Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

Kin(e)ships:
Cinematic Traces and Transformations of The Human-Canine Bond

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KIN(E)SHIPS:
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OF THE HUMAN-CANINE BOND

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.....László Borbála.....

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Introduction: The Anthrokynematic Assemblage

"Let difference
remain our bond"
(W. H. Auden: "Talking to Dogs")

Cinematic Canine = Construction + (F)actual Creature

In *The Companion Species Manifesto*, a book-length pamphlet on the joint lives of people and dogs and the complex material-semiotic presence of the latter, Donna Haraway describes our four-legged partners as being both "[f]lesh and signifier, bodies and words, stories and worlds" (20). This insight has served as inspiration for the inceptive research question of the present study, namely: What or whom do we see when we are watching dogs on the screen? More precisely: Are they human beings in furry bodies and metaphoric signifiers of human notions, as pre-animal turn criticism contended, or simply dogs, as some animal studies scholars claim? My hypothesis is that the answer is both. On the one hand, cinematic canines are indeed meant to be – and have been predominantly interpreted as – constructions carrying some abstract human concept or sentiment. As Adrienne McLean puts it, they "are called to the set as it were, precisely to signify as 'projections' and 'realizations of an intention'—of trainers, writers, directors, and studios, as well as of audiences and critics," which ultimately renders them into "characters in our stories, not theirs" (13). On the other hand, dogs on the screen are (f)actual creatures that complete our representations with their own phenomenological realities. This assumption is inspired both by Jonathan Burt's argument that animals in cinema invariably exceed their symbolic associations (11-12) and by Anat Pick's assertion that, "[d]espite their excessive use as mirrors of human concerns and as repositories of human attributes, the appearance of animals in moving images is always also concrete ("Executing Species" 311). As long as cinema presents animal bodies – and this category extends to human animals – it will always inevitably include creaturely elements: layers of animality, actuality and materiality floating beneath the semiotic layers of abstraction.

These theories also suggest that cinema is a space where human intentions, experiences, and meanings can encounter, clash, and intermingle with nonhuman intentions, experiences and meanings. The present dissertation focuses on the cinematically mediated interactions between people and dogs, paying special attention to how different aspects of concrete human–canine relationships leave their material-semiotic traces on the representational space and how films may themselves contribute to commingling and colliding the portrayed human and canine bodies, stories, and worlds. The corpus comprises films spanning various styles, genres, cultural

contexts and representational traditions (including a mainstream feature film, a couple of arthouse animation films, and several documentaries), allowing the study to explore both the common aspects and the stylistic, generic, technological and cultural specificities of portraying human–canine exchanges on the screen. Due to their specific characteristics as well as the individual features of the portrayed interspecies relationship, each film – in the order of analysis, *Turner & Hooch* (1989, dir. Roger Spottiswoode); *My Dog Tulip* (2009, dir. Sandra and Paul Fierlinger); *Los Reyes* (2018, dir. Iván Osnovikoff and Bettina Perut); *Stray* (2020, dir. Elizabeth Lo); *The Plague Dogs* (1982, dir. Martin Rosen); *Isle of Dogs* (2018, dir. Wes Anderson); *Heart of a Dog* (2015, dir. Laurie Anderson) and *This Darling Life* (2008, dir. Angie Chen) – represents dogs and the people interacting with them differently. As it will be discussed at relevant points in the analyses, the represented relationships are shaped by the class, ethnicity, race and gender identity, family status, geographical location, temporal embeddedness and cultural milieu of the portrayed subjects and/or filmmakers, resulting in a colourful array of intersectionally specific human–canine representations, or, if you will, cinematic cultures of the human–canine bond. Some of the analysed films (e.g. *Turner & Hooch*; *My Dog Tulip*; *Heart of a Dog*) present conspicuously Eurocentric, white, urban, middle-class practices and notions of pet keeping, while others (e.g. *Los Reyes*; *Stray; The Plague Dogs*; *Isle of Dogs*; *This Darling Life*) portray non-European settings and/or interspecies interactions outside the urban middle-class home, including young precarious people's relationships with free-roaming dogs, the dominant society's relations with confined canine test subjects and banished disease carriers, and the strained relationship between shelter owners and their animal charges. Each discussed film is significantly shaped by these different contexts. For similar reasons, the analysed representations also differ in terms of style, genre, cinematic language, and the employed techniques and technologies, all of which play an important role in shaping the way the human–canine relationship appears on the screen. For instance, documentaries by definition aim to capture and highlight the realities of our shared lives with dogs, although – as it will be further explored – these are not free of abstract constructions either. Genre films like *Turner & Hooch* are prone to project cliché images on dogs, although – as it will be argued – these also include creaturely elements. Animation films tend to anthropomorphise their canine characters, although these, too, can contain references to the animals' actual lifeworlds. In short, while the selected films present cultural and formal particularities, together they also demonstrate the idea that the dog epitomises the material-semiotic complexity of cinema, where concrete animal presences coexist with abstract elements, irrespective of genre. As Burt and Pick claim,

cinematic creatures are therefore simultaneously subjected to and transcend the representational mechanisms of symbolisation, metaphorisation and anthropomorphisation.

In this regard, Burt's and Pick's views on film animals signal a divergence from the discourse propagated by John Berger, Akira Mizuta Lippit, and, in certain aspects, Randy Malamud, who all argue that the disappearance of animals in historical modernity is simultaneous with their increased visibility in cinema, wherein the lively, material realities of actual creatures are replaced by artificial constructs. In Berger's terms, film animals are either portrayed as human characters in anthropomorphised bodies, signifiers of human value concepts, or spectacles exposed to the totalising vision of the viewer (15-20). As a result, the real-life creatures are displaced by simulacra (Malamud 74), or, as Lippit calls them, "spectral animals" (*Electric* 1), which only bear a ghostly resemblance to the actual beings. Lippit claims that "the nature of the animal has shifted in the modern era from a metaphysic to a phantasm; from a body to an image; from a living voice to a technical echo" (21), suggesting an erasure of actual animal presences, experiences, and agencies from cinema. As Berger dramatically concludes, in the (post)modern paradigm, the real creatures vanish from our visual representations: "The bear. The lion. The donkey. The camel. The cock. The fox. Exeunt" (20).

Calling attention to the reductive nature of these views, Burt notes that treating the screen animal as a pure sign "*reinforces* at a conceptual level the effacement . . . that is perceived to have taken place in reality even whilst criticizing that process" (29). While acknowledging that animals in cinema often serve as spectacles and "can be burdened with multiple metaphorical significances," Burt claims that they also mark "a site where these symbolic associations collapse into each other" (11), since "the animal image constantly points beyond itself" (12). In other words, the presence of the (f)actual creature is always implicated in the cinematic image, therefore "the line between the fictitious and the *real* animal is most difficult to draw" (12). In certain aspects, Burt's views resonate with André Bazin's theory of cinematic realism, which emphasises the moving image's unique ability to capture and reveal the material reality of its subjects. Bazin saw cinema as a medium that, rather than simply creating a representation of reality, is capable of enacting and even intensifying its contingencies – its situadedness in space and time, the subjects' vulnerabilities and other embodied experiences – precisely through its photographic indexicality and its capacity to let life unfold on the screen, which Bazin connected to the condition of ruling out montage when the "essence" of the situation demanded continuous, unedited recording ("Virtues" 46-50). Bazin perceived animals as particularly "*cinematic* being[s]" because they resist full absorption into symbolic constructions and narrative structures, instead asserting their own presence and unpredictability

within the filmic world (qtd. in Pick, *Creaturely Poetics* 110). Inspired by Burt's insights and Bazin's theory of realism, Pick similarly argues that – while literary texts have techniques of their own – due to its immediacy and embeddedness in material reality, to which I would also add its ability to evoke sensory and kinetic experiences, cinema is especially capable of evoking embodied states and processes, which Pick calls cinema's "corporeal zoomorphic quality" (*Creaturely Poetics* 106). In this view, cinema is not just a cultural apparatus that reinforces the hierarchical distinction of humans and animals through, for instance, the objectification of the latter before the "human gaze" (Malamud 61). It can also act as "a zoomorphic stage that transforms *all* living beings—including humans—into creatures" (Pick 106, emphasis added), thereby highlighting the facts of human–animal continuity.[1] From this perspective, the cinematic representation of human and canine bodies is not completely different; although each is, of course, conditioned by distinct, historically developed technical, narrative and other strategies (e.g. particular story types, casting, training/rehearsing methods, makeup, camera angles, compositions and editing),[2] some of which are mentioned later on, they all appear as material beings subjected simultaneously to representational mechanisms and the contingencies of biological life that cinema is particularly able to incorporate into its own world.

While in *Creaturely Poetics*, Pick focuses on cinema's capacity to foreground shared creaturely conditions, in "Animal Life and the Cinematic *Umwelt*," she suggests that films can also feature species-specific perceptions, thereby being capable of questioning the human–animal divide not only in terms of embodiment but also in terms of subjectivity, that is, by showing the different yet equally meaningful interactions that animals carry out with their environments. In this respect, Pick draws on the Estonian-German biologist Jakob von Uexküll's concept of *Umwelt* (in plural *Umwelten*), which refers to the lifeworlds or "dwelling-worlds" created by all creatures on earth, albeit depending on their own sensorial capacities (Uexküll, *Foray* 139). In other words, each animal carves its own subjective reality out of the larger, objective environment, a microcosm made up of objects and signs that are meaningful to it, constituting what Uexküll refers to as the creature's "functional cycle" (49).[3] As Alexandra

[1] Pick's (and, indirectly, Bazin's) notions of zoomorphic realism will be particularly relevant in the dissertation's second chapter, dedicated to the discussion of films portraying the shared bodily vulnerabilities of humans and dogs.

[2] For a systematic discussion of the particularities of representing canine bodies and characters in cinema, see McLean, Adrienne L., editor. *Cinematic Canines: Dogs and Their Work in the Fiction Film*. New Brunswick, New Jersey, London: Rutgers UP, 2014.

[3] Positioning his theory against the mechanistic views of life (represented, for example, by Darwinism), Uexküll ultimately argued that each organism receives and acts upon environmental signs, thereby endowing its *Umwelt* with meaning. His notion of biosemiosis has important implications on human–animal relations, as it suggests that not only humans are active perceivers and shapers of their worlds.

Horowitz – a researcher specialised in canine cognition – highlights, while human sensory experience is dominated by sight, a dog's *Umwelt* is predominantly a world of smells, which carry much more meaning and serve more diverse functions than they do in our lives; if one wants to imagine the world from a dog's perspective, she needs to envision a constant buzz of odours (*Inside* 17-22). Combining Uexküll's *Umwelt*-theory with Bazinian realism, Pick suggests that films can foreground distinct creaturely realities, thereby enabling viewers to "explore the meaning of the perceptual, behavioural and ontological specificities of life by observing animals' subjective experience[s]" ("Animal Life" 222).

While Bazin reserves the notion of zoomorphic realism to live-action films, Pick asserts that the capacity of engaging with creaturely realities "is not limited to any particular cinematic practice but emerges out of a work's manner of picturing the material conditions of life cinematically" (*Creaturely Poetics* 117). As mentioned earlier, even non-photographic films such as animations, which are normally associated with artifice and anthropomorphism, can foreground both shared and subjective aspects of the material world by, as Pick proposes, using tools within their means in creative, creature-conscious ways. Similarly to Burt, Pick thus emphasises that regardless of the style or genre of the film in which they appear, animals are always more than spectral objects exposed to the representational mechanisms of cinema; in fact, they underline the medium's inherent hybridisation of technological artifice and phenomenological reality. Burt's and Pick's corrective arguments to the spectral economy of the (post)modern animal provide the theoretical foundations of my approach towards screen dogs, who are perceived throughout the dissertation as complex combinations of anthropogenic representation and creaturely reality – just as the human animals who appear alongside them. In each main chapter, the analyses will examine how the films belonging to different styles, genres, and representational traditions – while also presenting formal particularities in the representation of the human–canine bond – all engage with both trans-species and typically canine phenomenological experiences, thereby contributing to revealing the material dimensions of cinema.[4]

[4] This question will be particularly interesting in chapters one and two, which, besides live-action fiction films and documentaries, also include analyses of animation films, where the phenomenological realities of the subjects are not automatically presented within the representational space due to the technologies of drawing (either by hand or on a computer) and animating rather than recording actual situations and actions with a camera. When discussing Sandra and Paul Fierlinger's *My Dog Tulip* (chapter one), Martin Rosen's *The Plague Dogs*, and Wes Anderson's *Isle of Dogs* (chapter two), special attention will be paid to exploring what techniques these animation films use to enact the shared and subjective creaturely conditions of humans and dogs – both significant aspects influencing the nature of the human–canine bond.

The Faithful Companion and the Despicable Beast

The duality of constructedness and facticity has prominently characterised cinematic dog representations since the inception of the medium. For example, the opening scene of *The Return of Boston Blackie* (1927, dir. Harry O. Hoyt), a silent film featuring the famous canine actor Strongheart,[5] portrays the emotional reunion of the eponymous jewel thief and his beloved canine companion, the "pal who had never failed him" (Fig. 1.1). The sequence of a dog running towards his master after a long absence, jumping into his arms, and covering him with slobbering kisses and adoring glances has been replayed countless times in subsequent films,[6] becoming an iconic representation of the human–canine bond. Yet even in this highly constructed scene, besides Strongheart, the cute-looking, quasi-human character and Strong Heart – the two words that make up the name intentionally separated here to emphasise the allegorical meaning of unconditional love and loyalty projected onto the character –, there is Strongheart, the canine actor hiding in plain sight, whose not-fully-convincing performance as a dog of the same name makes it relatively easy to notice his appearance: oddly, he seems to be looking and barking in the wrong direction (Fig. 1.2), most probably at his off-screen trainer, thus revealing his non-fictional, embodied presence within the scene. Far from disappearing once Strongheart looks "the right way" and resumes his position in the fiction, this real-life dimension persists throughout the film, doubling the diegesis but becoming noticeable only in the case of slippages, such as when Strongheart glances at his handler off-screen or when, during a walk in the park, a cat leaps into the frame, triggering the dog actor's prey drive (Fig. 1.3). While Burt argues that such moments create a "rupture in the field of representation" (11), I believe they only reveal an immanent phenomenological layer of cinema, where the animal (including the human animal) is never purely fictional but retains its – either lived or metonymic – ties to reality, thereby occupying the representational field as a hybrid entity, part filmic construction and part (f)actual creature. As it has been mentioned earlier, the doubling of phenomenal reality and representation also applies to human actors/characters, whose bodies are similarly subjected to the contingencies of life and can therefore break out of their roles when, for instance, distracted by some strong smell, when they sneeze, sweat, etc. Since they

[5] *The Return of Boston Blackie* is in fact the only Strongheart-film that has survived to be restored for viewing today. As Horowitz explains, films featuring animal actors, especially those that starred dogs, "were so popular that the film stock was destroyed from frequent playing" ("The Dog at the Side" 222).

[6] Examples include *Lassie Come Home* (1943, dir. Fred M. Wilcox), *The Incredible Journey* (1963, dir. Fletcher Markle), *Homeward Bound: The Incredible Journey* (1993, dir. Duwayne Dunham), and the film adaptations of Jack London's novel *The Call of the Wild* (1935, dir. William A. Wellman; 1972, dir. Ken Annakin; 2020, dir. Chris Sanders).

do not conceal these unscripted states and actions, dogs epitomise this constant hybridisation of reality and fiction in cinematic representations.

