of cats, and their relationship with humans?

Describe the ideal nature of the cat/human relationship?

What is your image of the cat in general?

Do you consider cats as individuals? If so, in what way? Do you try to communicate this individuality in the café?

How did you establish the ratings/descriptions of the cats? Why did you create these ratings?

How do customers use the information provided in these “menus”?

Why do you think cat cafés are so popular around the world?

What sorts of relationships exist between the cats? What sorts of relationships exist between the staff and the cats? (Would you go as far as to call this a family?)

Do you find that most of your customers are already very familiar with cats? Are many of them, in fact, already cat owners?

Have you noticed differences in the ways people attempt to interact with the cats?

What type of language do you use in advertising the café? To what end? Is it successful?

Why the vegetarian/vegan menu?

(CAFÉ CHAT L’HEUREUX) Explain the concept of “purr-therapy” described on your website and in your crowd-funding video? Can you describe the different aspects of your “social mission”?

(CAFÉ CHAT L’HEUREUX) What are the challenges involved in regularly introducing new cats to such a large group of established cats?

(CAFÉ CHAT L’HEUREUX) Why the lack of wi-fi?

(CAFÉ CHAT L’HEUREUX) Tell me more about the procedure surrounding the kitten adoptions?

(CAFÉ DES CHATS) Explain how “the cat is king”?

(CAFÉ DES CHATS) Explain the concept of “malleabilite”?

(CAFÉ DES CHATS) I noticed you took Turkey off your menu: why is that?

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONS FOR THE CAT CAFÉ STAFF

How did you end up working here? Is this just another job, or did you specifically want to work in a cat café?

How much knowledge of cats and cat cafés before working here?

Is the cat café what you expected it to be?

In what ways do you mediate the interactions between humans and cats?

What relationship do you have with the cats?

How do you balance a “professional” relationship with the cats with a “personal” relationship with the cats?

Do you consider yourself to be at the service of the cats?

Is there any sort of hierarchy in the staff?

Do you consider the cats to be colleagues? (Are the cats staff?)

What are your duties at the café? What are the positive and negative aspects of these duties?

What is your relationship with the customers?

Do you participate in the activities surrounding the cat café (i.e. monthly conferences, workshops, zootherapy, contests etc.)?

What do you think of the cat café rules?

Are you happy with the conditions of the café cats?

How would you describe the café environment? (is it domestic?)

Do you find the cat café therapeutic? If yes, in what way?

Do you have a favourite cat here? Is there a cat who emerges as the café's most popular cat?

What experience with cats do you have/do you or have you ever had a pet cat?

Do you have pets at home? If yes, what pets, how many, and for how long?

How do the café cats compare to the cats at home?

Is the cat café really an ideal setting for interaction between humans and cats (lots of sounds, strangers etc.)?

How many customers do you get on average?

Do you have many regular customers?

How much do you survey/control the interactions between humans and cats?

What impact do the cats have on interactions between patrons?

What training is required to be able to work here? Do the cats have to accept new employees?

Can you tell when a cat is in discomfort or distress? How do you react?

What rules are imposed on the cats?

What is considered cat misbehaviour? How is misbehaviour handled?

Do you consider the cats to be staff (i.e. affective labour)?

Do you believe in training cats?

How much do you know about the history of cats, and their relationship with humans?

Describe the ideal nature of the cat/human relationship?

Describe the ideal cat café customer? Do you have many such customers here?

What is your image of cats (in general, and the café cats in particular)?

Do you consider the cats to be individuals? If so, in what way and how is this individuality communicated?

What sorts of relationships exist between the cats? What sorts of relationships exist between the staff and the cats? (Would you go as far as to call this a family?)

Do you find that most of your customers are already very familiar with cats? Are many of them, in fact, already cat owners?

Have you noticed differences in the ways people attempt to interact with the cats?

APPENDIX E

QUESTIONS FOR THE CAT CAFÉ PATRONS

Where did you come from? (from work? home? etc.)

Do you come here alone? with friends? with family? on a date?

What do you do when you are at the café?

How often do you come here?

How long do you stay here on average?

Do you come here at a particular time? If so, when and why?

