Xilogravura do livro *Les songes drolatiques de Pantagruel* (1565), de autoria presumida de François Desprez. Obra em domínio público. Composição visual remixada.

DOSSIÊ ESPECIAL

POLITICAL DOGS IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

PERROS POLÍTICOS EN EL ANTROPOCENO

CÃES POLÍTICOS NO ANTROPOCENO

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Abstract
The article proposes expanding the Aristotelian definition of "political animals" to include nonhuman animals. It focuses on dogs, specifically free-living ones, as a possible paradigm for a new interspecies community and politics. However, before examining free-living dogs, the definition of "dog" must be reclaimed from its Western reduction to "pet." Additionally, the cohabitation of dogs and humans must transcend the ethical and political limitations of the "companion species" paradigm, which is based on a Western, minority model (the dog as a human companion) and never questions the power dynamics and hierarchies of this historically and geographically specific model, ultimately reinforcing them. The free-living dog paradigm opens up the relationship to different forms of cohabitation and politics. After briefly examining two examples of legislation that grants free-living dogs the right to inhabit the *polis* (in India and Turkey), the article concludes with a list of key points for reorienting politics along interspecific lines.

Keywords
Political animals; anthropocene; free-living dogs; companion species; right to the city.

Resumen
El artículo propone ampliar la definición aristotélica de "animales políticos" para incluir a los animales no humanos. Se centra en los perros, concretamente en los que viven en libertad, como posible paradigma de una nueva comunidad y política interespecies. Sin embargo, antes de examinar a los perros que viven en libertad, hay que recuperar la definición de "perro" de su reducción occidental a "animal de compañía". Además, la cohabitación de perros y humanos debe trascender las limitaciones éticas y políticas del paradigma de las "especies de compañía", que se basa en un modelo occidental minoritario (el perro como compañero humano) y nunca cuestiona las dinámicas de poder y las jerarquías de este modelo histórica y geográficamente específico, reforzándolas en última instancia. El paradigma del perro en libertad abre la relación a distintas formas de convivencia y política. Tras examinar brevemente dos ejemplos de legislación que concede a los perros que viven en libertad el derecho a habitar la *polis* (en India y Turquía), el artículo concluye con una lista de puntos clave para reorientar la política siguiendo líneas interespecíficas.

Palavras clave
Animales políticos; antropoceno; perros de vida libre; especies de compañía; derecho a la ciudad.

Resumo
O artigo propõe a expansão da definição aristotélica de "animais políticos" para incluir animais não humanos. Ele se concentra nos cães, especificamente os de vida livre, como um possível paradigma para uma nova comunidade e política interespécies. Entretanto, antes de examinar os cães de vida livre, a definição de "cão" deve ser recuperada de sua redução ocidental a "animal de estimação". Além disso, a coabitação de cães e humanos deve transcender as limitações éticas e políticas do paradigma das "espécies de companhia", que se baseia em um modelo ocidental minoritário (o cão como companheiro humano) e nunca questiona as dinâmicas de poder e as hierarquias desse modelo histórico e geograficamente específico, reforçando-as em última instância. O paradigma do cão de vida livre abre a relação para diferentes formas de coabitação e política. Depois de examinar brevemente dois exemplos de legislação que concedem aos cães de vida livre o direito de habitar a *polis* (na Índia e na Turquia), o artigo conclui com uma lista de pontos-chave para reorientar a política de acordo com linhas interespecíficas.

Palavras-chave
Animais políticos; antropoceno; cães de vida livre; espécies de companhia; direito à cidade.

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Introduction: Politics in the Anthropocene

Aristotle's definition of the human being as a "political animal" in his *Politics* (I.2, 1253a, 2) has been taken by the Western tradition – even against Aristotle's emphasis on a political *continuum* throughout many species – to uphold a notion of "politics as the enactment of species difference"[1]: despite being both *natural* (i.e., biological) and *shared* with other animals – in *The history of animals* (I.1, 488a, 8-13) Aristotle designates as "political animals" a group including "man, the bee, the wasp, the ant, and the crane" – politics has been considered by the Western tradition both the most valuable and the most distinctive feature of human beings, what in the end truly distinguishes and sets apart the humans from the nonhumans. In this framework, the *polis*, the political community, has been conceived as exclusively human and the "animal" – both as nonhuman animals and as humans' own animality – as what borders and defines, by exclusion, this community: the exclusion of animality is what defines the *polis* as such, it is, in a sense, its founding act, but at the same time the *polis* is literally built upon the materiality that is animality.

In the early twenty-first century this framework does not work anymore, in the sense that it no longer reflects reality and, moreover, that it hinders and prevents the realization of a *true* political community. Not only because, over the last few decades, ethologists, biologists and ecologists have dismissed and dismantled the Aristotelian *essential* difference between *phoné*, the animal "voice," and *logos*, the (exclusively human) faculty of reason and language (rational language or articulated language), which for Aristotle conferred the mark and the privilege of "true" politics (*Politics* I.2, 1253a, 10-18), and have adopted in their studies of animal communities the vocabulary and the theoretical toolbox of political scientists, using concepts such as power, community, resistance, justice, violence, norms, hierarchy, and cooperation.[2] And also not only because, as Michel Foucault and other theorists of biopolitics have argued, in modernity the division between biological life and political life collapses and thus also collapses the neat division between non-political (nonhuman) animals and political humans.[3] What emerges in this early twenty-first century as evident is *also* that the *polis*, the political community, has always been composed by several species, has always been a mixed community,[4] an interspecies community.