Fig. 1. The canine actor conflating representation and reality (*The Return of Boston Blackie* 00:01:56; 00:02:04; 00:11:48)

The extent of this hybridity is especially high in the case of dogs, whose physical and ontological proximity to the human world has vested them with a liminal status, radically wavering between the realms of tameness and wildness, culture and nature, abstraction and biological reality. As James Serpell explains, their threshold position has led to an ambivalent attitude towards dogs in most societies:

> In symbolic terms, the domestic dog exists precariously in the no-man's-land between the human and non-human worlds. It is an interstitial creature – neither person nor beast – forever oscillating uncomfortably between the roles of high-status animal and low-status human. As a consequence, the dog . . . has become a creature of metaphor, simultaneously embodying or representing a strange mixture of admirable and despicable traits. . . . In our own culture, the dog has been granted temporary personhood in return for its unfailing companionship. But . . . this privilege is swiftly withdrawn whenever the dog reveals too much of its animal nature. (312-313)

As Naama Harel insightfully observes, the history of Western art and literature, reflecting this duality, has produced two parallel – ostensibly opposing – traditions of canine representation: an exalting convention where the dog embodies highly valued qualities, most commonly the virtue of loyalty (103), and a degrading tendency where it reflects humankind's detested traits,

including deceitfulness, impulsive violence, uncontained sexual desire, gluttony, and, generally, a lack of self-control, as well as foolishness, servility, and cowardice (104).[7]

Projecting exalted notions on dogs was already in practice at the time of Homer's *Odyssey*, where Argos waits twenty years for his master's return, becoming a prototype for what Harel calls "the paradigm of the faithful dog" (103).[8] This tradition continued in medieval bestiaries – containing many stories about dogs rescuing their captive kings, accompanying their owners into prison, or guarding their dead masters' bodies[9] – as well as in Renaissance literature; the canine characters in Miguel de Cervantes' *The Dialogue of the Dogs* (1613) self-reflexively comment on the symbolic elevation of canine loyalty: "What I have heard highly extolled is our strong memory, our gratitude, and great fidelity; so that it is usual to depict us as symbols of friendship" (137). Dogs often embodied the virtues of steadfastness and loyalty in Victorian literature and visual art, too, while, reflecting the idealisation of the home and the tenets of the emerging Evangelical movement, they also became symbols of family idyll and the moral values of kindness and commitment (Hamlett n. pag.). The "paradigm of the faithful dog" is also common in twentieth-century literary texts, from Virginia Woolf's *Flush* (1933) through Eric Knight's *Lassie Come Home* (1938) to Paul Auster's *Timbuktu* (1999). This paradigm is also prevalent in cinema, with numerous examples, including the many adaptations of *Lassie*; the American classic *Old Yeller* (1957, dir. Robert Stevenson), the story of a stray dog who becomes the loyal protector of a frontier family; the 1974 film *Benji* (dir. Joe Camp), where a scruffy little dog befriends two children whom he then bravely rescues from a group of kidnappers; and the tearjerker *Hachi: A Dog's Tale* (2009, dir. Lasse Hallström), based on the true story of Hachikō, who waited at a Tokyo train station for over nine years after his master's death – a cinematic example of tales revolving around the many legendary dogs waiting for their dead masters. Menache notes that such depictions not only projected idealised

[7] This duality can be also found in many non-Western traditions, which, although embedded dogs in cosmologies, spiritual beliefs and moral allegories that differ from European tropes, also oscillate between conveying a sense of familarity or admiration towards these animals and associating them with fear, impurity, base instincts, death and destruction, suggesting a trans-cultural perception of the dog's liminality. For example, in Japanese folklore, the *Inugami* – a supernatural dog-spirit – could serve as a devoted guardian or a vengeful presence (Antoni 45), reflecting ambivalent attitudes toward canine agency. In the *Mahabharata*, an epic from ancient India narrating a war of succession between two groups of princely cousins, Yudhishthira – the eldest of the Pandava brothers – refuses to enter heaven without his faithful dog, who is later revealed to be Dharma, the god of righteousness (Roy 18), while in rural Indian literature and folklore, dogs often symbolise the lower social strata, being associated with impurity. Similarly, in the Islamic tradition, dogs are often considered ritually impure (Menache, "God's Worst Enemies" 34), but some Quranic accounts such as that of the "Sleepers of the Cave" (Quran 18:9-26) depict them as symbols of loyalty and divine protection.

[8] As Sophia Menache notes, "[a]mong the many qualities associated with dogs, ancient writers emphasised their loyalty, perception (being the sole animal to recognize their names), memory, and devotion toward offspring" ("Dogs and Human Beings" 70-71).

[9] For such accounts, see, for example, *Naturalis historiae*, VIII: 61 or *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, Folio 18v.

human qualities on dogs but also "elevated [them] to the epicentre of harmonious relationship between the animal world and humankind" ("God's Worst Enemies" 23). In our cultural imaginations, the dog thus serves as a paragon of both interhuman and interspecies relations.

While cinematic dogs often portray human virtues and alluring fantasies of interspecies harmony, similarly to their literary counterparts, they also seem to carry humankind's most condemned traits, thereby contributing to what Harel calls "the paradigm of the despicable dog" (104). This tradition, emerging from the perception of dogs as unclean and the concomitant disdain towards them, dates back to the Hebrew Bible, and dominated the European imagination until the seventeenth century, to also resurface in modern literature.[10] In films, it manifests itself most conspicuously in the monstrous beasts of the horror genre, embodying our fear of the nonhuman "other," and in the evil canine characters of cartoons – for example, Carface, the villain of the *All Dogs Go to Heaven* movie franchise (Fig. 2.1) – whose vices either articulate critical self-reflexion or, conversely, the vilification of human (social, cultural, racial, or ethnic) "others."[11] The cinematic epitome of the good dog–bad dog binary is the contrasting duo of Pluto and Goofy from the Walt Disney pantheon (Fig. 2.2,3): while the former is man's best friend, "the faithful and beloved pet, whose classical name and quintessentially silent and sympathetic character secure his 'privileged' status as a 'personified animal'," [12] the latter is "the daft and bumbling sidekick who, in spite of all the privileges of language, tools and even two-legged walking ability, strays far from the ideals of human or dog," serving instead as a reflection of the "degraded" or "reviled" human (McHugh, *Dog* 10).[13] This dualistic depiction extends well beyond mainstream cinema. For example, in the Aardman Studio's quirky *Wallace & Gromit* films, the loveable, bead-eyed Gromit is a textbook example of the loyal pet (Fig. 2.4), quietly helping Wallace in all his wacky endeavours and usually saving the day without his master ever acknowledging his support, while Preston is a vicious cyber-dog willing to mince up sheep and humans to make more nutritious dog food (Fig. 2.5). Built to be a friendly

[10] For a detailed discussion of "the paradigm of the despicable dog" in Western literature, see Harel.

[11] Carface, for instance, portrayed as a dangerous gangster, is an American pit bull terrier/bulldog hybrid, thus reflecting and, in turn, reinforcing the intersecting negative stereotypes around bull-breed dogs – targets of increasing public antipathy in recent years – and their owners – especially those from socioeconomically, ethnically, or racially marginalised communities unfairly associated with urban crime.

[12] At the same time, Pluto was the ruler of the underworld in ancient Greek religion and mythology, which suggests that even the figure of the friendly pet retains references to the animal's wild nature – a liminality that has simultaneously endowed dogs with revered supernatural powers and the role of psychopomps, intermediaries between this world and the afterlife (Serpell 307; McHugh, *Dog* 42; Menache, "God's Wort Enemies" 24).

[13] As Susan McHugh notes, Goofy's comically grotesque figure "is akin to the stock 'animal' characters of American blackface minstrelsy such as Zip Coon, which were rapidly being relocated from stage to cartoon at the time of their inception" (*Dog* 11). Goofy is therefore another example of how negative representations of dogs often intersect with the vilification of human "others."

and helpful aid, but reverting into a pitiless criminal due to a malfunction, Preston is a representative of canine characters who embody our ambivalent attitude toward dogs due to their ability to swiftly change from loyal pet to violent beast.[14]

Fig. 2. The good dog–bad dog binary: (from left to right) Carface from the *All Dogs Go to Heaven* franchise; Pluto and Goofy from the Walt Disney pantheon; Gromit and Preston from the *Wallace & Gromit* films

Although, as the above mentioned examples suggest, the liminal status of dogs is often mapped onto binary representations, the presupposition informing the analyses in the present dissertation is that, to varying degrees, each cinematic canine embodies the dog's oscillation between domestication and wildness, anthropomorphic projection and feral life-forces. It is this threshold position that makes them uncanny, heterogeneous creatures that defy easy classification even when they seem to uphold distinct representational paradigms. As Burt and

[14] One could also mention the character of Philip, Gromit's enemy in *The Curse of The Were-Rabbit* (2005, dir. Nick Park, Steve Box), who fishes for spare change in his flower-patterned purse in one moment, only to turn into a vicious killing machine in the next. It is also of note that with their stout bodies and spiked collars, both Preston and Philip evoke the stereotypically negative perceptions around bull-type dogs and their owners.

Pick suggest, all animal images are hybrid in the sense of blurring the line between representation and creaturely reality, thereby providing an intriguing subject for inquiries into the connections of the moving image and the material world. However, cinematic canines were selected to be the focus of the present study (besides an admitted personal bias, as my love towards dogs in general and my furry companion in particular has seeped into my academic interests) because, and this is another aspect that I personally experience on a daily basis, the intimate proximity and familiarity of dogs as well as their (partly actual, partly projected) intelligence, sensitivity and loyalty make their slips into animal nature especially salient and unnerving. The present study is based on the assumption that this strong oscillation between tameness and beastliness makes its way into the cinematic representations of dogs which, as the example of Strongheart showed, are always shadowed by the animal's wild spirit even if the dog actor is highly trained or the character is excessively anthropomorphised.[15]

In this regard, the filmic canine image is akin to the photographs in Thomas Roma's *Plato's Dogs* (2016), created by mounting a camera on an 8-foot pole and projecting it over the dogs in a dusty Brooklyn park in order to capture their shadows (Fig. 3.1). The amorphous silhouettes, resembling feral wolves or mythical monsters rather than cute pets, provide an obscure reflection of the dogs' primitive selves, reverting the original Platonic logic: while according to the latter, shadows are degraded imitations of the Ideal Forms, in this case, the dogs' outlines are the reflections of the animals' true selves (and their leashed, orderly forms are their mere shadows in the Platonic sense).[16] The wild, in many ways child-like spirit of dogs is apparent whenever they roll in the dirt or chase a bird, and there is also a glimpse of it in each canine image. With these analogies, I do not wish to imply that the screen dog's creaturely dimension is a manifestation of the Cartesian beast-machine – an anthropocentric concept regarding nonhuman animals as inferior creatures mechanistically governed by their instincts.[17] In cinema, the lived or metonymic canine experiences simply signal the presence of realities that are partially foreign to our perceptions and resistant to our representations but, as Uexküll

[15] As I will argue in chapter one, this hybridity produces particularly interesting results in the cinematic representations of human–canine love, where the perception of the dog's unconditional loyalty and the sense of comfort, safety, and lack of judgement experienced in their company is mixed with a recurring uncanny feeling due to the unpredictable and largely uncontrollable emergences of the animal's creaturely side.

[16] As a bit more distant metaphor, one can also think of Peter Pan's shadow in J. M. Barrie's novel *Peter and Wendy* (1911): the agile and mischievous figure flitting around Wendy's bedroom at once seems to be an entirely different character and the emanation of Peter's essential, free-spirited self who never grows up (Fig. 3.2).

[17] The notion of the beast-machine can be traced back to *Discourse on the Method* (1637), where, while introducing a radically new philosophy based on the rational self, Descartes also established conceptual binaries between body and mind, human and animal, nature and culture, which have had far-reaching influences on Western humanist thinking up until today (Stuckrad 413). For an overview of the vast literature on Descartes' "beast-machine hypothesis," see Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning* 214-216.

would argue, not devoid of meaning. The creaturely moments like Strongheart charging after a cat offer glimpses into the dog's exuberant lifeworld, teasing out the hybridity of visibility and elusiveness, spectacle, signifier, and flesh at the heart of the canine image. One of the dissertation's aims is to explore this ambivalent technophenomenological composition characteristic of cinematic dog representations through the selected films, in which the oscillation between the constructed and the (f)actual creature is particularly compelling. I will argue that this duality, resulting from the shadow of creatureliness complementing the canine image, is not just a site of animality subjected to human representational control, but, in line with Jack Halberstam's (re)conceptualisation of the wild, also a power that can potentially unsettle hierarchical distinctions between nature and culture, mind and body, human and animal: "a challenge to an assumed order of things from, by, and on behalf of things that refuse and resist order itself" (3).

Fig. 3. The shadow of creatureliness completing the screen dog: an image from Thomas Roma: *Plato's Dogs* (2016), and an image from *The Peter Pan Picture Book*, illustrated by Alice B. Woodward and Daniel O'Connor (1940)

The Relational Units of Dogs and Humans

A further reason why film dogs can be considered hybrid, potentially subversive entities is that, as representatives of "a species in obligatory, constitutive, historical, protean relationship with human beings" (Haraway, *Companion Species* 11-12), they bear the traces of human–canine coevolution. In this sense, cinematic canines are always adulterated, inevitably reflecting the impurity resulting from the interrelatedness of humans and dogs. In this regard, too, my

approach builds on Haraway's insights and, more broadly, on posthumanist and animal studies perspectives, which set out to challenge the conceptual oppositions Western humanism has drawn between humanity and animality – the cogs of what Agamben calls the *anthropological machine*. In *The Open: Man and Animal*, Agamben explains that this mechanism is essentially two-fold. On the one hand, throughout the history of Western humanism and in dialogue with the cultural, philosophical, and scientific beliefs of the time, it has been used to generate and continuously re-generate the criteria that helped define "the human" in opposition to "the animal": in antiquity, for instance, the distinguishing factor was the idea that humans alone have a "rational soul," that is, a perception of good and evil, just and unjust, manifesting through the ability to speak; in medieval Christian times, it became the idea of morality or *ethikos*, the capacity to gain an immortal soul through redemption; while during the Enlightenment, the latter was replaced by *logos*, the capacity of rational thought. In all these systems, the human is defined as separate from and superior to nonhuman animals on the basis of some quality that we possess and the "others" supposedly lack.

Parallel to the "production of man through the opposition of man/animal" and increasingly since modernity, the anthropological machine also works to isolate "the nonhuman within the human" through a process of socialisation as, upon entering the symbolic order, the subject is expected to sever ties with certain impulses that are identified as 'natural,' including the desire for sexual indulgence, violence, survival, and play (Agamben, *The Open* 37). For Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, whose works largely inspired Agamben's theory, the mimetic faculty, that is, "the powerful compulsion to become similar" to the environment is one of those forces that constitute the organic connection between man, other creatures, and the material world (Benjamin 720). Although still present in the pretend games of children (Benjamin 720), or, in a sublimated form, in the logic of representation, since they threaten with an uncontrollable dissolution of boundaries, such faculties are expected to be suppressed by the modern subject, built on the imperative of self-containment, the distinction between inside and outside, and the denigration of "sensory connections between the subject and the others and the living environment" (Brennan 12).[18] Therefore, in this case, the concept of human distinctiveness is created not by insisting on an assumed lack in the animal but by denying the presence of undesired forces that connect man to other living beings. However, as Agamben highlights,

[18] For an in-depth discussion of how Benjamin, Adorno and Horkheimer think about the mimetic faculty and its ambivalent relationship to the modern subject, see Bényei, *Traumatikus Találkozások* 130-135.

> [b]oth machines are able to function only by establishing a zone of indifference at their centers, within which—like a "missing link" which is always lacking because it is already virtually present—the articulation between human and animal, man and non-man, speaking being [*bios*] and living being [*zoe*], must take place. Like every space of exception, this zone is, in truth, perfectly empty, and the truly human being who should occur there is only the place of a ceaselessly updated decision in which the caesurae and their rearticulation are always dislocated and displaced anew. (37-38)

In other words, while the anthropological machine functions in the service of hiding the links between humans and animals and the presence of the animal within man so that the notion of what is "truly" human can emerge, the continuous reformulation of its generative ideas simultaneously reveals that the distinctions it makes are not real but constructed (which is why Agamben describes it as an "ironic apparatus," 29). Human–canine interactions and – if one regards cinema as a plane that absorbs creaturely realities – the filmic (re)presentation of such interactions can unveil the emptiness at the core of the anthropological machine by showing not only how humans and dogs become more and more entangled with each embodied encounter but also how, either through play or, for a different reason, committing acts of violence against dogs, impulses often deemed animalistic also come to the fore within man. Considering the latter aspect, the analyses in the dissertation will focus not only on films portraying positive interspecies relatings but also on depictions where the connections between humans and dogs become threatening for some reason, triggering the human subject's or community's violent reactions of exclusion but in turn revealing that "what repels them as alien is all too familiar" and continues to lurk "in the contagious gestures of an immediacy suppressed by civilization" (Freud's notion of the uncanny qtd. in Horheimer and Adorno 149).[19]

Posthumanist discourses highlight this immediacy between humans and the rest of the material world – suppressed by Western humanist philosophies and practices – by emphasising how different lifeforms evolve together and are thus "embedded within relational structures" (Nayar, *Posthumanism* 112). As Rosi Braidotti explains, posthumanism questions the

[19] In chapter one, for instance, I will focus on films (*Turner & Hooch* and *My Dog Tulip*) that upset the workings of the anthropological machine by showing how the human guardian becomes feralised through affective interactions (e.g. play) with the canine companion, while chapter two will examine representations of shared human–canine marginalisation (*Los Reyes* and *Stray*) and films portraying the violent exclusion of canine subjects at times of epidemic crises (*The Plague Dogs*, *Isle of Dogs*), which reveal both the animalistic aggression of the dominant human community and the shared vulnerabilities that the exclusory practices intend to deny, thereby challenging the notion of the human–animal divide from two aspects.

categorical distinction and hierarchisation between what Agamben calls *bios* (political, legal, properly "human" life) and *zoe* (bare, biological, "animal" life) (*Transpositions* 37): "What comes to the fore instead is new human-non-human linkages, new 'zoontologies'" ("A Theoretical Framework" 5). In other words, posthumanism highlights that existence is shared, symbiotic, and hybrid: that we are entangled in multidimensional webs of relations with other creatures, our direct surroundings, and the larger environment (Ferrando 170-171). In a similar fashion, animal studies scholars "have begun to chart the costs and limits of the classic effort to maintain an essential species barrier and have sought to diminish those costs and to press against those limits in [their] own conceptual and other practices" (Herrnstein-Smith 15), for example, by deconstructing animal signs and their ideological implications in cultural texts. These considerations result in "an increasingly rich and operative appreciation of our irreducibly multiple and variable, complexly valenced, infinitely reconfigurable relations with other animals" (15-16).