Where did you hear about the cat café? Had you heard of cat cafés before the two that opened in Montreal?

Is the cat café what you expected it to be?

Why are you visiting the cat café/what is the appeal of the cat café?

Do you participate in the activities surrounding the cat café (i.e. monthly conferences, workshops, zootherapy, contests etc.)?

Do you agree with the descriptions/ratings given to the cats by the café owners and presented in the 'menus'?

Can you identify the different cats by name without consulting the "menu"? Do you also know the ratings of the cats without consulting the "menu"?

What do you think of the cat café rules?

Are you happy with the conditions of the café cats?

What do you gain from your experience at the cat café?

Has your experience of the cat café evolved since your first visit?

How would you describe the setting? (Is it domestic?)

Do you find the cat café therapeutic? If yes, in what way?

What experience with cats do you have/do you or have you ever had a pet cat?

Do you have pets at home?

If yes, what pets, how many, and for how long?

If pet cats, why visit a cat café regularly?

How do the café cats compare to the cats at home?

Do you have a favourite cat at the café?

Are you seeking to build a relationship with the cats (or a cat in particular)? What type of relationship?

How close to you feel to the cats?

What image of cats do you have? Do you consider cats to have human-like qualities?

How well do you know the owners/staff of the café?

Do you talk with other customers of the café?

How well do you know the other regulars of the café? Do you feel you form a sort of community?

If the regulars are a community, in what way are non-regulars viewed?

Have you made any friends here?

How far do you come to visit the café?

APPENDIX F

PHOTOS OF THE CAT CAFÉS

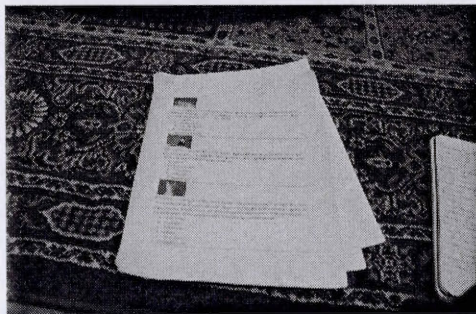
Café des Chats



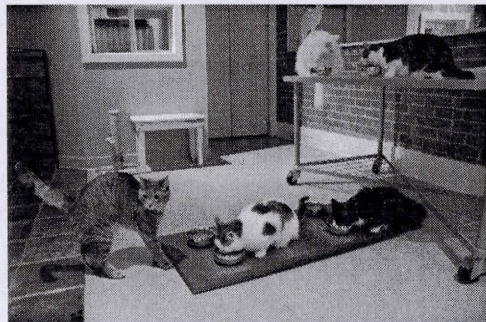
Café des Chats from the outside



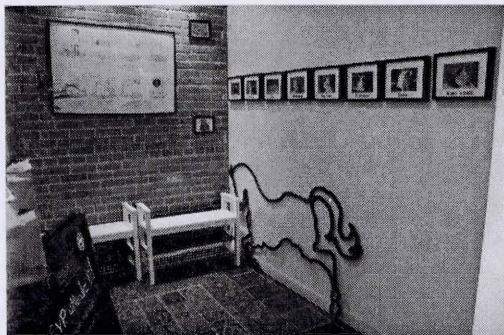
Part of the café's book selection



The original 'cat menu'



Cats gathered for food time



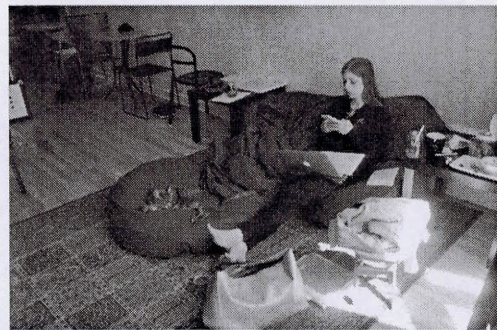
Entrance area with portraits and rules



The café's motto and the cat room



Comfy chair corner and cat-themed art



Studying with Peace on the bean bags

Café Chat l'Heureux



Entrance area with portraits and rules



Fake fireplace in the winter



Cat-themed merchandise for sale



Luna giving a high five to Clément

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