Therefore, the task today, as Rafi Youatt puts it, is that of "thinking politics anew, across species lines."[5] In other words, politics must be reconceptualized as no longer the space of an (exclusively human) conquered autonomy from nature (conceived as the realm of necessity) but rather as the negotiation of life in a shared space and in interaction with other species. There is no outside of nature, Youatt emphasizes, and nature is already intrinsically political: "political life involves the interactions of multiple species over the conditions of shared life."[6] Youatt's project is therefore that of exploring and redefining the language and the conceptuality of a

[1] Donaldson; Kymlicka, *Interspecies politics*, p. 323.
[2] Youatt, *Interspecies politics*, pp. 7-8.
[3] Cf. e.g., Cimatti; Salzani, *The biopolitical animal*.
[4] Midgley, *Animals and why they matter*, pp. 98-143.
[5] Youatt, *Interspecies politics*, p. 4.
[6] Youatt, *Interspecies politics*, p. 1.

political life that is *always already* multispecific and interspecific, *always already* ecological and relational. In this redefinition, human beings might see a scaling down of their exceptional (but fictitious and illusory) freedom, but, Youatt argues, a "relational freedom" will also unlock and increase alternatives for "living well with others," and ultimately, therefore, also "increase our freedom to act with other creatures and each other."[7] Species relations are and remain uneven, asymmetrical, and diverse depending on environmental, social, and cultural contexts and constraints, but the "good life among species" must be the goal – as difficult, precarious, and open-ended as it is – of this new politics as such.

Youatt insists that his re-definition of politics does not depend on the exceptional circumstances of our current climate and environmental crisis – interspecies politics is "ordinary politics" – and distances thus his project from the language and conceptuality of "crisis environmentalism," which, by heavily relying on a narrative of exception, emergency, and technical solutions, depoliticizes "ordinary" interspecies relations (which are the "most important questions") and ultimately leaves anthropocentric politics unchallenged.[8] While I fully subscribe to this position, I will here adopt the so-called Anthropocene as a conceptual framework, and for a very specific reason. The Anthropocene, the "human epoch," is a very problematic label, which in the past two decades has been used and misused to defend many different theories and positions but never succeeded in building a consensus around its periodization, starting date, and meaning – and in 2024 the label was rejected as the name for a new geological era by the International Commission on Stratigraphy (ICS). Other alternative labels have been proposed (Capitalocene, Androcene, Plantationocene, etc.), which all insist (explicitly or not) on the catastrophic consequences of "Mas as a geological force" (climate change, sixth mass extinction, etc.), so that this label ultimately marks not the "triumph of humans" but instead the evidence that, as Anna Tsing aptly puts it, "without planning or intention, humans have made a mess of our planet."[9] What this label marks, therefore, Tsing insists, is "precarity" as a sign of our epoch, and that is why for me it has a powerful *framing* effect: as a mark of precarity and vulnerability, it spells the fact that we can no longer rely on the status quo (i.e., traditional, anthropocentric politics)[10] and must invent – or rather, re-discover – a new politics and new political relationship with each other and with the world.[11]

This is, naturally, a very ambitious program that vastly exceeds the limits of a short article. What I am going to propose here is, therefore, the exploration of one particular but exemplary case: the politics of human-dog relationships. This is the longest and closest interspecies relationship known to human beings and can therefore work as both a starting point and a paradigm for "thinking politics anew, across species lines."

[7] Youatt, *Interspecies politics*, pp. 8-9.
[8] Youatt, *Interspecies politics*, pp. 3-4.
[9] Tsing, *The mushroom at the end of the world*, p. 19.
[10] "The problem of precarious survival helps us see what is wrong," Tsing, *The mushroom at the end of the world*, p. 29.
[11] Tsing, *The mushroom at the end of the world*, pp. 20, 29; cf. also Gabardi, *The next social contract*, p. 12.

1. What is a Dog?

The fact that the human-dog relationship is, for both species, the longest and closest interspecies relationship also constitutes nonetheless a problem, insofar as it has turned into a "story" (in the sense of *fiction*) that ultimately naturalizes and justifies the status quo. Mariam Motamedi Fraser has called this story "species story," an account of the human-dog co-evolution that deems domestication as the *destiny* of dogs, as expressed in the very taxonomical definition of dog as *canis familiaris*, i.e., belonging to the household. This co-evolution comes to signify that "dogs belong with humans," which also means however that "there are no dogs *qua dogs* without humans," that "dogs are inconceivable, *as dogs*, without humans."[12] In questioning this species story Fraser is not challenging co-evolution or the fact that dogs inhabit the human ecological niche (a very successful evolutionary strategy); what she argues is that this story not only tells how dogs came into existence but also – and most importantly – *defines* and *prescribes* how dogs are expected to be, to feel, to behave *today*, and what treatment is justified on the part of humans.[13]