The present study engages in the ongoing revaluation of the humanist separation of different lifeforms by exploring how cinematic canines reflect the manifold connections between people and dogs. As the quotations above suggest, from a post-anthropocentric perspective, human and nonhuman animals are interrelated not only in biological but also cultural terms, with the result that

> [t]he creatures that occupy our taxonomies are never purely nonhuman. They are never free of us. Their bodies, habits and habitats are shaped by human designs; they are contaminated by, but also resistant to, our philosophies, theologies, representations, interests, intentions. On the other hand, and just as surely, our concepts and practices are never purely human in the first place. For we are not free of the animals either, although the tradition of humanism—whose ruins we inhabit—promised that we should be. Animality infests us, plagues us, goes feral on us. (Armstrong and Simmons 2)

While Western humanist thought has led to the conceptual sterilisation of human and animal lifeforms in their relation to each other, posthumanism thus stresses the notion of cross-contamination. This idea is also reflected in the proliferation of neologisms, as we are now described as human–animal "compounds" (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*), "trans-speciated" beings (Hayward, "More Lessons") or, succinctly, "humanimals," all of which suggest that different species do not come into being alone but "co-make" each other ("Donna Haraway on the

'humanimal'"). Among these, I will most frequently use the term "humanimal," because I believe it is this portmanteau that best reflects the ontological intermingling of people and dogs.[20]

In the case of the human–canine bond, the process of coevolution has entailed mutual domestication and feralisation, as a result of which it is impossible to tell human and canine nature(s) and culture(s) apart. For a long time, for instance, it was believed that the characteristic traits of social flexibility, tolerance, and playfulness – the latter commonly thought to be a side effect of perpetuating the dog's juvenile traits into adulthood (Bradshaw et al. 82) – developed in domestic canines thanks to human selection (Nagasawa et al. 334). However, the recently emerging theory of self-domestication suggests that wolves' intrinsic inclination for sociality played a huge part in bringing these two species together and might even have contributed to developing our own pro-social behaviour (Dale et. al 47-48), a trait which humanism claimed to be an autonomously fashioned feature of humanity. Considering our shared evolutionary histories, one can never talk of purely human or canine bodies, habits, and behaviours: these are intricately intertwined and are together inscribed into the "syntax" and "flesh" of companion species (Haraway, *Companion Species* 12), and also, by extension, into their representations. Like their real-life counterparts, cinematic canines – and, by the same token, human characters appearing alongside their furry companions – bear the "record of couplings and infectious exchanges" (9), the story of "co-constitutive relationships in which none of the partners pre-exist the relating, and the relating is never done once and for all" (12).

Haraway also suggests that the process of interspecies co-constitution continues into the present as, with every encounter, humans and dogs mutually affect and, if only to an infinitesimal extent, reciprocally transform each other. For example, a recent study found that positive interactions between humans and companion dogs such as play result in neurophysiological changes in both participants, including increased endorphin, oxytocin, and

[20] In line with animal studies specifications regarding language, when discussing interspecies relations or when making a distinction is important, I will use the terms "human animals" and "nonhuman" or "other animals," but, for the sake of simplification, I also resort to the occasional usage of "man," "human" and "animal," while acknowledging that these words have historically contributed to the conceptual separation of human and other lifeforms as well as the maintenance of asymmetrical power relations between them. For similar reasons, I generally opt for "companion animal" instead of "pet" and "guardian," "keeper" or "caregiver" instead of "owner," however, when emphasising the power dynamics involved in human–canine relationships is important (see, for example, Fudge, *Pets*; Tuan, *Dominance and Affection*), I use the terms "pet," "owner," and, occasionally, "master."

dopamine levels (Odendaal and Meintjes 296).[21] In layman's terms, everyday interactions contribute to strengthening the ties between people and dogs on an interpersonal, embodied, molecular level. Constituting an integral part of screen dogs' phenomenological experiences, the intersubjective relatings between humans and canines have become the central subject in the dissertation, which ultimately aims to explore how cinema (re)presents different aspects of concrete co-constitutive human–canine relationships. This choice of focus is based on the assumption that, beyond the stories of evolutionary intermingling, cinematic canines also bear the traces of everyday exchanges, where humans and dogs meet as "knotted," co-shaping "creatures of fierce and ordinary reality" (Haraway, *When Species* 4-5), and which, as Haraway suggests, also hold a potential – if not greater – power to upset taken-for-granted categorisations between humans and animals, nature and culture, as well as signification and embodied reality. It is the potentially subversive force of mundane interactions which compelled Haraway to abandon cyborgs and apes and "go happily to *the* dogs" (*The Haraway Reader* 297, emphasis added to highlight the dogs' implied facticity) to re-examine the scientific, philosophical, cultural and political systems that have naturalised the distinction between "man" and "animal".

The importance of studying immediate gestures between humans and animals has been also indicated by Jacques Derrida, whose critique of the Western humanist separation of man and beast, elaborated in his essay "The Animal That Therefore I Am," is premised on his own direct interaction with his cat. For Derrida, it is the acknowledgment of the animal's irreplaceable singularity, manifested in the cat's inscrutable gaze, that can potentially undo the denigrating generalisation – reflected in the word "animal" – which reduces the multiplicity of living beings in order to posit the distinctness of mankind: a humanity that, as Horkheimer, Adorno, and Agamben also observed, "is above all careful to guard, and jealous of, what is proper to it" (Derrida, "The Animal" 14). When caught by the other's gaze, the human subject cannot escape the exposure of its own animal body – conspicuously manifested in the reaction of freezing, which reveals the "forgotten, [supposedly] transcended, repressed phylogenetic sediment" of animal mimicry (Bényei 130, my translation) – while the nonhuman being emerges as a full-fledged subject. In the light of what was discussed in the previous part of this introduction, such encounters with dogs – whether real or mediated – can be particularly perplexing, since the canine gaze is commonly thought to provide a reassuring reflection of their love for us, making their unfathomable, disapproving or downright malevolent gestures

[21] In another experiment, scientists focused specifically on gaze exchanges and found that these can also trigger hormone release in the owner, "facilitating mutual interaction and affiliative communication and consequently activation of oxytocin systems in both humans and dogs in a positive loop" (Nagasawa et al. 335).

especially uncanny. Drawing on Haraway's, Agamben's and Derrida's thoughts, I assume that the cinematic depiction of intersubjective exchanges – where the human (both the character and the viewer) is confronted with the simultaneous similarity and singularity of the dog – is a site for contesting the humanist onto-politics of distinction on several grounds. Based on this assumption, I will explore how each film selected for analysis challenges the human–animal divide in its own way, outlining instead an alternative posthumanist onto-politics where the subject emerges through diverse, dynamic, ever-evolving relations with other species and individual animals. Mapping the filmic traces of concrete, cross-infections interactions between people and dogs, the dissertation ultimately aims to contribute to a poetics and politics of human–canine relationality in cinema.

Building on a growing body of scholarship on screen animals and human–animal relations, my dissertation seeks to bridge a gap between film studies and animal studies by offering a dedicated exploration of cinematic canine representations through the lens of relationality. To the best of my knowledge, no academic study has examined dog representations from a perspective combining film theory, animal studies as well as cultural criticism, biopolitics, bioethics, and philosophy. Although an extensive number of book chapters and articles have concerned themselves with similar topics (e.g. Michael Lawrence: "Practically Infinite Manipulability: Domestic Dogs, Canine Performance and Digital Cinema", 2015; Caleb Chodosh: "Good Boy: Canine Representation in Cinema", 2018; Arden Fayard: "How Dogs Representation in Cinema Reflects How They are Seen in the Real World", 2020; Nicole R. Pallotta: Dogs on Film: "Status, Representation, and the Canine Characters Test", 2024), until 2014, when *Cinematic Canines: Dogs and Their Work in the Fiction Film* edited by Adrienne L. McLean was published, there had been no comprehensive academic inquiry into the portrayal of dogs in cinema. Thematically related monographs – besides Haraway's works, Susan McHugh's *Dog* (2004), exploring human–canine histories, the phenomenon of dog breeding as well as the canine's role in science fact and fiction; Alice A. Kuzniar's *Melancholia's Dog: Reflections on Our Animal Kinship* (2006), examining the negotiation of intimacy, sadness, and shame at the heart of the human–canine relationship; and, more recently, Erika Cudworth's *Animal Entanglements: Muddied Living in Dog-Human Worlds* (2024), tackling the power relations that shape the everyday lives of people and dogs – provide invaluable insights on various aspects of the human–canine bond, but they only contain sporadic references to cinematic depictions. Furthermore, while McLean's edited volume offers a coherent overview of canine actors and characters in narrative cinema, its focus is restricted to the technical roles and the significance of dogs within the fiction film. Working with a corpus

including live-action films, animated movies, and documentaries allows me to reflect not only on how cinema portrays the hybridity of dogs due to their cross-infectional relationship with humans but also how it hybridises them by means of its own transformative effects. As it was suggested in the first section of this introduction, even canine actors and anthropomorphised characters appear as partly (f)actual creatures, whose phenomenal lifeworlds are integrated within the fictional world, while dogs appearing as themselves in documentaries also project the intentions of the filmmakers and are shaped by the perceptions of the viewers. Moreover, the duality of cinematic canines' phenomenal and representational presence calls attention to a similar doubling in the actions of human actors/characters (who, like Bob Custer/Boston Blackie when he needs to stop Strongheart from chasing a cat on set, might also momentarily break out of their roles); as it was mentioned earlier, dogs can be therefore seen as allegorical entities embodying the immanent hybridisation of reality and fiction in cinematic representations.

Another novel aspect of the present study lies in its approach. Since the animal turn, the recent paradigm shift that has turned critical attention to nonhuman animal presences and their entanglement with human lives on various levels, a growing number of articles, monographs and collections of essays have concerned themselves with literary and cinematic representations of animals (i.e. the Animal series edited by Jonathan Burt at Reaktion Books; Susan McHugh: *Animal Stories: Narrating across Species Lines*, 2011; *Animal Life and the Moving Image* edited by Michael Lawrence and Laura McMahon, 2015; *Beyond the Human-Animal Divide: Creaturely Lives in Literature and Culture* edited by Dominik Ohrem and Roman Bartosch, 2017; *The Palgrave Handbook of Animals and Literature* edited by Susan McHugh, Robert McKay, and John Miller, 2021). However, no comprehensive academic study so far has been dedicated specifically to cinematic canine representations from a relational perspective. In the age of the Anthropocene, when age-old ideologies and practices of human exceptionalism seem to be taking their devastating – though by no means surprising – toll (e.g. pandemics emerging from the animal-industrial complex, unprecedented levels of pollution, mass extinction and the consequent loss of biodiversity), academic studies calling attention to the interrelatedness of human and nonhuman lifeforms with which we share our genes, habits, and habitats are of vital importance. At the same time, while the theoretical approaches employed here are valuable tools for challenging anthropocentric notions and practices, it is also important to note that these perspectives emerge largely from Euro-American intellectual traditions and often carry with them universalist assumptions, white middle-class sensibilities, and Western cultural reference points. Such orientations may not fully capture the ways in which people from other

sociocultural contexts conceptualise or experience relations with dogs, nor do they account for the plurality of interspecies histories and practices beyond the West. Acknowledging these limitations is essential not only for situating this study within its own epistemological lineage, but also for recognising that the human–animal interrelatedness theorised here is as culturally and historically specific as the relationships portrayed in the analysed films.

Dog + Human = "Strange Kinship"

Drawing inspiration primarily from Agamben's biopolitics, but also, more broadly, from posthumanist thinkers such as Haraway and Braidotti, Matthew Calarco argues that representations of human–animal relations participate in what he calls an onto-politics of *indistinction*, a philosophical approach which aims for setting the traditional human–animal divide aside rather than "refining, multiplying, and complicating [difference]" (51). This perspective partly aligns with the theoretical framework through which I aim to explore cinematic dog representations, as it also engages in thinking through animals and human–animal relations beyond the workings of the anthropological machine. However, at this point, my stance diverges from the indistinction approach as I think it is important to recognise that, despite the continuities and connections between human and nonhuman animals, the latter – even dogs, whose lifeworlds are most intimately intertwined with ours – retain essential differences, a certain degree of unknowability, and an element of strangeness. In fact, as suggested before, the sense of the uncanny can be particularly powerful in our relations with dogs because so much of our time is spent with them that their "language seems almost indistinguishable from our own" (Masson 187), and this exceptional state of familiarity "clashes mightily with their atavistic side" (Horowitz, *Inside* 43). Horowitz lists a few examples when we can catch a glimpse of the wolf in the pet (a growl when we try to take a dog's favourite toy, a scared look in the eyes during rough-and-tumble play, an uncontrollable force pulling dogs into the bushes when they run maniacally off the trail after some invisible thing), and argues that "[t]his unpredictable, wild side of dogs should be acknowledged" (43).[22]

[22] This position reflects Horowitz's larger project of understanding canine *Umwelten* as a condition of creating more balanced human-dog relations within Western pet keeping practices. She argues that becoming familiar with the unfamiliar perceptions, behaviours, and experiences of canine companions should be an integral part of our shared lives as well as academic studies on dogs and human-dog interactions. As she observes, we "may never see the invisible thing in the bush," but we can learn and acknowledge "that invisible things *are* in bushes" (*Inside* 43, emphasis added) and that they are as meaningful to the dog as the trail is to us.

Since the oscillation between *canis familiaris* and *canis unfamiliaris* also seems to seep into the cinematic representations of dogs, I shall follow the approach suggested by Horowitz and construe the depictions of human–canine interrelatedness through Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of "strange kinship" (*Nature* 214): a concept that accounts for the contiguities between human and animal lives while also acknowledging the differences between them.[23] As Kelly Oliver asserts, Merleau-Ponty's term effectively highlights the fact that, "although we share this special bond with other creatures, their worlds—both as species and as singular beings—are unique in ways that prevent us from ever totally perceiving, understanding, knowing, or mastering them" ("Strange Kinship" 113). The notion of "strange kinship" thus lends me ample room to explore the cinematic portrayals of dogs from a relational perspective without the risk of overemphasising the connections or falsely assuming a homogeneity between human and nonhuman lifeforms. While Haraway's *oddkin* – a term for "other-than-conventional biogenetic relatives" (*Staying* 221) – is useful to describe how intimate relationships extend beyond human family members to nonhuman beings, I also want to address the weirdness of such bonds, the oddness of oddkin relations, if you will, and, specifically in the context of this study, the sense of strangeness permeating the representations of our non-genealogical kinships with dogs due to the latter's strong oscillation between familiarity and unfamiliarity. I believe this aspect is the most accurately captured by Merleau-Ponty's term.

Another reason why I prefer to approach human–canine relationality through the concept of "strange kinship" is that, mirroring the shift of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology towards what he called "indirect ontology" or the ontology of "the flesh of the world," this concept, too, is rooted in the idea that every relation between the self and the world is primarily an embodied relation (*The Visible* 83-84). This idea is particularly relevant to human–canine intersubjectivity, as most of our interactions with dogs are markedly physical – an aspect that also transfers into cinematic representations of the human–canine bond.[24] Merleau-Ponty's

[23] In this regard, Merleau-Ponty's concept is similar to what Derrida calls "a discrepant analogy" ("une analogie décalée," *Of Spirit* 51), elsewhere translated as "staggered analogy" (Lawlor 40), which refers to the perception of the other's arresting inscrutability Derrida experienced when caught by his cat's gaze and which he subsequently developed into a metaphor to reconceptualise the divide between humans and animals not by collapsing all differences and idiosyncrasies into absolute continuity but calling attention to both connections and distinctions between them. In other words, Derrida suggests the opposite route envisioned by Calarco and argues that instead of "effacing the limit," the solution lies in "multiplying its figures, in complicating, thickening, delinearizing, folding, and dividing the line precisely by making it increase and multiply" ("The Animal" 29), that is, in acknowledging the myriad different ways through which other animals perceive and make sense of the world.

