

Dog Ta(i)les

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Introduction

Urban theorist Andy Merrifield considers “everybody” to be manifested through a process of “becoming” within the urban fabric (2013). Merrifield analyses James Joyce’s concept “Here Comes Everybody” as us being “an urban existence” in two conceptual relations: Joyce’s proposition “as synonymous with the urban process [...], the social, political and economic environment to which everybody is coming or shaping, if always unevenly,” and Henri Lefebvre’s “complete urbanization of society” (2013).

Dog Ta(i)les is a speculative writing rendering a specific non-human perspective by taking hold of an artefact, a stray dog’s tail, that designates belonging to a non-human state. It views the subject of “everybody” by its component form, “every-body”, set in an urban condition. *Dog Ta(i)les* questions whether the universal assumed “everybody” within Merrifield’s revolutionary vision and critique

of neoliberal citizenship limits the framework and excludes ‘the potential outsider other’ of whom the urban condition also relates. As Judith Butler states “when we claim to know and to present ourselves, we will fail in some ways [...]” (2005, p. 42).

The body-text is created as body-less writing, by mapping ‘tails’ from different bodies of research – encounters with theoretical texts and arguments – that acknowledge the straying points of the “other” in the discourse of “everybody”.

Tale One

Scholar Boria Sax states that what “all ‘animals’ have in common [...], is that they are not one of ‘us’” (2008, p.1). Derrida calls this “the absolute alterity of the neighbour”, especially in the moments when “I see myself seen naked under the gaze of the cat” (2002, p. 380).

What separates humans from non-human animals from a physiological perspective is the tail (Adams *et al*, 2008). In everyday life we often encounter this difference in the domesticated case of the dog’s tail. What kind of “-body” might a non-human’s tail expose and possess? Does it reveal something about humans, as well, when confronted with non-humans, not in the domestic space the way Derrida has been naked in front of his cat, but in the streets and in urban space meant for “everybody to come together”?

Tale Two

The tail of a stray dog in Armenia is a context-sensitive object. It is an incomplete artefact constantly seeking the absented body, a production of human intentions (Thomasson, 2007, p.52) that exposes the management and power of a state apparatus.



Since 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and Armenian Independence, Armenia has faced the challenge of modernising infrastructures, inventing and proposing various programmes and state strategies in social, political and cultural domains. In the early 2000s, the Yerevan State Municipality began to address the stray dog problem. Annually, the Trade and Services Department of the Yerevan Municipality announces an open call for an institutional body to implement stray dog sterilisation and euthanasia programmes. The only winning vendor since 2006 is Unigraph X LLC (Media Center, 2013), which the municipality allocated an annual amount of 180 million AMD (approximately 500,000 USD) from the state budget for these sterilisation programmes (Muradyan, 2011). In reality, this “well-designed” system physically exposes “the tail of the stray dog” as a remainder of the process, and whose presence is evidence of a corrupt apparatus operating through monopoly and illegal actions.

Unigraph X, in partnership with the municipality, has an extermination strategy for stray dogs. They annually register 40- 50,000 stray dogs in Yerevan alone, which scientists and professionals argue is an impossible number for a city that size (Muradyan, 2012). These stray dogs are mainly shot with guns and rarely sterilised (Dingo Team, no date). In order for Unigraph X workers to receive payment from the state (approximately 8 USD), they have to file a report¹ with proof of completing the task. The severed tail from the dead body of each neutralised stray dog is provided as this evidence² (Muradyan, 2012).

Tale Three

For Giorgio Agamben, the conception of subject is located between living beings and apparatus, and in the contemporary capitalist period it “becomes” through constant desubjectification processes enacted by apparatus (2009, pp.19-20).

Straying suggests a threshold between two “becomings”: that of the domestic, civilised and controlled by norms, rules and rights – being inside at home – and of the violent, unacceptable

and transgressed – being outside in the street. A stray dog is desubjectified, “the other” (the straying one) among “others” (non-humans), which is “the other” of the human ones. Outside of any institutional logic identifying its validity, the stray dog cannot be institutionalised but exists exclusively in the public/urban space. It cannot be included in the “normative” frame “through which we apprehend or, indeed, fail to apprehend the lives of others as lost or injured” (Butler, p.1, 2009).