This story ultimately and retrospectively naturalizes and universalizes, through an extremely powerful scientific and rhetorical apparatus, the dog-human relationships of a specific time (today) and a specific place (the West or Global North) – and as such, Chris Pearson adds, it is quite "provincial."[14] This provincial naturalization takes the pet dogs living in Western human households as the representatives of dogness and as the standard for what dogs are and are supposed to be.[15] The story is supported by the overrepresentation of pet dogs in dog behavioral research (which is produced overwhelmingly in the West), creating a "scientific" bias which, Christina Hansen Wheat and Clive Wynne write, truly hinders our understanding of dog behavioral ecology and evolution.[16] Pet dogs represent indeed only 15-25% of the estimated 1 billion world dog population (these estimates are of course very difficult to make),[17] but on this minority a whole species is defined, regulated, and disciplined.

This perspective, these scholars argue, should be reversed, not only because non-pet dogs – who go under many names: stray dogs, street dogs, village dogs, free-living dogs, free-ranging dogs, feral dogs[18] – make up the vast majority of the dogs living today in the world (75-85%), but also because they live the way most dogs have lived in history since their first contacts with humans: they inhabit the human ecological niche and gravitate around human settlements, exploiting anthropogenic resources (i.e., depending on humans for food) in various degrees and choosing various degrees of socialization with humans. Their behavioral

[12] Fraser, *Dog politics*, pp. 130-131.
[13] Fraser, *Dog politics*, p. 2.
[14] Fraser, *Dog politics*, p. 171; Pearson, *Dogopolis*, pp. 4-5.
[15] Coppinger; Coppinger, *What is a dog?*, p. 21; Fraser, *Dog politics*, pp. 124-25.
[16] Wheat; Wynne, *The unfulfilled potential of dogs in studying behavioural ecology and evolution during the Anthropocene*, pp. 408-9.
[17] See for example, "How Many Dogs Are There in the World?"
[18] Terms like "stray" and "feral" imply that these dogs strayed from their "right path" and absconded from their "right place," which are of course following humans in the human household. "street dogs" or "free living dogs" are certainly more appropriate terms, which I will here adopt together with "non-homed" and "non-owned" dogs. See e.g., Srinivasan, *Remaking more-than-human society*.

ecology, moreover, presents substantial variations depending on many factors, from the environment – urban or rural – to the human countries and cultures in which they live and their social and legal status within them, to their individual personality, etc., which makes it difficult to squeeze them all into a consistent and homogeneous group (this adaptability is naturally also a mark of their evolutionary success).[19] These dogs still live in what were probably the original relationships with humans and are thus the "real" dogs.

Unlike the breed dogs of the West, meticulously (and sometimes perversely) selected and literally *molded* by humans, the "real" dogs are "self-selected," that is, naturally evolved. This brings Raymond and Lorna Coppinger to question the very core of dogs' species story: that dogs are a human creation "forged" by an act of will from the "raw material" of grey wolves (this is the Promethean version of the domestication story). To the contrary, they argue, dogs belong to their own, individual species, which is part of the biological family of the *Canidae* like wolves, coyotes, jackals, and foxes, but have learned more than others to exploit the human ecological niche.[20] The domestication of dogs has been a two-way process in which both parties entered for evolutionary advantages – in a word, most probably dogs "self-domesticated." In a thought experiment of "speculative biology," Jessica Pierce and Marc Bekoff have imagined what would become of dogs in a world without humans. The fictional absence of humans, they argue, can shed light on who dogs are *on their own terms* – and also on who they might become if humans stopped interfering so completely in their breeding and behavior.[21] If the disappearance of humans would certainly strongly impact dogs' evolutionary trajectory, Pierce and Bekoff write nonetheless: "Is contact with humans a necessary part of what it means to be a dog? No."[22] Dogs would continue to be dogs – only without humans.

It is therefore at these dogs – the "real dogs" – that we must look if we want to "think politics anew, across species lines." They are usually written off – especially in "science," not to mention politics – for being uncategorizable (neither wild not domestic), "pest," rabies-infested, etc. They are what Tsing calls the "unruly edges"[23] of the dog-human relationships, but it is precisely in these unruly edges that the seeds of a new dog-human politics might be found.

2. Beyond Companion Species

Looking for new interspecies politics in the unruly edges, where humans can encounter "real" dogs, means, first of all, overcoming the ethical and political limits of what Donna Haraway has popularized as "companion species." Not only because Haraway takes as paradigmatic focus for her analyses her personal relationship with her own (and *owned*) dog, that is, she exclusively focuses on the minority Western model; but also because, despite her great promises to overcome the shoals of human exceptionalism, finally Haraway ends up strenuously defending the

[19] Wheat; Wynne, *The unfulfilled potential of dogs in studying behavioural ecology and evolution during the Anthropocene*, pp. 410, 414-15.
[20] Coppinger; Coppinger, *What is a dog?*, p. 21; Fraser, *Dog politics*, p. 83.
[21] Pierce; Bekoff, *A dog's world*, p. 12.
[22] Pierce; Bekoff, *A dog's world*, p. 163.
[23] Tsing, *The mushroom at the end of the world*, p. 20; Tsing, Unruly edges.

status quo. The companion species paradigm has enjoyed considerable popularity in the past couple of decades, so it is important to get clarity on this point before proceeding further.