[24] As the films analysed in the first chapter will show, physical interactions constitute a great deal of developing an affective bond with pet dogs and these embodied elements are also visualised on the screen. The films discussed in the second chapter reveal the threatening aspects of this physical intimacy, while the documentaries analysed in the last chapter demonstrate that the unparalleled bodily ties developed between humans and companion dogs

focus on embodiment evolved as part of his attempt to deconstruct the Cartesian mind–body dichotomy, which indirectly led him to the simultaneous questioning of the human–animal divide. Although his earlier work proclaimed the ultimate difference of humans due to their capacity to willingly detach themselves from and return to what Agamben – drawing on Benjamin's concept of "bloßes Leben" – was to call "bare life," in his lectures on "The Concept of Nature," especially in the second and third courses from 1957 to 1960, he began to abandon the residual anthropocentrism inherited from Edmund Husserl. No longer conceptualising "the animal" with the aim of marking an immanent schism in man, he recognised an irreducible "man-animality *intertwining*" due to the fact of shared embodiment (*The Visible* 274), or, in his terms, "intercorporeity" between human and animal lifeforms (*Nature* 268). At one point, he suggests that "the use of life teaches us not only the union of our soul and our body, but also the lateral union of animality and humanity" (*Nature* 271). With this suggestion, Merleau-Ponty ultimately delineates an ontology where perception is interlinked with the lived (animal) body and the perceiving body is inseparable from the perceived world as well as other perceiving bodies.

Largely inspired by Uexküll's *Umwelt*-theory, Merleau-Ponty's proto-relational ontology attributes meaning to perception and behaviour – aspects of embodiment we share with nonhuman animals –, thereby establishing a continuity between body, associated with animality, and mind, associated with humanity. As he puts it, "animality is the logos of the sensible world: an incorporated meaning" (*Nature* 140). From this it follows that humans are not merely upgraded animals, improved by the addition of consciousness, language and culture, and that animals are also capable of symbolic communication that exceeds their need for survival. As Oliver asserts, animals, too, have cultures, and "language is not a rupture from the natural world but a continuation of it ("Strange Kinship" 110). "Interanimality," the continuity between human and animal lifeforms resulting from "intercorporeity," nevertheless allows for the recognition of differences in modes of existing and making sense of the world, which are "as manifold as the animals themselves" (Uexküll, "A Stroll" 6). As Oliver's reading of the notion implies, "interanimality" suggests the presence of "an intimate relation based on shared embodiment without denying differences between lifestyles or styles of being" (115). Merleau-Ponty's concepts thus allow me to reflect on the intimate but differential human–canine relationship that cinema not only displays but also shapes by continuously blurring the

make the latter's deaths particularly traumatic, rendering pet grief a markedly embodied experience, the traces of which also appear in the representational space.

boundaries between the sensible and the insensible, the human and the animal as well as the fictional and the real.

A further benefit of using the notion of "strange kinship" is that it prevents visualising the human–canine bond as the paragon of interspecies affiliations, and allows me to reflect on the power dynamics characterising our relations with dogs – an aspect that, albeit in different contexts, appears in all films selected for analysis in the present study. In this respect, my understanding of the human–canine kinship is influenced by the sociological insights of Erika Cudworth, who – drawing on Yi-Fu Tuan's reflections on the ambivalent combination of dominance and affection impacting companion animal lives – argues that the human–dog relationship should be always seen "in terms of matrices of power," as "socially constituted" and "implicated in systemic relations of social domination" (1). Cudworth explains that despite the intimacy that can arise between people and dogs, the number of abandoned pets is huge.[25] In addition, dogs deemed to have behavioural problems are routinely put down at the request of their owners, and certain breeds of dogs (such as the already mentioned bull-breeds) are exposed to increased risk due to racist and classist discrimination (2-3). While ethologists such as Horowitz and Marc Bekoff are right to highlight that dogs "have their own lives and their own point of view" (Bekoff, *Minding* 24), it is also important to note that even when they are well-treated, dogs are subject to the whims of humans, therefore "the agency they are able to express is highly limited" (Cudworth 3). Taking these facts into account, I share the *critically* posthumanist perspective propagated by Cudworth and use the notion of "strange kinship" not only to reflect on how the analysed films engage with the dog's perceptual, behavioural and ontological differences but also on how they address the ways human power is inflicted on canine lives and "the ways this is intersected with intrahuman forms of exclusion and domination" (Cudworth 8).[26]

However, recognising these matrices of power does not mean reducing the human–canine bond solely to a dynamic of domination and subjugation. As Erica Fudge warns, framing multispecies companionship as a structure of power risks "presenting the human-pet relation as somehow false, as a pretence, and that is not how many pet owners experience their relationship

[25] In European countries, hundreds of thousands, in the United States, approximately 3 million dogs enter shelters each year, while in countries with limited animal welfare regulations, these rates can be even higher, with large numbers of stray dogs roaming both cities and the countryside.

[26] In chapter one, the analysis of *My Dog Tulip*, for example, reveals how dominant perceptions about sexuality simultaneously affect the lives of dogs and gay men. The discussions of *Los Reyes*, *Stray*, *The Plague Dogs* and *Isle of Dogs* in chapter two expose the ways modernity exacts a violent price on the lives of dogs and marginalised humans, while *This Darling Life* and *Heart of a Dog*, analysed in chapter three, give a glimpse into how anthropocentric notions restrict the process of grieving lost pets.

with the animals they share their homes with" (*Pets* 20). In this light, while acknowledging that pet-keeping reproduces relations of species domination on a private level, and also sharing Alice Kuzniar's conviction that species-specific differences prevent building complete rapport between us[27] – which entails an awareness that the dog's experiences of co-existence may differ from our own –, this study also emphasises that everyday interactions with a canine companion are often a source of joy, mutual comfort, fascination, curiosity, worry, and bewilderment rather than simply a daily power struggle or a source of melancholia. These experiences align with Cudworth's assertion that the home is not just a site of species domination but also a space where "heterotopic moments" can emerge, "suggesting possibilities other than exploitation and domination" (9). As the films analysed in the dissertation also show, mundane interactions such as playing, walking, or resting in each other's company hold a potential power that arises not from controlling the other but from a sense of entanglement shaped by both human and canine subjectivities and agencies. Therefore, through the lens of "strange kinship," I seek to trace not only how films expose the structural forces governing interspecies relations but also how they offer glimpses into heterotopic possibilities where moments of reciprocity, conviviality, and shared embodiment create openings for alternative ways of being together. To clarify, the aim is not to diminish the importance of addressing inequalities within multispecies companionship, but to recognise that such structural imbalances coexist with, and are sometimes challenged by, the lived realities of mundane, intimate moments shared with dogs.

Dog + Human + Cinema = Anthrokynematic Assemblage

Due to its unique ability to incorporate material reality and evoke embodied experiences, cinema has effective strategies to enact how the relatings between humans and dogs manifest themselves in carnal exchanges and cohabited spaces, or, in Haraway's terms, humanimal bodies and naturecultures. The latter term reflects the idea that where human and nonhuman lives regularly intersect, they not only participate in mutually (trans)formative relationships

[27] Kuzniar's conceptualisation of the human-dog relationship is based on the argument that our experiences with dogs are essentially melancholic because of the insurmountable ontological – and socially reinforced – gap between our species: "The melancholic pet owner longs for complete rapport and to know that the dualisms between animal and human are untrue. Yet she is saddened by the inevitable disjointedness and nonsimultaneity between herself and the extimate species, extimacy being that which is exterior to one yet intimately proximate" (8). As suggested above, I see the dog-human relationship in a much more positive light. Despite the differences – which I hope to capture through the notion of "strange kinship" –, I believe special forms of interspecies communication do develop between us, serving as potential sites for upsetting anthropocentric ontologies, epistemologies and ethics.

with each other but also contribute to shaping their environments. As such, "naturalcultural contact zones" are created biophysically and socially by both humans and their nonhuman companions (*When Species* 7).[28] In the case of human–canine relationships, such zones include the home, the streets, and – as I will argue in the analytical chapters – even films which, depending on their shooting and representational practices, also incorporate and in turn are shaped by both human and canine perceptions. While these sites reveal the "porosity of worlds and the flexibility of those who people them" (Despret 196), they also display how human and canine *Umwelten* converge in shared places rather than merge completely. As such, they will be construed as "heterotopic spaces" (Cudworth 10), where human and canine perspectives interact, mutually (trans)form, yet also resist one another, that is, where the ambiguities of intimacy and alterity characterising our "strange kinships" unfold in lived and mediated spheres of conviviality.

A film that explores and creates such emerging contact zones is *The Truffle Hunters*, a 2020 documentary created by Michael Dweck and Gregory Kershaw, shot in the forests of Piedmont, northwest Italy, more precisely, in the multispecies cartographies drawn into the fallen leaves and the mud by the crisscrossing lines of human memory and canine noses. The film begins with the sounds of bird calls, softly pattering rain, and rustling leaves, slowly immersing the viewer into the multisensorial world of truffle hunters and their dogs, then a distant church bell brings its regular rhythm into the silent ecophony, signalling the intermingling of nature and culture even in a place which, for the city-dwelling directors, seemed to be a "fairytale kingdom" that "had not been touched by modernity" (Carey n. pag.).[29] When the visuals join the sounds, the camera starts zooming in on a tapestry of autumn-coloured leaves, dense foliage, and tangled vines, with tiny figures steadily making their way toward the top of the image: what first appears to be an overview shot slowly reveals itself as a side-view shot of a man and his dogs climbing a steep, vegetation-covered mountainside (Fig. 4.1). The giddying sensation evoked by the realisation of the actual camera angle contributes to drawing the viewer into the entangled web of embodied human–canine experiences unfolding on the

[28] This idea closely resonates with Ralph Acampora's notion of "convivial worldhood" (120), which suggests that 1) human beings do not have a monopoly on shaping their environments; 2) expressions of the more-than-human permeate our own lifeworlds, including what we might commonly think of as the most anthropogenic land- and cityscapes; 3) "environments are not wholly of human making" (12); and 4) consequently, human and animal worlds are in dynamic, reciprocal relations with one another.

[29] With its spectacular nature-shots and the chiaroscuro aesthetics of the interior sequences', which render the film experience as if we were indeed flipping through a storybook, *The Truffle Hunters* is an example of how even documentaries, which are, by definition, supposed to record reality, are shaped by the filmmakers' ideas, sentiments and imaginations. In this case, the portrayed world is strongly tinted with the directors' perception of traditional truffle hunting as the image of perfect harmony with animals and nature, which does not correspond with the actual situation of the Piedmontese truffle culture, largely influenced by the forces of market capitalism.

screen. Followed by a cut, the next overview shot brings us even closer to this convivial world, capturing a moment when the man and one of his dogs dig out a trove of white truffles (Fig. 4.2): a spatiotemporal point where human and canine experiences – the man's sense of touch and the dog's sense of smell – intersect and co-create a momentary site teeming with multiple sensory perceptions.[30] These two opening sequences can be seen as introductory mise-en-abymes of the film's visual world which, in the process of mapping how the experiences of the truffle hunters and their dogs converge in and co-construct the landscape, itself becomes an interspecies contact zone. Notably, the filmmakers also tried to capture the forest from a canine point of view by attaching GoPro cameras to the dogs' heads as well as fitting their paws and noses with small microphones (Fig. 4.3). Although these sequences inevitably anthropomorphise the dogs' phenomenal worlds, thereby demonstrating how even real-life creatures appearing in documentaries are hybridised by human perceptions, they also muddle the human – and by extension, cinematographic – hierarchy of the senses, usually favouring vision, by bringing in a primarily smell-, sound- and movement-based perception. Thus, both the portrayed world and the film emerge as heterotopic spaces co-created by human and canine experiences, interests, and intentions. The films discussed in the analytical chapters unfold *in* and *as* similarly hybrid sites, reflecting how people and dogs co-shape their environments through everyday routines and practices.

[30] Considering the fact that, since finding Alba truffles growing in the wild is especially difficult and the mushrooms are very expensive, the hunters keep these places secret (explaining why the exact filming locations could not be revealed to the public upon the film's release), one could argue that the coordinates where truffles can be found exist only in the shared world of the hunters and their dogs.

Fig. 4. Interspecies contact zones from afar, up close, and within the cinematic image (*The Truffle Hunters* 00:01:45; 00:02:58; 00:26:30)

Similarly to *The Truffle Hunters*, the films selected for analysis also show how, in the process of routine interactions, dogs and humans become mutually attuned to each other's lifeworlds, thereby participating in the creation of what – applying a Deleuizan terminology – could be called embodied humanimal assemblages: dynamic, heterogeneous systems that, like the sites of conviviality, are composed of diverse elements or "multiplicities" of several kinds (i.e. human and animal), which come together through contingent and shifting ways, and instead of fusing into a singular unity, maintain their distinctiveness while forming a temporary configuration (Deleuze and Guattari 36). This concept aligns with how Uexküll originally

imagined creaturely *Umwelten*: as hermetically sealed soap bubbles (qtd. in Horowitz, *Inside* 21) that, depending on the proximity and frequency with which the different species and individual animals meet as well as on the relative comparability of their sensory systems, might nevertheless touch, stick together, and mutually affect each other's trajectories. As Horowitz explains, due to their shared evolutionary histories and continued closeness, dogs and humans are particularly good at synchronising each other's lifeworlds, that is, at adapting their own perceptions, bodily expressions, and habits to those of the other. Horowitz suggests that dogs are so adept at reading human body language that she describes them as "canine anthropologists" (*Inside* 98), while also arguing that people, too, can, and, if they want to create balanced relations with their companions, *should* attune their lifestyles to those of their dogs.

In *The Truffle Hunters*, this mutual attunement unfolds as the condition of working together, as the dogs need to learn that their owners expect them to look for mushrooms, distinguish the truffle scent from other earthly smells, communicate detection clearly, and must also adjust the direction and pace of their movements based on their handlers' cues. Simultaneously, the men must be able to recognise subtle changes in their dogs' sniffing patterns, postures, and movements, and they also need to use clear signals to indicate their intentions.[31] At the same time, the attunement between the truffle hunters and their dogs exceeds this tightly coordinated working partnership. For instance, an older man called Aurelio is shown confiding in his dog Birba his fears about what will happen to her once he is gone and promising to find someone trustworthy to take care of her, implying a deep emotional attachment between the human and the dog. Likewise, the truffle hunters share an ongoing concern about the dangers of poisoned bait hidden in the forest, a threat that requires them to anticipate their dogs' behaviours and protect them from harm. In a scene, we witness how one hunter has muzzles fitted to his dog's nose to prevent poisoning, anxiously checking whether the equipment is too tight, whether the dog can breathe, and whether it interferes with the latter's ability to navigate the forest. Animated by his overwhelming sense of worry about the animal's safety, the man's body unconsciously mimics how the dog sniffs and licks things on the ground when exploring the forest floor, enacting what Horkheimer and Adorno regard as a resurfacing primordial indivision and metamorphosis between the human subject and the material environment, or what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as *becoming-animal*. Rather than imitation, this process

[31] This concordance also manifests in the language used by the hunters to communicate with their dogs: when reviewing the footage, the directors realised that the hunters were using a special dialect (or, more precisely, familect), which even the local interpreter could not understand, suggesting the development of an exclusively intimate communication system between hunters and dogs.

entails making one's "organism enter into composition with *something else* in such a way that the particles emitted from the aggregate thus composed will be canine as a function of the relation of movement and rest, or of molecular proximity, into which they enter" (Deleuze and Guattari 274). By involuntarily acting out what he imagines to be the dog's experiences, the man enters into an embodied humanimal assemblage that organically emerges from his routine interactions with this dog.

In less abstract terms, the scene also evokes Kenneth Shapiro's concept of "kinaesthetic empathy," a phenomenological approach to studying the life of nonhuman animals by adjusting one's "sensitivity to the bodily posture, gesture, movement and behavior of the animal" in the attempt to "complement existing paralinguistic communicative abilities" between one's own and the other species ("Defining Kinesthetic Empathy" n.pag.). For Shapiro, "kinaesthetic empathy" is not necessarily a consciously devised method; it may arise as part of our everyday relationships with companion animals (including but not limited to work relationships), since in the process of living together, we develop mutually attentive ways of acknowledging, observing, and interpreting each other's bodily gestures and behaviours.[32] Similar to Acampora's notion of "corporal compassion" – which refers to an inherent sense of empathy towards other creatures due to our shared embodiment (30) –, but more reflective of the dynamic nature of interspecies relatings, Shapiro's concept is useful in exploring how embodied empathy emerges in and is emphasised by cinematic representations of concrete human–canine kinships. Building on a twist on Shapiro's term, I argue that the films under scrutiny in this dissertation project what could be called kin-aesthetic empathy, that is, an aesthetics that not only reflects but also reinforces the sense of somatic sympathy between humans and canines by highlighting the processes of attunement to the other's bodily gestures, movements, and perceptions.[33] In this sense, apart from a posthumanist onto-politics, the films in the present study also outline a posthumanist ethics: an alternative system which treats the affective forces between intimately entangled, similarly embodied, yet significantly different creatures as the basis of forming an ethical community with others.