The tail of the dead stray dog becomes the politicised code left from the disposed body of “the stray other”. It is also a marker of the transgression of the social contract and exposition of “the act of killing that other”, the moment when “power relations become concrete” (Agamben, 2005, p.6) and apparatus profoundly structured via strictly juridical, technological and military senses (Agamben, 2005, pp.7-8). The tail in a way turns into another threshold, conveying strategies of two realities of cities and politics; one inclined to the liberal, “to let live and make die”, the other inclined to the neoliberal – “to make die and to let live” (EGS).

The urban constitutes the space in which “straying” involves a sense of transgression, a movement in areas across and outside the borders and rules. At the same time, “straying” also forms a strategy to create “stray communities of interest” against the apparatus of power.

Tale Four

A conception of a stray body as an urban collective existence is exemplified in the history of the Ottoman Empire, particularly in relation to the Young Turks regime in the beginning of the 20th century because the capital city, Istanbul, was in the process of “westernization” (Pearson, 2012). This process went through a process of modernisation with technological growth, development and construction of urban infrastructures meant for newly formed Francophone and Anglophone Turkish citizen-flâneurs (*Sesim Rüzgara: Modern Bir Sürgün Hikayesi*, 2010).



Dogs of Constantinople, 1880-90. Image: Abdullah Freres Studio, <http://lusadaran.org/artists/abdullah-freres>.

At that particular moment in Istanbul's history, the large number of stray dogs had become a problem. Scholars claim that, historically, the large number of stray dogs were due to religious observation which did not allow dogs (animals) to be welcomed in the home. However, people still cared and fed them in the streets, such that Istanbul was known as "the city with animals" (*ibid.*).

For officials attempting to modernise in 1910, stray dogs were representatives of "disorderly and backward urban society" (Pearson, 2012), especially when compared with the Western paradigm of modernisation which managed to deal with "the other" in the streets at that time. Their solution was to exile the stray dogs to a barren island in the Marmara sea (Whittington, 2013). 80%, or around 80,000, of Istanbul's stray dogs died of thirst and hunger and drowning as they tried desperately to get across the sea (Whittington, 2013).

Tale Five

In 2014 guerrilla geographer Daniel Raven-Ellison launched a proposal-project called “Greater London National Park*”. It calls upon the officials of London to remember the fact that London is a city with “8.3 million humans [...] [and] 13,000 wild species as well as lots of cats and dogs”, and it has a rich biodiversity with Greater London 47% green area (Greater London National Park*, 2014). It is not new for the city that wild animals migrate there which is partially the result of the urbanisation process. Raven-Ellison’s proposition calls for London city to turn into the new urban national park that would accommodate everyone and have more green areas.

Interestingly enough, this urban national park project demonstrates an upcoming paradigm change of the “straying” subject. It changes the threshold of straying from its original relation, the movement from domesticated space onto the urban street, to a contemporary notion where the straying refers to leaving the space of the “wild” for an urban park.



Greater London National Park project-proposal. Source: <http://www.greaterlondonnationalpark.org.uk>

Conclusion

For Andy Merrifield, “[Joyce’s] Here Comes Everybody is what global citizenship ought to be about” when it forms an intersection, coexistence against the neoliberal condition, a planetary urban (2013). Myra Hird, agreeing with Donna Haraway, suggests that the one (body) is constituted because of the other residents of the world (2009, pp. 134-135). Could these two positions, “global citizenship” and “other residents” in the world, placed within relation to each other allow for recognition at the threshold, an other “straying body” collected in the framework of *Dog Ta(i)les*?

In this case the “the urban becoming” remains processual as Merrifield proposes, but it now requires a differentiation of “straying others”. The significance of the dog’s tail as something more than a body segment is that it allows differentiation (contextually different articulations of the straying others) in terms of “becoming” which draws nearer to the question of “who is everybody still to come?”

Notes

1. Since 2009 there has not be any inspection by the Financial Supervision, therefore, perhaps there has not been any need to dock a tail, but just directly to kill.

2. It is said that the sterilised sex organs of a sterilised dog are also a part of the report. But in regard to the conceptual focus of this paper, it means a dog stays somehow alive and body is not disposed from it.

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