The great promise of the companion species paradigm is that of doing away with the (false and ineffective) abstractions and generalizations of human exceptionalism and of developing instead an ethics and a politics based on the reality of the web of interactions uniting and articulating many different species, which therefore cannot be considered as isolated and separated but must be seen as always already interrelated – i.e., always already as "companions." The mantras of this paradigm are in fact that interspecies relationships are co-constitutive and "none of the partners pre-exist the relating," and that therefore "the relation is the smallest unit of analysis."[24] This co-constitutive and productive network, and not abstract universal norms and generalizations, is the terrain where ethical and political relationships must be actively and pragmatically negotiated "in the flesh," from time to time and always anew. Despite acknowledging that these co-constitutive relationships may be and often are unequal, unjust, and even cruel and violent (but can, of course, also be joyous, inventive, and playful), Haraway believes that they are the only ground upon which a real and pragmatic "flourishing of significant otherness" can be based.[25] This promise, however, is broken, as Zipporah Weisberg appropriately puts it,[26] when the existing relationships are naturalized, generalized, and ultimately justified in the name of this non-innocent pragmatism, blocking thereby the way for the invention of new forms of relation.

Haraway completely embraces the dog species story according to which dogs are "a species in *obligatory, constitutive, historical*, protean relationship with human beings,"[27] and, although cursorily acknowledging a couple of times that non-homed and non-owned dogs exist (somewhere else) in the world,[28] she bases her whole analysis and proposal on her personal relationship with her own dog, in particular as this relation develops in the sport of agility they perform together. This personal phenomenology is then extended into a general theory and made paradigmatic. In a sense, the agility training, which is the core of Haraway's descriptions and proposal, is indeed paradigmatic, not however of flourishing dog-human relationships but of the unsurmountable problems of the companion species paradigm. Essential in this sport is actually the *training regime* that the dog (and also the human, but in a very different sense) must undergo, which, via a reading of dog/horse trainer and philosopher Vicki Hearne and other literature on dog training,[29] Haraway makes into the means for a successful and flourishing interspecies co-habiting. Training, Haraway argues, "is for opening up what is not known to be possible, but might be, for all the intraacting partners," and is what allows dogs a *real* form of enfranchisement in human society.[30] Mark Rowlands – another sympathetic reader of Vicki Hearne who also generalizes his personal relationships with his own dogs into a paradigmatic philosophy – puts it quite clearly:

[24] Haraway, *The companion species manifesto*, pp. 12, 24; Haraway, *When species meet*, p. 17.
[25] Haraway, *The companion species manifesto*, pp. 12, 3.
[26] Weisberg, *The broken promises of monsters*.
[27] Haraway, *The companion species manifesto*, pp. 11-12, emphasis added.
[28] E.g., Haraway, *The companion species manifesto*, p. 14; Haraway, *When species meet*, p. 98.
[29] See for example Hearne, *Adam's task*.
[30] Haraway, *The companion species manifesto*, p. 52; Haraway, *When species meet*, p. 223.

training teaches the dog a language (in the Wittgesteinian sense of language games) which provides them with a structure in the human world, and it is this structure, this proficiency in the human codes, that ultimately gives them freedom (or the only freedom they can get).[31]

Both dogs and humans, the argument goes, are and must be "acculturated" into the disciplinary regimes structuring our societies – dog training is essentially and explicitly equated thereby with human education[32] – so in the end what really matters is the "dance of encounters," the "dance of relating," and the "entanglements of becoming together," i.e., the joined productivity in which all are transformed and that can be conducive to flourishing for all "companions."[33] What is never questioned and is instead hidden in this argument is however the unequal power frame of this mutual co-shaping. Haraway (begrudgingly) acknowledges not only that coercion necessarily frames training, but also that "death awaits the failed dog": "I know very well how much control of Cayenne's life and death I hold in my inept hands," she confesses.[34] But still, as Dinesh Wadiwel shows, she refuses to name the systemic form of domination in which the companion species relationships are inscribed and which determine every aspect of the companion dog's life. On the contrary, these unequal relationships are euphemistically renamed as "friendship" and inscribed into the logic of the "pack," the name that both Haraway and Rowlands give to their (very personal) experiences of dog-human companionship.[35] In fact, Fraser adds that the emphasis on "fun," "joy," and "play" – exemplarily brought up in the agility sport as paradigm – are perfect instances of the biopolitical manipulation that covers up domination under an appearance of "care."[36] In the end, unequal instrumental relations and domination are simply naturalized: "I am not so sure about 'equals,'" Haraway writes; "I dread the consequences for significant others of pretending not to exercise power and control that shape relationships despite any denials. But I am sure about the taste of copresence and the shared building of other worlds."[37]