The framework of posthumanist ethics has grown out of the theories of feminist animal studies scholars, who expressed a deep scepticism towards rationality, subjectivity, and other

[32] Shapiro himself developed his method through attunement to his own outdoor watchdog called Sabaka in rural Maine: observing his dog at play, his sense of space and place, as well Sabaka's own continuous assessment of the human–animal relationship, Shapiro realised that he was becoming attuned to the dog's interests and needs (Shapiro, "Understanding Dogs" 194).

[33] This bodily attunement, as I will argue, emphatically appears in the representations of interspecies love – discussed in the first chapter – and in the portrayals of pet grief – analysed in the last chapter.

cognitive criteria as the basis of extending moral consideration to nonhuman animals – an approach propagated by animal rights theorists such as Tom Regan and Peter Singer.[34] One of the biggest issues with this view is that it reiterates the Cartesian dualism between mind and body and, simultaneously, between humanity and animality. Furthermore, as Kari Weil notes, "just as a prejudicial definition of the human has been used to grant privileges to some while excluding others" – referring to how, for long, the white, Western, educated man served as the norm for considering who should deserve rights –, "so the notion of animal rights privileges a particular group of animals—those who can demonstrate a capacity for so-called rational agency—and leaves others unprotected" ("Report on the Animal Turn" 3). In an attempt to bypass the problematic implications of liberal ethics, feminist animal studies scholars have instead drawn on Baruch Spinoza's biocentric philosophy which "takes us away from the God toward which humanist metaphysics aspires . . . toward the flesh which constitutes life . . . or rather, lives – real, singular and connective" (MacCormack 4). In other words, these thinkers turn towards the possibilities of shared materiality, affective bonds, and the notion of relationality as the basis of forming ethical communities with others.

For Lori Gruen, for example, companion species relationships provide a potential site where such an alternative ethics can emerge, since in order "to figure out what a very different kind of being, who cannot speak, wants or needs, you must develop the capacity for empathy" (157). In a similar vein, Josephine Donovan argues that through attentive observation and compassion, we can form a "dialogue" with nonhuman animals (both on an individual and a collective level) (320), which is indispensable when we share our lives with beings who are simultaneously familiar and "utterly alien" (Fudge, *Pets* 1). Rather than trying to extend humanist notions of subjectivity and agency onto animals, this approach acknowledges their own perspectives, thereby facilitating more respectful interspecies exchanges which are not envisioned "with an end in view" (Spinoza 79), but as an emerging becoming-in-relation. As Braidotti succinctly summarises, a posthumanist ethics is an "ethics of affirmation," which entails "the overthrowing of negativity through the recasting of the oppositional, resisting self ('I would prefer not to') into a collective assemblage ('we')," a community formed through "generative cross-pollination and hybrid inter-connections" ("A Theoretical Framework" 21, 16).[35] By emphasising the mutual recognition, attunement, and arising empathy between

[34] See, for example, Singer, *Animal Liberation*; Regan and Singer, "Animals in the History of Western Thought;" Cavalieri and Singer, "A Declaration on Great Apes".

[35] For more on posthumanist ethics, see, for example, Haraway, *When Species Meet*; Wolfe, *Animal Rites*; "Learning from Temple Grandin;" Braidotti, *Transpositions;* Bolton; Loh.

humans and dogs, the films analysed in this study engender an ethical paradigm rooted in the dynamic interspecific entanglements described by posthumanist scholars.

As the example of *The Truffle Hunters* illustrated, cinematic representations are not simply sites where these affective inter-relatings play out but, using tools within their means, they can also facilitate the relational encounters between people and dogs. Therefore, a supplementary presupposition behind the analyses is that – depending on their styles, genres, shooting practices as well as their representational modes and purposes – films themselves, somewhat in the way of third parties, contribute to shaping the human–canine kinship both on and beyond the screen. In this sense, cinematic depictions can be perceived as expanding the co-constitutive unit of man and dog into a three-pointed assemblage, an instance of dynamic, reciprocally (trans)formative interactions between human, animal, and cultural-technological subjects. Since the dissertation focuses specifically on human–dog–film configurations, I refer to this type of formation as the anthrokynematic assemblage, a neologism that combines the Greek word for human and the etymologically similar roots of the words *dog* (κύων [kuōn]), *doglike/canine* (κυνικός [kunikos]), and *cinema* (from κίνημα [kinēma], meaning movement, hence the phrase moving image).[36] With this phrase, I intend to imply that technological tools – including the internal medium of human perception and diverse external media such as cinema – are indispensable parts of concrete humanimal kinships, since they allow us to open toward, relate to, and, by doing so, engage in generative becomings-with other-than-human creatures.

Haraway's example for such hybrid assemblages is *Jim's Dog*, a photograph taken by her friend Jim Clifford of a dog-shaped, moss-covered tree stump in one of the damp canyons of the Santa Cruz greenbelt (Fig. 5). As Haraway explains, this entity could only come into existence due to a unique arrangement of biological symbioses (between, among other lifeforms, redwood needles, ferns, lichens, and a California bay laurel that provides the dog's tail) and entangled naturecultural histories (for example, the tectonic activities, water flows, and other geological-climatic forces that sculpted the canyons over the years, intersecting with the human activities of logging, road construction, and nature conservation that contributed to shaping the land and its inhabitants' lives, parallel with the natural processes of lightning-caused fires that might have carved Jim's dog from a tree's burnt remains and the decomposition of matter on which organisms like fungi, lichens and ferns thrive). Furthermore, the inception of the photo was contingent on the histories of engineering, electronic product

[36] A further advantage of the term is that, besides including linguistic signifiers to each element/actant in the signified relationship, it also includes a variation of the word *kin*, thereby expressing the (non-biogenetic) alliance between dogs, humans, and cinematic technologies.

assembly-line labour, mining and IT waste disposal, the research and manufacturing of metal and plastic, transnational markets, consumer habits, and Haraway could only receive it due to the development of computers, servers, and email programs. And this is still not all that constitutes *Jim's Dog*, since Haraway and subsequent viewers would not be able to perceive the ephemeral constellation captured by Clifford's camera without the evolution of the specific optic-haptic perception that allows us to see and touch the objects before us (*When Species* 5-6). In a similar manner, the films analysed in this dissertation demonstrate that the sensorial entanglements between humans and dogs cannot emerge without, first, the process of attunement to the other's experiences, and second, the cinematic techniques and technologies that allow the filmmakers to re-present these embodied exchanges on the screen. The analyses thus call for a posthumanist ontology by shedding light on "the embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world, the prosthetic coevolution of the human animal with the technicity of tools" (Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism* xv).

Fig. 5. Jim's Dog (Haraway, *When Species Meet* 5)

As integral parts of assemblages, where all the parties and their interactions mutually affect each other, the films under scrutiny in this dissertation bear the traces of the inter-relatings between people and dogs, becoming the filmic impressions of what Eva Hayward – a student and close colleague of Donna Haraway – calls "the residuum of our interactions" ("FingeryEyes" 582). For example, in the case of *The Truffle Hunters*, the embodied exchanges between the mushroom hunters and their dogs emphatically impress themselves on the texture of the film, which, like the portrayed forest, is teeming with the intermingling sensory impulses

– lush visuals, earthly smells, lumpy tactilities, kinetic energies – of human and canine perception. Taking her cues from Haraway's relational ontology, Hayward argues that in the course of interacting with other species, we become more than ourselves, constituting physical and metaphysical ensembles where "senses are amalgamated, superimposed, forging cross-species reticulations and sites of solid-arity" (580). In order to describe the combination of visual, haptic, and other sensory perceptions arising from interspecies encounters, she develops the term "fingeryeyes" – "the overlay of sensoriums" emerging as the "indices of human–animal meetings" (581), which also leave their imprints on technological subjects. As Hayward puts it, "all these forces are quite literally impressed on organisms such that bodies (human, animal, machine) carry the markings, the fleshly and instrumental inscriptions, of the other" (580). Taking my cue from Hayward's insights, in the attempt to map the cinematic traces of embodied human–canine interactions, besides the creature-conscious interpretational methods provided by Burt's and Pick's approaches to film animals, I will also employ phenomenological film theories, most importantly, those of Vivian Sobchack and Jennifer Barker, which can help in detecting the effects of canine presences, perceptions, intensities, and expressions on both the human subject and the flesh of cinema without assuming an over-identification or assimilation of different creaturely sensoria.[37] As Hayward highlights, "[t]he ways species and their constituting senses are impressed should not be understood simply as offering a cozy closeness; impressions are also traces of indigestible beings that feed on signifying practices, populating meaning with multiple kinds of matter" (581). Applying the perspective of "fingeryeyes" can thus also aid the process of exploring how the analysed films carry the traces of the strangeness inherent in human–canine kinships.

As it has been suggested, however, cinema shall be regarded as an active element (or actant) in the anthrokynematic assemblage that also exerts its own effects on the human–canine bond. For example, as the overview of canine representations in the first part of this introduction demonstrated, films frequently project the notions of unconditional love and loyalty on dogs, which not only results in anthropocentric fictions with human interests, intentions, and meanings in the centre of the portrayed universe, but also lead to unrealistic expectations

[37] While tracing the subjective phenomenological experiences of dogs is an aspiration running through the entire dissertation, Sobchack's and Barker's theoretical insights will be called upon specifically in chapter two, which is dedicated to exploring the cinematic portrayals of creaturely vulnerabilities. The chapter will examine not only how canine presences, perceptions, and expressions leave their traces on filmic bodies but also how the latter – through their multisensory qualities, stressed by phenomenological film theorists like Sobchack and Barker – also transfuse those creaturely experiences (back) to the viewer's world. This process, as I will argue, is an important aspect of how the analysed films confront the spectator with the facts of human–animal continuity not only on but also vis-à-vis the screen.

towards dogs in reality. At the other end of the spectrum, films often project humanity's fears and anxieties onto canine figures, who thus carry threatening, disgusting or otherwise despicable traits, contributing to the negative stereotypes, discrimination, and violence that have serious – often fatal – consequences on the lives of actual dogs. I will argue that the films constituting the corpus of the present study offer more nuanced views than these binary depictions, highlighting the ambiguities inherent even in the most intimate human–canine relationships (apparent in *Turner & Hooch* and *My Dog Tulip*, analysed in the first chapter), the potentially empowering aspects of even the most vulnerable or biopolitically fraught dynamics involving people and dogs (foregrounded in *Stray*, *Los Reyes*, *The Plague Dogs* and *Isle of Dogs*, analysed in the second chapter) and the hybridisation of creaturely realities and techno-cultural constructions even in what seem to be either exclusively fictional (e.g. *Turner & Hooch*) or documentary portrayals (e.g. *Stray*, *Los Reyes*, *Heart of a Dog*, *This Darling Life*). In other words, the selected films not only reflect but also reinforce the ambivalent mixture of intimacy and alterity characterising our relationships with dogs, thereby contributing to rather than simplifying the complications of the human–canine bond. What follows is a close reading of the techniques and technologies employed by the selected films in the attempt at mapping the cinematic traces and transformations of the intimate yet strange, constantly evolving configurations between humans and canines. The main title of the dissertation, kin(e)ships, aims to emphasise the roles that the films play in shaping our essentially hybrid, multidimensional, fluid relations with dogs. The films comprising the corpus examine different elements of this interspecies relationship (namely, love, vulnerability, and grief), yet – in their own ways – each of these aspects emphatically highlights the complexity of the human–canine bond.

Chapter Outlines

The analyses begin with the discussion of a mainstream Hollywood production, the 1989 buddy cop-dog movie *Turner & Hooch* (dir. Roger Spottiswoode), which seems to be out of place in a corpus predominantly comprised of animated arthouse films and documentaries with fictional or personal authorial features. Yet, on the one hand, this movie accurately dramatises the complex, often abrasive feelings that characterise the affective bond between people and their dogs, thereby providing a thematic transition from the introduction – intended to theorise the fluidity of human–canine relations in general – to the first chapter, which explores representations of interspecies love between people and companion dogs. On the other hand,

Turner & Hooch shows that the uncontrollable and largely unfathomable creaturely side of dogs is captured not only by documentaries and realist depictions, but is presented even by such conventional representational forms as classical narrative cinema, which otherwise oversaturates the appearances of screen dogs with the constructions of cuteness or, conversely, monstrosity as well as the abstract meanings of unconditional loyalty or, again depending on the genre, uncleanliness, unpredictability, and moral corruptibility. The analysis of *Turner & Hooch* is therefore strategically important because it both sets up the analyses' thematic arc and substantiates the hypothesis that all cinematic canines are essentially hybrid entities, mixing constructions and creaturely realities, and can therefore potentially serve to question totalising representational and interpretational practices that try to squeeze film animals into fixed ideological categories such as good and bad, fictional and real, factual and abstract.

Hoping to highlight this trans-generic hybridity, the range of the analyses from a mainstream Hollywood production to realist and art films is intended to show that even the most "traditional" representational orders contain creaturely elements and, vice versa, even documentaries and aesthetically "radical" films include anthropocentric tendencies. Apart from this non-teleological logic, the order of the main chapters loosely follows the common course of a person and a dog's shared life in a chronological-thematic sense, beginning with representations that record the formulation of co-constitutive ties and ending with films portraying how these become undone by the pet's untimely death. By mirroring this life course, the dissertation's structure reflects both posthumanist notions of interspecies entanglement and human(ist) tendencies toward narrativisation, anthropomorphisation, and sense-making, thereby, in a sense, also embodying the complexity of our relationships with dogs – kinships shaped simultaneously by canine agency, the shifting flows of multispecies conviviality, and the inevitable framing of the human perspective.

The first chapter, "Strange Love Affairs" focuses on cinematic enactments of what Haraway refers to as "becoming-with-companions" through gestures of love across species lines (*When Species* 39). Since the two films selected for analysis – the already mentioned *Turner & Hooch* and the animation film *My Dog Tulip* (2009, dir. Sandra and Paul Fierlinger) – represent very different styles, genres, and cultural contexts, I compare and contrast the representational strategies each uses to evoke the specific kind of affective bonding that arises between people and dogs, a process where the partners become intimate in both emotional and bodily terms but still remain strangers to each other. Although the uncanny element is generally part of our relationships with dogs (including our evolutionary commingling as well as concrete relationships, for instance, between people and working dogs, or human citizens and

street/community dogs), in the first chapter, I examine how this strangeness manifests itself in the love affairs emerging between people and dogs in the private sphere of the home. Closely connected to the films' poetic qualities, I also explore the political implications of representing interspecies intimacy, a phenomenon approached through – among others – Dominik Pettman's concept of "creaturely love," which helps identifying and appreciating the subversive forces born out of the queer human–canine romances.

The second chapter, "Creaturely Vulnerabilities," examines how the states of embodiment – theorised through Pick's concept of "creatureliness" – shared by humans and dogs hold potential powers to challenge anthropocentric ideologies and practices of exclusion. This theme is explored through two documentaries, *Los Reyes* (2018, dir. Iván Osnovikoff and Bettina Perut) and *Stray* (2020, dir. Elizabeth Lo), portraying the parallel precariousness of urban stray dogs and marginalised human groups; and two animation films, *The Plague Dogs* (1982, dir. Martin Rosen) and *Isle of Dogs* (2018, dir. Wes Anderson), which problematise the violent reactions to canine-borne zoonotic diseases. Drawing on the biopolitical theories of Giorgio Agamben, Zygmunt Bauman, and Judith Butler, I argue that the analysed films expose the mechanisms that transform politically, legally, ethically valuable lives (*bios*) into disposable lives (*zoe*), only to reveal the inherent connections between humans and animals, humanity and animality, self and other, individual and community. Providing different versions of a poetics of creaturely vulnerability, which highlights the fragility of the excluded subjects and the violence of the perpetrators, the four films outline the need for an alternative biopolitics and ethics where all lives are treated with respect and dignity, irrespective of species identity.