It is a fact, however, that dogs' "acculturation" and socialization, performed through and institutionalized by training, require an enormous amount of labor on the part of the dogs and very often – and more and more – put on the dogs demands that contradict their very nature. "To adapt to human environments and expectations," Bekoff and Pierce write, "dogs must sacrifice some of their 'dogness.' [...] [W]e usually ask them to live like us rather than like dogs."[38] We systematically try to "de-dog" our dogs, Pierce insists, preventing them to perform natural activities like foraging, scavenging, digging, marking, sniffing, mating, and barking, and minutely regulating the place, time, and frequency of the few activities we still allow.[39] Companion dogs have no real autonomy with regard to the basic activities of their lives and are therefore *captives* of their companion humans who command

[31] Rowlands, *The philosopher and the wolf*, pp. 38-39. See also Rowlands, *The world of dog*, and Rowlands, *The happiness of dogs*.
[32] Haraway, *When species meet*, p. 222; Rowlands, *The philosopher and the wolf*, p. 44.
[33] Haraway, *When species meet*, pp. 4, 25, 208.
[34] Haraway, *When species meet*, pp. 64, 216.
[35] Wadiwel, *The war against animals*, pp. 219-20; Cudworth, *Animal entanglements*, p. 20.
[36] Fraser, *Dog politics*, p. 34.
[37] Haraway, *When species meet*, pp. 236-37. See Weisberg, *The broken promises of monsters*, p. 28.
[38] Bekoff; Pierce, *Unleashing your dog*, p. 4.
[39] Pierce, *Who's a good dog?*, pp. 30-31.

– and very often *overcommand* – them to do just about everything.[40] A very one-sided "companionship" indeed. It is no surprise, therefore, that more and more dogs (up to 80% in the US according to some statistics) *fail* to be properly "acculturated" and present what owners and trainers call "behavioral problems." Despite "top-notch veterinary care, high-quality food, soft bedding, shelter from heat and cold, and protection from parasites and diseases," companion dogs in the early twenty-first century "are in crisis."[41] These problems, however, derive from excessive and unnatural human demands and not from dogs' deficiencies: "Dogs are not allowed to be themselves," Pierce and Bekoff again note, "and are often punished just for being dogs."[42] Fraser calls this *failing* "dogs' resistance" to living with humans on exclusively human terms, and it is a resistance that can cost their lives.[43]

The bottom line is that the much-vaunted relationality of the companion species paradigm has been reified into a series of expectations and practices that shape what a dog should and must be, erasing and "disrespecting" the boundaries of their autonomy.[44] If acknowledging and even celebrating relationality and entanglements has been extremely important for moving beyond human exceptionalism and isolationism, on the other hand it also risks foreclosing critical interventions and inadvertently reinforcing the *status quo*. "The paradox of relationality," Eva Giraud writes in *What comes after entanglement?*, "is that it struggles to accommodate things that are resistant to being in relation, including forms of politics that actively oppose particular relations."[45] A true interspecies politics must therefore *disentangle* dogs from their species story and from the naturalized hierarchies of the companion species paradigm – and *Unleashing your dog* is Bekoff and Pierce's ethico-political motto.[46] As Giraud emphasizes, "the act of excluding certain relations is precisely what creates room for others to emerge,"[47] and it is for the emergence of these other kinds of relations that a new interspecies politics must work.

3. The Right to the City

To think politics across species lines we need therefore to truly open up the political space to nonhuman actors *in their own right* and *on their own terms*. In other words, we need to give them access to the political space, to the *polis*, which must therefore be reshaped as a *zoo-polis*. In this regard, the concept of "right to the city," coined by Henri Lefebvre in a 1967 article,[48] can be very useful – if by "city"

[40] Bekoff; Pierce, *Unleashing your dog*, p. 13. "Simply put," they continue, "'being captive' means that your life is not your own, that the contours of your daily existence are shaped by someone else. It doesn't necessarily mean that you are mistreated or unhappy or that your captors intend to harm or punish you. Being captive refers to a type of existence, not its quality" (p. 5).

[41] Pierce, *Who's a good dog?*, p. 7.

[42] Pierce; Bekoff, *A dog's world*, p. 150.

[43] Fraser, *Dog politics*, pp. 148-49.

[44] Fraser, *Dog politics*, pp. 224, 236.

[45] Giraud, *What comes after entanglement?*, p. 7.

[46] Bekoff; Pierce, *Unleashing your dog*. The authors do not extend their analysis beyond a survey of the problems of – and possible solutions to – the current dog-human relationships (in the West). If ethics and ethical responsibility are certainly central to their position, the elevation of their title to a political manifesto is entirely my responsibility.

[47] Giraud, *What comes after entanglement?*, p. 11.

[48] Lefebvre, *The right to the city*.

we understand the *polis* more generally as "political space." Lefebvre proposed this concept to counter the logic of exclusion that shapes the modern city through privilege and segregation, and after five decades of neoliberal privatizations at the expense of public access, this idea is more actual than ever. Of course Lefebvre was not thinking of nonhuman animals when he proposed to remodel the city along inclusive lines: dogs (and especially free-living dogs, whom I use here as paradigmatic case) were never included in the disenfranchised categories – the "underdogs," as it were – to whom a new right to the city should be granted. However, this concept is plastic enough to allow for the correction of this anthropocentric oversight, which has already been proposed, for example, by Marie Carmen Shingne.[49]

To grant this right to the dogs as well as the underdogs, however, does not merely mean to "expand the circle" and "let them in," but it implies a redefinition and reorganization of our very concepts of space, of social relationships, of access, of belonging. A new politics of space will have to redesign the city as a place co-produced by many different species, which involves not only the inclusion of nonhuman actors and the acknowledgement of their needs, demands, and rights (with a complete redefinition, for example, of the city's "soundscape" and "smellscape"),[50] but also the acceptance of friction, antagonism, and conflict as inevitable components of the sharing of space (which, of course, is already the case in human cohabitation). Coexistence always means (also) conflict,[51] and the acceptance of this fact is the first step towards a multispecies spatial justice. Humans will therefore have to renounce their sense of entitlement to a completely sanitized, tidied, and "safe" city, and accept the challenges – together with the rewards – of a mixed community.

Importantly, in this reorganization dogs would be not – or better, not *only* and not necessarily – (dependent) *companions* but rather (autonomous) *neighbors*. The term "neighbor" denotes, like "companion," the sharing of space and physical and social closeness, with the advantage, however, also of not falling into the biopolitical traps of the companion species paradigm – but neither into the demanding debates about citizenship and active political participation as proposed, for example, by Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka.[52] In their seminal 2011 book *Zoopolis*, in which they adopt traditional political categories to discuss the place and role of nonhuman animals in mixed communities, Donaldson and Kymlicka talk a lot about dogs and make many dog examples. However, they, too, focus exclusively on the Western model (companion dogs) when they talk about citizenship (domestic animals, they argue, should be given full citizenship in a mixed society), and when they talk about non-homed and non-owned dogs, they recur to the category of "feral" (as part of the category of "liminal animals," which should be granted the right of "denizenship," i.e., of residence and protection without the full responsibilities of co-citizenship).[53] However, neither of these categories fully captures the status of the world 75-85% "real" dogs, who live in a much looser relationship with humans than companion dogs but cannot be considered all feral, insofar as feral denotes a re-acquired fear

[49] Shingne, *The more-than-human right to the city*.
[50] Pierce, *Who's a good dog?*, p. 31.
[51] Srinivasan, *Remaking more-than-human society*, p. 389.
[52] Shingne, *The more-than-human right to the city*, p. 13.
[53] Donaldson; Kymlicka, *Zoopolis*, especially pp. 118-22, 224-27, and passim.

of humans and a shunning of human contact, which certainly does not apply to street dogs. The "real" dogs' relationships with humans fall within a wide spectrum that, depending on the environmental, social, cultural, and political context, spans from full avoidance (feral dogs) to loose companionship (neighborhood or village dogs) and will probably require the invention of new political categories.

It is useful to briefly look at two examples in which non-homed and non-owned dogs were granted the *legal* right to inhabit the city streets. The first example is India, which has the largest population of non-homed dogs in the world (some estimates suggest over 60 million). If the 1960 Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act generally made animal cruelty a criminal offense, both the 1972 Wildlife (Protection) Act and the 1986 Environment (Protection) Act already explicitly protected these dogs from cruelty. It is however the 2001 Animal Birth Control (Dog) Rules (ABC, reformulated in 2023) that stipulate that sterilization (neutering) and vaccination are the only legal means of stabilizing and reducing the free-living dog population and prohibits their culling, removal and/or relocation. That is, free-living dogs – who have a different legal status from homed (pet) dogs, who are property of the owner – must be (captured and then) sterilized and vaccinated and then returned to the area where they were seized. Municipal corporations and other local bodies are responsible for implementing the ABC program, often in partnership with organizations recognized by the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI). The ABC Rules emphasize the importance of minimizing cruelty during the capture, treatment, and release of dogs and also provide guidelines for managing human-dog conflicts without resorting to relocation or harmful actions.[54] The Rules follow the recommendations of the WHO Guidelines for Dog Population Management.[55]

A similar case, which also follows the WHO Guidelines, is that of Turkey. Despite traditionally having a large population of free-living dogs, Turkey did not have a specific legal framework for animal welfare until 2004, when the Animal Protection Law was passed.[56] Among other things, this Law ended two centuries of failed (and cruel) attempts to "clean" the city streets from the presence of dogs and, like India's ABC program, it adopts the "catch, neuter, and return" strategy. Animals returned to the street are tagged in different colors indicating that they have been treated and indicating the year and place of origin/capture. The law also mandates that pets be microchipped to counter the (quite common) practice of abandoning cats and dogs.[57] The Animal Protection Law was amended, however, by the Turkish parliament on July 30, 2024, now requiring that, since the current sterilization system appears inadequate and ineffective, street dogs be rounded up (again!) and put into shelters for adoption. The new measures are likely to go back to the previous brutality in the treatment of street dogs, not least because the country has 322 animal shelters with a capacity to house only around 105,000 dogs, but the government itself estimates the total free-roaming dog population at around 4 million.[58]

[54] Animal Welfare Board of India, *Rules*; *The Gazette of India*, n. 154; Government of India, *Animal Birth Control Rules, 2023 notified by Central Government*.