In this regard, the films analysed in the second chapter project views similar to those represented by the works dissected in the last main chapter, "Cinematic Paw Prints," which focuses on two dog mourning documentaries: *Heart of a Dog* (2015, dir. Laurie Anderson) and *This Darling Life* (2008, dir. Angie Chen). Both films express a deep sense of loss for canine companions, thereby questioning the ambiguous status of pets' grievability and, by extension, the idea of the human–animal divide, where one of the criteria setting humans apart from animals is that only the former can properly die and deserve to be mourned. Chen's work, however, offers a particularly sensitive and anthropologically informed representation of animal death, carefully attending to the lived realities of the dogs and their human partners, and capturing grief in ways that foreground the intersubjective and interspecies dimensions of mourning. In contrast, *Heart of a Dog*, despite its aesthetic originality, appears less as a reflection on the death of the filmmaker's dog Lolabelle than as an aestheticised overflow of the implied author's mind, in which the grief for the dog is only one of several elements in a

broader personal collage, paradoxically giving centre-stage to the human self rather than to the human–canine relationship. By comparing and contrasting *Heart of a Dog* and *This Darling Life*, the chapter thus also reinforces one of the dissertation's key arguments: that all cinematic dog representations are marked by hybridity, with creaturely elements surfacing even in mainstream works, while even formally "radical" films may harbour anthropocentric tendencies.

The dissertation ends with a coda including an analysis of *Space Dogs* (dir. Elsa Kremser and Levin Peter), a 2019 documentary that records the lives of street dogs in present-day Moscow, emphasising the mysteriousness of the animals' perceptions, experiences, and actions, thereby ensuring that their phenomenal worlds remain inaccessible to and uncontrollable by both the filming apparatus and the human viewer. In other words, the study ends with the discussion of a film that, like the photographs in *Plato's Dogs*, render the portrayed dogs into elusive shadows, entities living in a parallel, to us only partially perceptible universe. Yet, as it will be shown, not even this creature-conscious documentary is free from abstraction and anthropomorphisation, as the film uses the metaphor of Laika's ghost to convey the idea of the dogs' elusiveness and also constructs an anthropomorphic narrative in its portrayal of the urban strays. The analysis of *Space Dogs* thus underscores the idea that the filmic representations of human–canine kinships emerge through multiple material-semiotic mechanisms, suggesting that even creature-conscious documentaries are partly shaped by human intentions, imaginations, and stories.

Chapter 1: Strange Love Affairs

"Significantly other to each other, in specific difference, we signify in the flesh a nasty developmental infection called love."
(Donna Haraway: The Companion Species Manifesto)

As the first thematic block in the line following the successive stages of a human-dog relationship, this chapter explores the cinematic traces and transformations of interspecies love in two stylistically and generically distinct films: the popular buddy cop movie *Turner & Hooch* (1989, dir. Roger Spottiswoode) and the animated adaptation of eccentric British gay writer J. R. Ackerley's autobiographical novel *My Dog Tulip* (2009, dir. Sandra and Paul Fierlinger). Depending on the intersectional particularities of the protagonists and filmmakers – which leave their marks on the narrative, visual, and affective aspects of the depiction – as well as on the genre, the employed techniques and technologies, and the portrayal's embeddedness in certain representational traditions, which contribute to shaping the presented kinship, the films enact two versions of what Haraway, after Deleuze and Guattari, calls "becoming with" a companion dog (*When Species* 16). Rather than a coming together of fixed, atomised subjects with an end in view, Haraway's notion envisions the affective bonding between humans and dogs as an ongoing process of co-shaping each other through interactions that entail as many moments of connection, recognition and exchange as ones of misconnection, misrecognition and misprision. This idea closely resonates with Dominic Pettman's notion of "creaturely love," which denotes a simultaneous rejoicing in the shared creatureliness and "the miraculous singularity of the being that one is [becoming] with" (8), a continuous "physical and metaphysical *leaning toward*, in the hope of recognition, encounter, and exchange" (7). In their own ways, both films evoke this specific kind of intimacy, where the partners become close in both emotional and bodily terms, yet also maintain an inevitable distance. Besides the concepts of "becoming-with" and "creaturely love," the chapter thus also builds on the notion of "strange kinship," which the introduction extended to the human–canine bond in general, but which here will refer specifically to the mutually (trans)formative love affairs arising between people and their canine companions in the private sphere of the home – relationships presenting an unparalleled form of intimacy while also generating a sense of the uncanny due to the other's radical differences. The analyses shall pay particular attention to how the oddness of concrete interspecies relationships is reflected in and is potentially reinforced by the films' aesthetics, which in turn hold the possibility of upsetting traditional ideas, norms, and expectations about the affective

human–canine bond, love in general, and, connected to the latter, the species divide. In this sense, although each film frames the human–canine bond through its own representational strategies and cultural contexts, both incorporate creaturely elements, including the creatureliness of interspecies love itself, which complicates anthropocentric understandings of intimacy.

While animals in ancient and medieval representations often functioned as allegories of love,[38] paradoxically, they had traditionally been excluded from actual affective relationships, similarly to how they had been marginalised in moral discourses: the categories that Western thought has drawn from the myriad, messily entangled affective phenomena described as "love" have been, implicitly or explicitly, also species boundaries. One of the most influential and enduring distinctions, first codified by Platonic philosophy, is the one between physical and spiritual/metaphysical forms of love, the word "love" itself predominantly referring to the latter: "Love today is still primarily coded as spiritual. And desire is still coded as physical" (Pettman 6). These two aspects or types of love are also usually placed within a conceptual hierarchy where "love" is granted an intrinsically higher position and hence greater value than physical desire. In Plato's *Symposium*, Diotima explains the notion of *eros* to Socrates through the metaphor of the ladder (i.e. "the ladder of love," Bloom 150), which describes – and simultaneously prescribes as an ideal process – the progress the lover shall make from purely carnal attraction to a beautiful body towards love that is focused on true, essential Beauty, an ideal Form belonging to the higher realm of transcendental concepts that can only be glimpsed by mortals as conceptual shadows (201a-c).[39] The elevation of spiritual/metaphysical love also informs the notion of *philia*, which encompasses the feelings of affection towards friends, family relations, as well as one's loyalty to the *polis*, and is ideally based, as Aristotle explains in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, on a set of common interests and dispositions such as rationality, goodness, and an equal share in virtue (*NE*, VIII.3) – a communion of like-minded, equally upright individuals. As Alexander Moseley comments, "love between such equals . . . would

[38] In Aesopian fables, the dove and her interactions with other animals often represent the idea(l)s of love and care. For instance, in "The Dove and the Ant" (Perry 235), the dove's selfless act of saving the ant from drowning, which the insect repays by biting the foot of the hunter who has come to catch the bird, symbolises universal love rooted in compassion, mutual care, and kindness. In Christian iconography, the pelican – believed to pierce its own breast and feed its young of its blood – frequently served as the allegory of the self-sacrificing love of Christ.
[39] Meanwhile, Aristophanes presents a much more creaturely concept of Eros: an origin story of sexual desire in which human beings were once rolling around as spherical bodies combining male and female sexes (or entirely male or female in the case of same-gender-loving people) and ever since Zeus cut them in half as punishment for their attack on the gods, they have been looking for their other halves. In this view, Eros is "the bringer-together of [humans'] ancient nature" (189c2-191d3), who seeks to restore the previous wholeness of two bodies. Such variations within the *Symposium* reflect a much more nuanced perception than the commonly perpetuated idea of Platonic love as a purely spiritual endeavour.

be perfect, with circles of diminishing quality for those who are morally removed from the best" (n. pag.)

As the observation above suggests, ancient Greek philosophy perpetuated the notion that only certain mortals – first of all, human but not other animals, and, in the case of *eros*, only the initiated, the philosophical, or the artistic, in the case of *philia*, only the rational and the virtuous – may pursue the highest, spiritually driven forms of love; others are stuck on the lower rungs of physical desire. Western philosophical thought has thus established a conceptual hierarchy in which carnal desire, shared with nonhuman animals, is deemed inferior to a more intellectual conception of love. In this framework, desire is "not a proper form of love" in itself, "love being a reflection of that part of the object, idea, or person that partakes in Ideal beauty" (Moseley n. pag.). This binary opposition, deeply ingrained in Western thought, elevates metaphysical – also labelled as rational, cognitive or intellectual – love into a uniquely human privilege, distancing it from the supposedly base, instinctual desires associated with animals and those deemed less virtuous or enlightened. In this sense, the hierarchies of love constitute one of the cogs in Agamben's anthropological machine, creating ideological distinctions between human and animal forms of love while also isolating – as it was discussed in the introduction through Adorno and Horkheimer's reflections on the modern subject – the creaturely desires within the human, and defining, in both cases, "human" love as more complex, valuable, and meaningful than "animal" love.

The conceptual separation and exaltation of metaphysical love – what Irving Singer calls "the idealist tradition" (3) – was also carried over to romantic and religious discourses, which established further categorisations, most importantly, between perceivedly celestial or mystical and mundane forms of love, the former describing "higher," "nobler," essentially human experiences, while the latter believed to characterise "simpler," "unremarkable" interactions such as those between humans and other animals. As Singer observes, much of the courtly love tradition is, for example, built upon the concept of merging through love, the union of two souls in a single entity that, in a sense, the lovers have always been a part of. This is, however, not a natural, common, or ordinary condition: people are caught up in "something bigger and grander than themselves as separate entities, something that negates and even destroys the boundaries of routine existence" (Singer 6). In the idealist conception, love – insomuch as it entails a merging of souls – is therefore an "*extra*ordinary event" that transcends the laws of nature and disturbs the comfort of everyday life, "creating that which cannot be obtained by ordinary

means" (7-8).[40] Such a tradition – also appearing in Christian notions of religious love, "defined as a search for union with the supreme reality which was God" (9) – has not only produced a "split between love as a mundane attitude and love as a transcendental aspiration" (13), but also devalued any form of love that falls short of the ideal of total union: those fleshy details, mundane moments, frictions, mistakes and failures that are also part of our relations with significant others, especially when those others are nonhuman animals.

As one of our oldest and closest animal partners, dogs often embody ideals of loyalty, fidelity, and friendship in our cultural imagination, whereby they act as facilitators, projections, and symbolic signifiers of those paradigms which have established hierarchical categories between different forms of love while they themselves are, somewhat paradoxically, excluded from these superior kinds of relatings. As Marjorie Garber observes, the dog stories pervading our literary, cinematic and popular media representations – for example, accounts of two pups falling in love at first sight and becoming lifelong partners, mother dogs rescuing puppies from various perils as well as the countless stories of dogs saving people from either physical danger or loneliness – have transformed this animal into a repository of model human properties regarding love such as devotion, selflessness and compassion (15). Menache notes that, from a psychoanalytic perspective, the practice of projecting various virtues on dogs may stem from the animal's archetypal function as an attachment figure, "an idealized provider of love who reanimates reminiscences of maternal love" ("God's Wort Enemies" 23-24). While this may be true in some cases, this chapter will argue that the affective relationship between humans and dogs tends to extend beyond resemblances of maternal love to a messy mixture of attachment and parental care, feelings of kinship and friendship, as well as a sense of bodily intimacy and emotional intensity that Western discourses associate with the category of romantic love but which, normally (i.e. not counting cases of bestiality) are not sexual in nature.[41]

Nevertheless, the care and compassion dogs show for their own offspring, along with their partly actual, partly projected loyalty towards humans have fused their perception with the idea(l) of unconditional love. This, in turn, has produced a proliferation of cultural

[40] Among the literary examples, Singer highlights the story of Tristan and Iseult, who, no longer feeling that they belong to the everyday world, forfeit "all concern for former responsibilities" (6), and would lie, steal or even kill "in order to preserve their sense of oneness" (7). Singer adds that, in cultural representations, such a powerful bond usually develops through the means of magic – for example, the love potion that Tristan and Iseult drink – which "may well symbolize radical transformations that love can actually institute" (7).

[41] It must be also noted here that these affective patterns are not universal but are rooted in specific cultural, historical, and socio-economic contexts, particularly those of Euro-American, white, middle-class companion animal keeping. In other geographical locations, historical periods, cultural traditions, and interspecies arrangements (e.g. in the case of shepherds, police officers, sled dog drivers), human–canine relationships have developed along different practical needs, symbolic associations, and affective registers, producing equally complex but distinct configurations of intimacy.

representations depicting dogs as symbols of friendship and fidelity – a tradition, called by Naama Harel the "paradigm of the faithful dog," that is described in detail in the introduction. Beyond embodying the highly valued qualities of loyalty, selflessness, and compassion, dogs have been also consistently portrayed as signifiers of romantic devotion and passion.[42] In the story of Tristan and Iseult, for instance, the knight's loyal hunting dog Husdent reflects, on the one hand, his master's love for King Mark, rooted in the medieval notion of fealty denoting the vassal's feelings of allegiance and fidelity towards the lord. On the other hand, Husdent's unconditional loyalty and the fact that he is suffering in his master's absence suggest that the dog also partakes in the construction of courtly love, mirroring the emotional bond and physical attraction between Tristan and Iseult. In the Middle English version *Sir Tristrem*, Husdent (here Hodain) accompanies his master on the quest for his uncle's bride, even drinking from the love potion consumed by the couple. As Harriet Hudson comments, "[b]y sharing the potion, Hodain, Tristrem, and Ysonde are of one kind—lovers—and the dog becomes their double, an emblem of fidelity" (110), and I would add, recalling Singer's interpretation of chivalric romance, a signifier that strengthens the merging of the lovers through magic. Later, the dog also sleeps besides the couple in the forest, simultaneously symbolising their sexual desire and, as Hudson argues, "in keeping with the devoted behaviour of bestiary dogs and the bond of hunter and hound," also upholding "the canine image of true love" (110). Ysonde's dog, Peticrewe, a magical animal gifted to Iseult by Tristan, can be similarly seen as the couple's double (Hudson 110), a symbol that represents the otherworldly nature of their love, with its bell that soothes the lovers' longing signifying repressed passion. Similarly to other animal symbols and metaphors of the period, these canine characters thus highlight the interplay between transcendental love and physical desire, simultaneously acting as heralds of the lovers' metaphysical bond and as projections of the physical aspects of their relationship. While in

[42] In this sense, the symbolic representation of dogs is embedded in a larger literary tradition of employing animals as signifiers of romantic devotion and desire. One of the most famous examples is Boccaccio's short story "Federigo's Falcon" (originally published in *The Decameron* in 1353), where the bird – the only valuable possession of the once-wealthy Florentine nobleman – is unknowingly sacrificed when Federigo serves it as a meal to the lady of his dreams, Monna Giovanna, who has come to request the falcon for her ailing son. In this story, the animal symbolises Federigo's unwavering dedication to the beloved. An earlier example where the animal carries a similar meaning is Catullus's elegy "Death of Lesbia's Sparrow" (written in the 1st century BCE), which laments the death of his lover's pet sparrow. However, while the bird's closeness to Lesbia makes it a symbol of faithfulness and companionship, mirroring what Catullus desires in his relationship with his lover, the way Lesbia plays with the sparrow and holds it close also carries sexual connotations, possibly representing the physical aspects of Catullus and Lesbia's love. The sparrow's symbolic role in this text closely resonates with that of the flea in John Donne's metaphysical poem "The Flea" (written in the 1590s), where the animal serves as a metaphor for physical union, seduction, and the blending of the lovers' souls *and* bodies. As these examples show, animals often reflected the complexity of love in ancient, medieval and early modern literature, sometimes symbolising spiritual devotion and erotic passion in the same text.

medieval and Renaissance representations this dual role reflected the complexity of love,[43] most subsequent representations either perpetuated "the paradigm of the faithful dog," employing the canine figure as the embodiment of idealised loyalty, or transferred – primarily negative – notions of sentimentality, sexual promiscuity, or beastliness to the dog so as to keep "human" love pure of animalistic desires, thereby using the dog to enforce conceptual distinctions and hierarchies between different forms of love while also marginalising the human–canine bond itself.

Similarly to literature and visual art, film has played a significant part in transforming the dog into a "love machine" (Kete 53), in the sense that cinematic canines not only reflect but also continuously generate our ideals about devotion and desire. For instance, in Walt Disney's *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* (1961, dir. Wolfgang Reitherman et al.), the popular adaptation of Dodie Smith's children's novel, the love story of the two adult dogs, Pongo and Perdita serves to mirror that of the human couple, Roger and Anita. In the early stages, the film is narrated from the point of view of Pongo, who decides to find the perfect "mate" for his "pet," saying that although Roger writes songs about romance, he knows nothing about it, and that "if it were left to [him], [they] would be bachelors forever" (00:04:04-00:04:07). Despite the overt anthropomorphism, Pongo's thoughts suggest a kinship between interdependent species who share in the experiences of desire, while rendering the dog as the one with more knowledge in such matters. The narrative even seems to provide room for a blooming canine love. Yet, from the moment Pongo sets eyes on and becomes instantly enamoured with Perdita, whose owner – as an additional benefit – also seems to be a perfect match for Roger, the dogs start to act as pantomimic focalisers of the idealised love ritual unfolding between their humans.