[55] WHO *et al.*, *Guidelines for dog population management*.

[56] http://www.lawsturkey.com/law/5199-animal-protection-law.

[57] Wright, *The stray dogs of Istanbul*; Bilgin; Özdogan, *"Street dogs" of Istanbul*, pp. 305-6.

[58] Rowan; Rowan, Turkey's new law on homeless dogs; Christie-Miller, Erdoğan's plan to cull Turkey's street dogs will destroy far more than just animals.

This is a very unfortunate (and backward) development, but the very 2004 law, just like India's ABC program, presents a fundamental problem: by defining street animals as "ownerless" (Article 3 of Turkey's Animal Protection Law) or "stray" (term used interchangeably with "street dog" in India's ABC program) these laws reiterate that the proper status of these dogs is to be *owned* by humans, and that if they aren't they *stray from the right path*, i.e., that of being faithful "companions" to a human master. The right to the city that these laws grant to nonhuman animals is that of inhabiting the streets merely as (barely) tolerated strangers, not as political actors. These laws are an expression of what Krithika Srinivasan calls the "welfare episteme,"[59] a biopolitical frame of population management that, if it is certainly an improvement with respect to the previous practices (expulsion, culling, extermination), nonetheless entirely *depoliticizes* the presence and role of the nonhuman (and also human, of course) inhabitants. It is management rather than politics, and is therefore, as Youatt argues, *anti-political*.[60] It is another, different right to the city that we need to invent if we truly want to "think politics anew, across species lines."

Conclusions: Political Dogs

Thinking this new politics is, as I warned at the beginning, a very ambitious program that cannot be fully (or even sufficiently) outlined in a short article, even when the focus is limited to a single – albeit perhaps paradigmatic – species. As a way of concluding, therefore, I will point out a few key points that, by summarizing the previous analysis and emphasizing essential features, could perhaps serve as a roadmap for future research.

The first point is the one I started with and is therefore the premise of my whole discussion: the fact that, as Youatt emphasizes, real existing communities are *always already* mixed species communities; "[b]oth by choice and by force," he writes, "on-the-ground communities are mixed species communities."[61] Youatt refers to Mary Midgley's theorization of mixed species community in *Animals and why they matter* (1983), where she pointed out the advantages but also the necessity of starting with actually existing, on-the-ground situations in which different species share space and resources and interact on a regular basis – and this is precisely the advantage of focusing on dog-human communities, which have existed for most of dogs' and humans' history and presently unfold in many different, complex, and even challenging ways. In particular, non-homed and non-owned dogs already sustain themselves in complex and independent forms of symbiosis with human communities and are therefore the perfect starting point for the project of *politicizing* these relationships. Moreover, these relationships, in all their variations, clearly show that "the structure of interspecies politics is not stagnant and stable" but must be continuously updated and renegotiated.[62]

Youatt complements and completes Midgley's argument with Anna Tsing's insight that "[h]uman nature" – but also animal nature more generally – "is itself an

[59] Srinivasan, *The welfare episteme*.
[60] Youatt, *Interspecies politics*, p. 135; see chapter 6 of this book for a poignant critique of biopolitics as antipolitical.
[61] Youatt, *Interspecies politics*, p. 118.
[62] Youatt, *Interspecies politics*, p. 137.

interspecies relationship": it is relations that produce species, communities, and groups, and these relations, in a multispecies sharing of habitats and resources, are what constitutes a community, are what creates politics.[63] Jessica Pierce, too, refers to Tsing's argument that sharing habitats and resources necessarily involves collaboration, and "collaboration means working across difference." This "working across difference" leads, in turn, to "transformation through encounter," and nothing better epitomizes these concepts than the dog-human relationships, which throughout the ages transformed and shaped both dogs and humans and need today to be reinvented and repoliticized.[64] Moreover, street dogs also illustrate another important point that Tsing makes: transformative encounters are not harmonious and non-antagonisitic but are, to the contrary, unstable, elusive, unsettling, and challenging (Tsing calls them "disturbances"[65]), and a lively and *politicized* multispecies community cannot therefore be the (ultimately fictitious) sanitized and tidied space that humans have created around themselves by excluding, expelling, and subjugating all other life forms.

The problem with Tsing's (and Haraway's) position, however, is that, despite theorizing instability and transformation, it risks fetishizing these co-constitutive entanglements and falling into an apolitical or even anti-political validation of the status quo (something like: since everything is entangled, then all practices are ultimately permitted). That is why, as Giraud emphasizes, it is also important to look *beyond* entanglements and relationality in order to break with wrong and unequal relationships and try to invent new forms of politics. Dog-human relations become paradigmatic of this alternative in the opposition between the companion species paradigm and the street dogs paradigm. The latter shows the need for what Youatt calls "proximate distance" in multispecies politics, for an ongoing *dis-entanglement* from bad relations and *re-entanglement* into new, productive ones.[66] Interaction and proximity work together with (and are counterbalanced by) distance and disengagement in what Haraway calls a "dance of encounters"[67] – a concept that must however be wrested from Haraway's ultimately anti-political paradigm.