To begin with, Pongo spotting the perfect pair of females in a manner which, as he reflects, "was almost too good to be true" (00:06:00) anticipates the *extra*ordinary nature of the relationship which, evoking the myth of passion perpetuated by courtly love stories, will entail the merging of the lovers' personalities through magical means, transcending the laws of nature and destroying the comfortable routine of everyday existence. Engineering the encounter, Pongo serves as the magical tool that transforms the couple's former world and achieves their miraculous union: the allegorical accessory representing desire, echoing the function of Husdent and Peticrewe. The sight of the entangled Roger and Anita (Fig. 6, left), rendered into

[43] Early modern engagement paintings, for example, *The Arnolfini Wedding* by Jan van Eyck (c. 1434), often pictured a dog at the couple's feet as a symbol of their loyalty to each other, while in Shakespeare's plays, the presence of dogs primarily serves to comically counterbalance lofty ideas of love. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1598), the bawdy humour of Launce, Proteus' servant, often revolves around his dog Crab, whose base instincts and physical desires reflect the corresponding qualities in humans.

powerless marionette puppets under the binding force of love, signified by Pongo's leash, evokes the idea of the merging of two personalities, which is visually reinforced by the complementary colours of the humans' clothes and the dogs' black-and-white coats. The following image of the couples' double wedding seals the symbolic status of Pongo and Perdita's relationship (Fig. 6, right).[44] For, even though the dogs are sat in the foreground, in the imaginary camera's focus, while Roger and Anita are standing behind them, reduced almost to silhouettes, the dogs' amorous gaze and interlocking hands anthropomorphically mirror their owners. The canine love story is gradually pushed into the background, signalled by the disappearance of Pongo's first-person narrative voice, giving way to one in which the dogs' marriage and family life is used to magnify the notion of romantic human love as well as the concomitant values of commitment and sacrifice.

Fig. 6. Canine focalisers of human love (*One Hundred and One Dalmatians* 00:09:37; 00:10:55)

The sexual part of Roger and Anita's marriage is, for instance, projected on the dogs, leaving the human couple's relationship untouched by creaturely desires, which is evident in the fact that only the canine couple's honeymoon yields puppies, whom Roger and Anita, remaining childless throughout the narrative, come to treat as their own babies. While transferentially carrying – in both metaphorical and literal terms – the physical aspects of the human marriage, the dogs also represent idealised family values such as unconditional parental love, reflected in the Pongos' determination to rescue their offspring. Their love even extends

[44] On the one hand, this moment recalls the multiple weddings at the end of certain Shakespeare plays, where the lower-status pairings (e.g. the marriage of Touchstone, the court jester, and Audrey, the simple shepherdess in *As You Like It*) symbolise the inescapability of love's physical aspects. This connection is also strengthened by the female dog's name, Perdita, shared by the young heroine in *The Winter's Tale*. On the other hand, the positioning of Pongo and Perdita also evokes the role of the dog in Renaissance engagement paintings, which was to convey the more metaphysical or rational aspect of the couple's loyalty to each other.

beyond their biological children as they also bring home with them the other eighty-four captive puppies, thereby evoking the Christian notions of care and compassion: much like Christ's miraculous multiplication of the loaves and fishes in the four Gospels, love increases the number of dogs, metaphorically reflecting the way selfless acts foster growth and abundance. Additionally, the film attaches the concept of *philia* to the wider canine community, which manifests itself most saliently through the solidarity, loyalty, and collective collaboration demonstrated by the "Twilight Bark" sequence, where dogs across the country help spread the Pongos' emergency call, significantly contributing to the puppies' rescue. *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* thus employs dogs to reproduce various – specifically middle-class, heterosexual, Anglo-American – ideals of love, including the (originally Aristotelian) concept of two souls merging in a single entity, the Platonic notion of love transcending the "burden" of physical desire, as well as the concepts of selfless parental love (*caritas*) and communal care.

While many – predominantly but not exclusively animation – films use anthropomorphised canine characters to convey exalted notions of love,[45] others – namely, the cinematic portrayals of dogs' legendary loyalty for their masters (e.g. the *Lassie* adaptions) – stage the human–canine bond as the paragon of harmonious relationships between humans and animals: an interspecies version of the ideal of merging through love. While the narratives of such films attach the notions of unconditional love to dogs by portraying them as the human protagonists' best friends, cinema also uses visual techniques to highlight what ethologists have determined to be the dog's biologically evolved love for humans, which supports the argument proposed in the introduction that screen dogs are both techno-cultural constructs and (f)actual creatures.[46] One of the most conspicuous manifestations of the dog's biologically evolved love for humans is the phenomenon called puppy eyes, which makes the gaze of dogs resemble that of human babies, thereby (potentially) activating a sense of care and protectiveness in humans.[47]

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[45] Another famous example from Walt Disney is *Lady and the Tramp* (1955), where the pairing of the pampered pet and the notorious womaniser stray mongrel – evoking the culturally prevalent fantasy of sexual promiscuity shared by the bourgeois woman and her "taboo sexual partner and social adversary," the working-class man (McHugh, *Dog* 134) – also emphatically reenacts the metanarrative of romantic love through, for instance, the iconic date scene. A live-action example of the same trend is *Beethoven's 2nd* (1993), which, as Garber observes, replays the story of Romeo and Juliet through the romance of two St. Bernards who run away from the bitch's evil step-owners to go on a date and end up snuggling at a drive-in movie (36).

[46] In this specific case, the concept of the dog's unconditional love is, of course, a cultural construction, but it also has biological underpinnings. The most common view is that dogs' strong attachment towards people is an intrinsic trait, shaped by generations of selective breeding which reinforced prosocial, compliant, loyal behaviour patterns in the animals. As Darwin stated in *On the Origin of Species*, "It is scarcely possible to doubt that the love of man has become instinctive in the dog" (136).

[47] According to a 2019 study, there is a pair of muscles around the eyes of domestic dogs which proved to be responsible for the special affective communication with humans (Kaminski et al. 14678). Another experiment found that when these muscles raise the eyebrows, making the dog's eyes look bigger and objectively cuter, humans respond with a jolt of oxytocin in their blood, the same hormone that activates our nurturing instincts when

During the silent film era, filmmakers realised that a flash of puppy eyes can trigger (parental) feelings in the audience,[48] and they have never ceased to capitalise on the emotional effects of this feature, instructing the dog to turn towards the human actor or the camera with pleading eyes and emphasising the animal's expressions with a close-up (Fig. 7). By consistently using this method to magnify the dog's genetically hard-wired love towards humans, one could argue that cinema has inscribed itself into the history of human–canine coevolution, contributing to deepening the special affective communication between humans and dogs as an actant in the anthrokynematic assemblage. However, by doing so, it has also perpetuated the stereotype that pictures dogs as "unconditional love dispensers" (Pallotta 5), as a result of which the "mimetic resonance between the canine and human is generally taken for granted and left unquestioned," reinforcing "the fantasy of perfect communication, indeed of unalloyed love" (Kuzniar 6) – the ideal of primordial oneness facilitated by the dog's heart-melting gaze.[49]

Fig. 7. The "puppy eyes" look: (from left to right) still images from *Lassie Come Home* (1943, dir. Fred M. Wilcox); *Old Yeller* (1957, dir. Robert Stevenson); *Benji* (1974, dir. Joe Camp); *Air Bud* (1997, dir. Charles Martin Smith); *Hachi: A Dog's Tale* (2009, dir. Lasse Hallström); *A Dog's Purpose* (2017, dir. Lasse Hallström)

While cinematic dogs often portray our most highly valued concepts of love and the most alluring fantasies of interspecies harmony, as it was elaborated in the introduction, other times they carry humankind's most despicable traits. Moreover, because of the animals'

we see human babies (Nagasawa et al. 335). These findings thus show that domestic dogs developed these muscles during their coevolution with us, mimicking human babies in order to stimulate an urge to care for them (see, for example, Hare et al. 573-76; Dale et al. 47-48).

[48] With no dialogue, the pantomimic gestures of the actors gained a huge narrative significance and similar importance was imputed to the facial expressions, most importantly the eyes, of dog heroes (Fuller-Seeley and Groskopf 65).

[49] As Haraway argues, the "idea that dogs restore human beings' souls by their unconditional love" is not only a lie, but is also pernicious because it reinforces the anthropocentric narcissism that uses animals for the conceptual and emotional elevation of humans (*Companion Species* 33). As Nicole Pallotta observes with regard to cinematic representations, [d]ogs are often exalted because of how well they seem to exalt humans" (5).

perceived filthiness, lasciviousness or overindulgence, one's emotional attachment to a dog – depending on the racial, class, gender identity and sexual orientation of the human subject – is also often portrayed as a source of social depreciation, ridicule, or contempt.[50] While this tradition extends beyond depictions of the human–canine bond, it is particularly jarring in the case of dogs, who – as explained in the introduction – are so intimately close to us that whenever they come into contact with an undesired and repressed aspect of animal nature, their presence becomes repulsive. Drawing on Sigmund Freud's observations, James Serpell maintains that the prevailing negative perceptions and, by extension, representations around dogs result from the fact that, no matter how much they are imagined to possess human virtues, they also elicit our disgust because of shamelessly engaging in activities deemed contemptible or forbidden in human culture, such as sexual promiscuity and the eating of faeces.[51] Consequently, as Alice Kuzniar points out, physical intimacy with and "emotional reliance on the pet can be shame inducing, for [the dog] can be regarded as an improper, unclean object of love" (6), an abject entity that, in Julia Kristeva's terms, confronts us "with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of the *animal*" (12). Revealing an inherent interspecies fluidity, or, in Merleau-Ponty's terms, "interanimality," which is one of the aspects that – according to Adorno and Horkheimer – threaten with a dissolution of boundaries between man and the material world and, as such, is rejected by the modern subject, the intimacy between people and dogs often "remains unspoken, in fact, at times unutterable, verging on the social taboo" (Kuzniar 8). It is often repudiated and marginalised – the animal generally regarded as an inferior being who can only be a substitute or supplement rather than a fit love object (Kuzniar 8, 109; Garber 122) –, and it is also often treated as absurd, pitiful and contemptible, considered as a "gratuitous perversion" of natural behaviour, especially in the case of childless couples and individuals, middle- or upper-class (postmenopausal) women, and, more recently, also lesbian and gay people (McHugh, *Dog* 87; Kuzniar 110; Garber 123, 135).[52]

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[50] This phenomenon is not exclusive to dogs; other animals have also been linked to notions of social marginalisation and abasement. The cultural construct of the "cat lady," for instance, exemplifies how attachment to animals – particularly by women – can be framed as a form of social deviance, manifested, for example, in the character of Mrs. Irving, a cantankerous old cat lady in A.S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990). More broadly, the trope of "loving an animal instead of a human" (or "being loved only by an animal") recurs across literature and cinema, often signifying the human character's emotional isolation or societal rejection. Notable examples include Ken Loach's film *Kes* (1969) and Andrew Cowan's novel *Pig* (1994), both of which explore the profundity of human–animal bonds as a response to social alienation.

[51] As Freud puts it in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), "[i]t would be incomprehensible, too, that a man should use the name of his most faithful friend in the animal world—the dog—as a term of abuse if that creature had not incurred his contempt through two characteristics: that it is an animal whose dominant sense is that of smell and one which has no horror of excrement, and that it is not ashamed of its sexual functions" (88).

[52] As McHugh notes, such associations are not universally negative or farcical. Ceramic artefacts from ancient American cultures often depict women holding small dogs, for example, the Tlatilco sculptures displayed in the

Parodistic representations of pet dogs and individuals belonging to the latter groups abound in cinema, including the satirical mockumentary *Best in Show* (2000, dir. Christopher Guest), which paints an overly exaggerated image about the emotional and physical ties between five dog show entrants – comprising childless heterosexuals, gays, and lesbians – and their animals. Harlan Pepper, an affable fishing store owner and aspiring ventriloquist, not only claims to have a telepathic connection with his bloodhound Hubert, who allegedly tells him when he is ready for the competition, thereby enacting the fantasy of perfect interspecies rapport,[53] but also shares intimate kisses with his dog whom he affectionately calls a "slobberpuss" (Fig. 8, top). These interactions elicit mild disgust and disdain from others in the upper echelons of the dog show world, suggesting that dogs – depending on where they stand on the imaginary scale between the human and the beast – are often treated as abject love objects. The dynamic between Sherri Ann, the heavily made-up trophy wife and her poodle Rhapsody in White, is also portrayed as bizarrely intimate, as she projects her vanity onto the animal and treats her as a replacement for human companionship in her dysfunctional marriage. Rhapsody, who bears the telling nickname Butch, also functions as a substitute child in Sheri Ann's romantic relationship with her trainer Christy Cummings (whose name also carries a vulgar sexual reference), and, as such, her character not only reflects the idea that one's love for a dog "is a sign of failure rather than success in emotional or erotic relations" (Garber 135), but also links the related pity and contempt to non-heterosexual people, simultaneously degrading both the human–canine relationship and lesbianism. In a similar fashion, the overindulgent attitude of the gay couple, Scott and Stefan, towards their pampered Shih Tzus is treated as a source of ridicule – fuelled by the lavish outfits donned by both the pets and the owners –, and also evokes connotations of perverse sexuality, as they share their bed with and whisper gentle messages to their dogs in a voice that verges on the sensual (Fig. 8, bottom). The behaviour of Meg and Hamilton, whom we first see at a psychotherapy session because

National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico, embodying women kissing dogs either in a standing or kneeling position. Dating back to around 1500 BC, the purpose of these figurines remains uncertain; they might reflect everyday interactions or healing rituals, but they all clearly provide a positive portrayal of the affectionate bonds between women and dogs (*Dog* 80).

[53] The notion of merging also appears through the uncanny resemblance between the owners and their dogs – a phenomenon often dramatised in films and literary works. For example, *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* begins with Pongo surveying women walking down a street with their similar-looking dogs, while Virginia Woolf describes Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Flush with similar heavy curls (or ears) hanging down the sides of their faces, large bright eyes, and wide mouths (18). Recent studies have scientifically confirmed that people and their pets often do look and act alike, with their similarities deepening over time (Bender et al.). It is common, for instance, that women have their hair cut to a similar length to their dogs' ears (Nakajima et al. 177). A possible reason is that people often choose dogs that look like them or reflect their personalities in some way (T. Law n. pag).

their fur baby saw them having sex in an “unusual” position and became “upset,” similarly incites an unnerving sense of bestiality, while their constant neurotic doting toward their dog Beatrice contributes to conceiving people’s emotional attachment to their pets as not only sentimental and pathetic but also psychopathologically abnormal. As these cinematic examples show, the love of dogs is at once exalted and despised – a paradox resulting from the fact that our affective relationships with dogs are inherently ambiguous, precariously trembling between the borders of the human and the animal, the platonic and the physical, the proper and the improper.

Fig. 8. Satirical images of human–canine intimacy (*Best in Show* 00:14:17; 00:44:55)

While films usually downplay it at the expense of idealisation or comic trivialisation, the hybridity of our affective relationships with dogs holds the power of subverting those hierarchical categories that dominant Western discourses have established between the various manifestations and aspects of love. This is because human–canine relationships are odd, not only due to the foreignness of the creature that one shares a home with, but also because the distinctive kind of love between people and dogs does not respect the artificially constructed borders between humans and animals – as, in general terms, it develops between different species –, "does not map neatly onto the *eros/philia/agape* distinction" (Hogg-Blake 4) – as it shares its emotional intensity and physical intimacy with romantic love, its bonding aspects with brotherly love, its affective ties with familial love and its unconditional care with Christian love –, and neither does it follow socially and culturally prescribed ideas about how one should love the other properly. This is why the question "What kind of lover is a dog lover?", proposed by Colleen Glenney Boggs, "pushes boundaries" and "animates taboos" (190). As Kuzniar observes, "the relation to the dog cannot be restricted to the singular role of guardian, lover, companion, or child but incorporates all of those modalities and shifts among them" (109), or, in Garber's words, it "retains all these dimensions as an emotional and physical reservoir of fantasy and possibility" (125).

The strange love affairs between people and their pet dogs can therefore challenge our conventional assumptions about "love" and "desire," "lovers," "guardians" and "companions," as well as "humans" and "animals," evading these classifications for something more fluid. Specifically, human–canine love holds the power of queering traditional perceptions about our affective relationships and interspecies bonds. As Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird put it in their book *Queering the Non/Human*, focusing on interspecies love can foster a positive, mutually influential connection with queer studies, as the affective relatings between humans and animals – similarly to queer identities and relationships – hold "potentialities for rethinking identity, desire, subjectivity and embodiment 'in radically different, off-center, and revealing ways'" (10), or, as Gabriela Jarzebowska and Justyna Schollenberger argue, the queer kinships between humans and animals can simultaneously subvert anthropocentric and heteronormative frameworks, at once questioning the human–animal divide and normative perceptions about gender and sexuality (12). Drawing on Kuzniar's work, Giffney and Hird specifically highlight the transformative power of human–dog relationships, the emotional and physical intensity of which can, in their words, significantly "challenge, critique and subvert norms relating to sex, gender, species, desire, intimacy and love" (10).