A corollary to this point is the distinction Youatt proposes between moral community and political community. A moral community, he argues discussing again Midgley's definition of mixed species community, is an on-the-ground fact insofar as humans have a moral sensibility towards nonhuman animals and engage in moral reflections about duties and rights towards them. In this sense, a moral community is not an interspecies community *on interspecific terms* but is rather "a human idea about a moral community made up of different species," which is structured therefore on a human framework of understanding. A moral approach to mixed species community is necessarily one-sided and one-directional, and can tell us little about power, resistance, violence, or exclusions. These concepts are the precinct of politics, so if we are aiming at a mixed species community *on interspecific terms*, it is a political approach that we need and not (only) ethics. Here again non-homed and non-owned dogs (unlike companion dogs) are paradigmatic

[63] Youatt, *Interspecies politics*, p. 141; Tsing, *Unruly edges*, p. 144.
[64] Pierce, *Who's a good dog?*, p. 27; Tsing, *The mushroom at the end of the world*, pp. 28-29.
[65] Tsing, *The mushroom at the end of the world*, pp. 152, 160.
[66] Youatt, *Interspecies politics*, p. 118.
[67] Haraway, *When species meet*, p. 4.

insofar as their claim to inclusion within the *polis* is not based on the evaluation of their moral status (about which humans might reason – among themselves) but instead on the sharing of a common space and of common resources and the incessant negotiations of the inevitable frictions and conflicts that cohabitation entails.

Finally (though the list could and should continue), in order to think politics across species lines the last – and also most arduous and enduring – bastion in defense of human exceptionalism and anthropocentric politics should be addressed and deconstructed: the fact that, as Aristotle stated and the Western tradition exalted and absolutized, only human beings possess *logos*, articulated language, which "serves to declare what is advantageous and what is reverse" and provides thereby the "perception of good and evil, of the just and the unjust" (*Politics* I.2, 1253a, 10-18). This fundamental presupposition can be and has been challenged and refuted in two ways: on the one hand, by showing that, even for humans, political communication and agency involve much more than articulated language; and, on the other, that nonhuman animals, too, always already engage in politically relevant forms of communication and agency. Youatt devotes a whole and important section of his book to refuting "the language objection" and insists that human signifying (and hence political) activities and practices are always and necessarily embedded within a thick and wider fabric of pre-, quasi-, and non-verbal interactions, communications, responses that go way beyond, and not necessarily require, reasoned speech and articulated language. Political communication and political agency always necessarily involve also "body language, facial expression, symbols, gestures, and pheromones," and it is on this terrain that interspecies politics can take place.[68]

Scholars like, among others, Josephine Donovan and Eva Meijer add that nonhuman animals, too, do possess their own form of *logos*, they do have their proper, refined and articulated voice and do indeed *speak* – but we do not *want* to listen.[69] These nonhuman forms of communication and agency, despite all risks of misreading and misinterpretation (which also apply to communication among humans), are sufficient for meaningful *political* interactions between different species, as has been abundantly proven throughout history, according to Midgley, in successful human-animal interactions: we can and do understand each other, and this is the basis for a meaningful interspecies politics.[70] Again, the example of street dogs here is poignant: wherever they live, they do establish an articulated – and thoroughly *political* – system of signification, communication, and agency with and alongside other species, including humans, that helps them negotiate and navigate the multispecies environment they inhabit and co-create. If the language objection breaks down, as it does in these contexts, then the *polis* truly becomes an inter- and multispecies place.

With this final point we have come full circle back to Aristotle, and it is with a last brief reading of his definition of "political animals" that I want to conclude. Emphasizing the continuity among "political species" ("man, the bee, the wasp, the

[68] Youatt, *Interspecies politics*, pp. 120-25.

[69] See Donovan, *Caring to dialogue*; Donovan, *Participatory epistemology*; and Meijer, *When animals speak*; Meijer, *Animal languages*.

[70] Midgley, Animals and why they matter, pp. 113-15.

ant, and the crane") that can be read both in the *Politics* and in the *History of animals* against the traditional emphasis on species difference, Youatt proposes to ground a new interspecies politics in the acknowledgement that the different "politicaleness" of different species is a question of degree and not of kind. What matters, then, is the "intensity of political activity," which does not rest on a break between human language and animal communication but is instead performed and sustained by the intensity of the circulation of signs – also among different species. "Thinking about the political in terms of intensity," he concludes, "helps us think more clearly about communities that involve multiple species. A species-miscegenated political community, made up of humans, dogs, cats, ducks, and more, is no less political than a human politics alone. Indeed, it is richer or more intense because of its variegated membership."[71] Treasuring this richness is what must reorient politics toward "living well with nonhuman others as a kind of political end in itself."[72] And looking at free-living dogs building communities with humans and other animals can be a starting point.

[71] Youatt, *Interspecies politics*, p. 125.
[72] Youatt, *Interspecies politics*, p. 136.

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