In their own ways, both films in the focus of this chapter muddle these categories by embracing the complexity of human–canine love, that is, by envisioning interspecies intimacy with "all its inappropriate, embarrassing, multidirectional, derogatory, and dangerous possibilities" (Glenney Boggs 190), not as something to be downplayed or despised but to be acknowledged and even celebrated. *Turner & Hooch* capitalises on the buddy cop genre's narrative formula of an unlikely partnership between two conflicting personalities to depict the mutually transformative relationship between the meticulous and orderly police investigator Turner (Tom Hanks) and the dirty, drooling, unruly French Mastiff called Hooch (Beasley, among others). Meanwhile, *My Dog Tulip* uses a playful, metamorphic, doodle-like animation style to relate the story of the strange love affair between Joe (standing for the real-life Ackerley) and his newly adopted Alsatian bitch (Queenie, renamed Tulip for the book and the film), wherein the writer's quest for the "Ideal Friend," whom he imagined as a heterosexual working-class man, culminates in the emotionally and physically intimate bond with his dog. While depicting the development of profound companionships, the films – using their own style-, genre-, and culture-specific tools – also foreground the messy, confusing, and creaturely aspects of human–canine love, thereby presenting two versions of "becoming with" the other rather than magical merging: a mundane type of affective bonding, the power of which lies in – as Horowitz and Kuzniar both observe – "the foreignness of the dog's being" (Kuzniar 112), those unfamiliar, unfathomable, at times endearing, other times unnerving aspects of the dog's lifeworld which prevent us from building complete rapport with each other. I argue that these strange aspects seep into both films, whereby they potentially upset traditional distinctions between the lofty and the beastly, the magical and the mundane, the constructed and the creaturely. While one might think that a Hollywood genre film would portray human–canine love mostly through anthropogenic constructions such as the fantasy of unconditional loyalty and the image of cuteness, *Turner & Hooch* shows that even the most 'conventional' representations inevitably contain unconstructed, creaturely forces, not only when these are intentionally highlighted for dramatic purposes but simply because the moment an animal body appears on screen, it introduces its own concrete, material, phenomenological presence into the fictional world – a presence which, at times, may be strange and disconcerting.

The Mutually Transformative Bond in *Turner & Hooch*

In Roger Spottiswoode's *Turner & Hooch*, the sense of subversive strangeness accompanying the process of human–canine bonding is particularly strong due to the spectacular frictions between the characters' dispositions and lifestyles, which are further strengthened by the narrative and visual strategies of the buddy cop genre. The plot of such films tends to revolve around two detectives with conflicting personalities, who are forced to work together towards solving a crime and/or catching criminals – a process which usually requires learning from each other. In his review of *Rush Hour* (1998), starring Jackie Chan and Chris Tucker in the roles of two mismatched police officers tasked with rescuing a Chinese diplomat's kidnapped daughter, Roger Ebert coined the term "Wunza Movie": a phonetic transcription of the phrase "One's a…", which could be used to describe the contrast between the main characters (Ebert n. pag.). Typically, a younger, "wilder," more rebellious partner is paired with an older, calmer, more composed one who brings greater insight to the duo; these films sometimes incorporate a variation on the good cop-bad cop trope, in which one partner embodies kindness and a strict adherence to the law, while the other is a streetwise, "old school" police officer who is not afraid to bend or break the rules. In *Turner & Hooch*, the man plays the role of "the neurotic, brainy, ambitious cop, and drooling, gaseous Hooch . . . the street-smart cop" (Wood 50), or, as Caryn James puts it, "the fussy partner is played by Tom Hanks and the slobby partner by someone who truly slobbers" (n. pag.). While in traditional buddy cop films, the heroes often belong to different racial or ethnic groups so that their pairing also entails a clash of cultures as a source of drama or comedy, here, this formula is revised as a conflict between human and canine cultures, or, in more simplistic terms, between civilisation and wildness, which gives rise to a mutually transformative interspecies bond. The analysis starts from the assumption that the reciprocally affective forces of the portrayed relationship are even greater given that the partners belong to different species. As Kuzniar argues, "paradoxically the foreignness of the dog's being . . . grants intimacy with them its power" (112), which, I would suggest, increases exponentially in the case of such a fierce-looking, uncontrollably-behaving dog as Hooch, who stands much closer on an imaginary ontological spectrum to the wild beast than the personified pet. It seems that the greater the perceived distance between the characters, the more powerful the force that brings them close to each other.

The film begins with a montage sequence that establishes the contrasting worlds and personalities of the main characters as the basis for their unlikely partnership. The sequence introduces Turner's meticulous night-time routine in a home which is immaculately organised

and clean despite the fact that the young detective is in the middle of moving (as we later learn, he is about to transfer from the quiet town of Cypress Beach to a more exciting position in Sacramento). After a rigorous workout, he prepares a perfectly proportioned dinner complete with an array of colour-coded supplements, tears off a cheque from his cheque book, removing even the tiny bit of paper that remained above the perforation line, and cleans his whole fridge after a bottle of mustard has exploded in it (Fig. 9). Both his living space and his time are exaggeratedly structured – an orderliness also reflected in the sequence's evenly timed cuts synchronised with the tight rhythm of the accompanying music. Further underscoring the character's fastidious personality, the images project a sterile mise-en-scéne containing only the essential elements needed to convey the basic impression of a house and to render the sequence of events understandable. Furthermore, they all look as if they were designed with a tape measure, following classical Hollywood cinema's rules of centred, balanced, symmetrical compositions, which can be themselves seen as the continuation of "some very old traditions in the visual arts" (Bordwell et al. 51). For instance, the shot portraying Turner cleaning his fridge complies with the triangular composition developed during the Renaissance to give a sense of stability, perspective, and symbolic hierarchy to paintings, although the character's positioning – captured from behind as a pair of legs without an upper body, most importantly, a head, symbolising his putative superiority over the animal character – undercuts the impression of authority and control with a sense of irony, signalling the actual instability behind the façade of Turner's orderliness and foreshadowing his journey beyond this rigid, (self)-repressive world.

Turner's obsession with order also extends to his workplace, where he meticulously explains to his replacement David Sutton how "each file folder needs to go into its own Pendaflex folder" (00:03:30), orders him to fasten his seatbelt before they leave for patrolling – "It's the law" (00:05:13) – and to keep his car clean, he even hoovers up the crumbs from his colleague's shirt. His own attire and appearance – suit, tie, glasses, clean-shaven face – are indicators of his putative superiority and control, not only over his fellowmen but also the animal world, represented by Hooch, and his own creatureliness. He emerges as the ideal Human, which is also signalled by the way he prepares for the next workday in the opening sequence, pressing his clothes and shining his shoes with machines, demonstrating foresight and ingenuity – capacities that, according to Western humanist thought, distinguish humans from animals – and plucking out (invisible) hairs from his nose in order to maintain the image of the civilised human having successfully tamed his animality. His obsessive self-checks in front of the mirror also point to a solipsistic form of love – as we later learn through his awkward rejections of the town vet Emily's romantic advances, he is also a philophobic – where the

subject's attention is centred on his self and, by extension, his own species. The character's anthropocentric narcissism is also manifested visually: following the compositional rules of post-Renaissance painting and Hollywood cinema, the images treat the human body as the major standard of framing, with the face increasingly occupying a central position until it fills up the entire frame in a close-up (Fig. 10). This self-centred, anthropocentric world is threatened by the transgressive forces carried by the canine character, whose affective approaches towards Turner do not respect species borders, the boundaries between civilisation and wildness, the sharply separated aspects and categorisations of love, and neither do they comply with the representational traditions of Hollywood cinema.

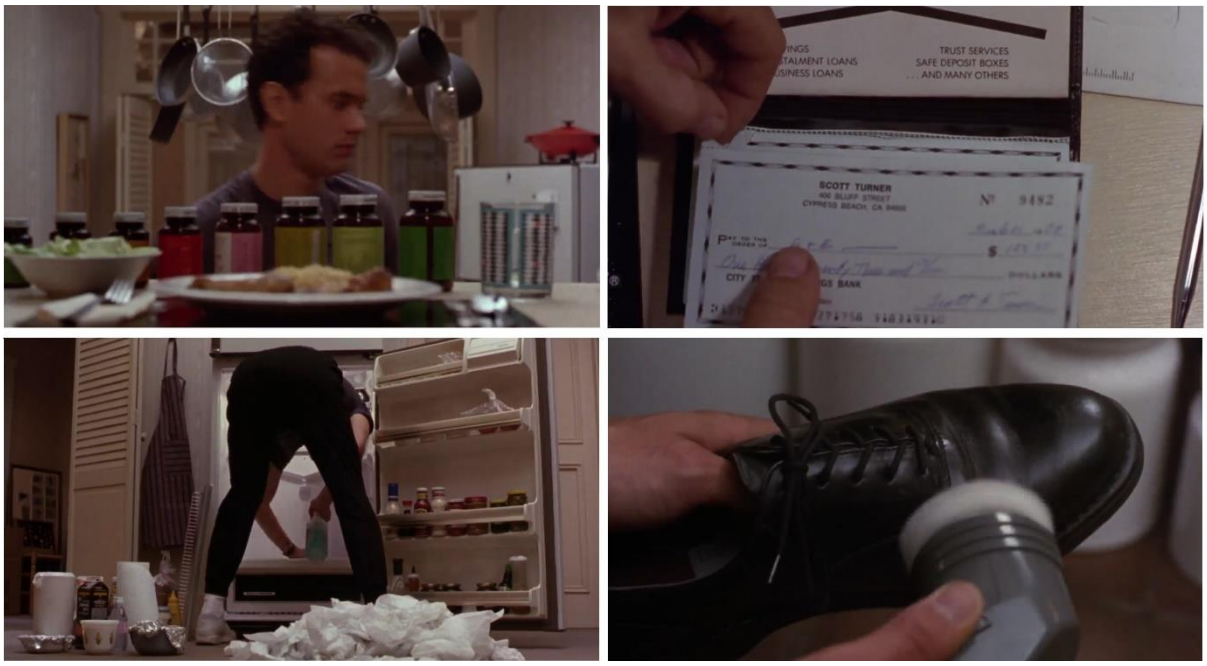

Fig. 9. Turner as the neurotically civilised human (*Turner & Hooch* 00:00:50; 00:01:03; 00:01:27; 00:01:59)

Fig. 10. Visually reinforced human exceptionalism (*Turner & Hooch* 00:02:50)

While the film assigns the trait of territoriality to the human character – thus subtly suggesting that, no matter how much he tries to suppress it, Turner, too, is fundamentally driven by animalistic energies –, Hooch appears in the position of a boundary-crossing creature even though, on the level of the plot, his role is to protect and maintain borders, resembling that of Cerberus in Greek mythology. Hooch is introduced as the guard dog of a dilapidated waterfront property, an old fishing boat functioning as a junkyard run by the animal's caretaker, Amos Reed (whose name also suggests that this is an undeterminable, partly natural, partly industrialised area rather than an enclosed, civilised space),[54] with rusty barrels and machine parts spilling over to the pier and blurring the boundary between land and water (Fig. 11, top). Compared to the minimalistic, meticulously composed images of Turner's house, the shots depicting the old man and his dog's life on the boat are clustered with greasy tools and coiled wires outlining a run-down, cramped environment, juxtaposed with the calm body of water in the background. When visiting this place, Turner's character markedly stands out (Fig. 11, bottom), his neatly pressed shirt in sharp contrast with Amos' worn cardigan and Hooch's foamy mouth, dirty coat, and muddy paws, which threaten with besmirching the policeman's clean uniform even when the dog does not move. Amos' sarcastic reply to Turner's suggestion that they should move to a nice apartment – "Me and Hooch in an apartment? Yeah, that'd be the sight" (00:10:55) – verbally reinforces the opposition between the investigator's and the dog's world, the latter being the physical reflection of Hooch's chaotic, uncontrollable, transgressive nature.

[54] The old man's surname also calls to mind Pascal's famous saying – "Man is only a reed, the weakest in nature" – an idea that, in this case, manifests in the character's frail, aged body – "but he is a thinking reed." Through this reference, Amos's name thus indirectly reinforces the opposition between the main human character, who is initially associated with rationality, and the canine character, linked to uncontrollable creaturely forces. Meanwhile, the forename Amos alludes to the Old Testament prophet who, like this character, holds people accountable for their sins; in a similar manner, Amos raises his suspicions about his neighbours' money laundering operations, which leads to his murder at the beginning of the narrative.

Fig. 11. The world of the "uncontrollable beast" (*Turner & Hooch* 00:08:08; 00:10:29)

Just like the junk on the property, Hooch does not respect boundaries: as an unruly, stocky, and powerfully built French Mastiff, with a drooling muzzle and a jaw powerful enough to tear one's throat out, he appears as a mythical threshold creature who easily crosses between the realm of the cute, loyal, and tamed pet and that of the wild, unfamiliar, and unpredictable animal. As Elizabeth Young argues,

> [a]cross and within breeds, dogs oscillate between emblems of domestic order and perceived threats to it — an oscillation also embodied within the individual

> animal. For in the specter of the friendly pet . . . is the possibility that the dog may expose the permeable boundaries of domestication, turning from faithful to violent and reverting from cute to wild. (132)

In fact, Hooch's character epitomises a wild oscillation between the tamed pet and the untamed beast not only within but also across the diegetic world, threatening both with upsetting "the domestic order" of Turner's home and with breaking down the clean-cut borders of fictional representation. More specifically, Hooch's ambivalent appearance challenges the expectations around the depiction of dogs in mainstream films, which, according to dominant interpretations represented by such scholars as Berger, Lippit, and Malamud, either portray these animals as personified pets or as wild, despicable creatures. Channelling the hybridity of real-life dogs, Hooch simultaneously embodies the friendly companion and the energies of the dog's primal, undomesticated self, thereby supporting the hypothesis presented in the introduction that all cinematic representations featuring dogs, even classical Hollywood movies, incorporate the animal's creaturely dimension and, with it, an element of the unpredictable. In *Turner & Hooch*, in the scene where the titular characters are first seen together, it is, for example, difficult to discern whether Hooch is running towards Turner to greet a friend or to attack a trespasser (Fig. 12). One might be even concerned about Tom Hanks, since the clash of the human and the canine body – preceded by a slow-motion shot of the massive dog running towards the camera – creates an overwhelmingly kinetic experience and requires viewers to see both the canine character and the dog actor, Beasley at the same time.[55] Casting such a fierce-looking breed thus ascribes the role of a threshold creature to the dog not only within the narrative but also in relation to the fiction/reality divide, which Hooch/Beasley is ready to tear down at any moment, constantly doubling fiction with a phenomenological, creaturely layer and causing a slightly unnerving feeling not only in the human protagonist but also in the spectator.

[55] Although the primary actor playing Hooch was Beasley, the filmmakers also used three other French Mastiffs, among them, a stunt double called Igor (Arar 9).

Fig. 12. The dog revealing the permeability of the fiction/reality boundary (*Turner & Hooch* 00:08:46)

Highlighting the dog's wild energies and the human's compulsion towards order, by the time of their first contact, the film establishes radical differences between the main characters' personalities, which serves as the foundation for their unlikely yet all the more moving partnership. Rewriting the classic formula of the buddy cop genre, Turner's designated human "other," the character of the black policeman Sutton, is quickly replaced by the dog, and the narrative commences as a story of human–canine love, which is formed through gestures of opening towards the other's "significant otherness" (Haraway, *Companion Species* 25), and leads to generative changes in both participants. The transformative union of human and dog is in fact already anticipated at the beginning of the narrative, since, despite his putative independence, control, and self-satisfaction, Turner's character is represented as incomplete. His existential loneliness is indicated by subtle signs in the film's screenplay and mise-en-scène, for example, the copy of the 1967 novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which Turner reads in bed before going to sleep, and which suggests that the human lead is a solitary figure in need of redemptive love. Meanwhile, Sutton hints at the physical aspects of Turner's loneliness, mockingly suggesting that the reason behind his excessive fastidiousness is sexual frustration: "'Scott, when are you going to learn to relax? . . . I'm not talkin' about the small "r." I'm talkin' about the big "R." You know, "Top of Old Smoky."' 'Oh, you mean, when am I going to get laid?'" (00:05:56-00:06:09). This conversation contributes to undermining the image of Turner as the model Human, "that provisional, asymptotic, hypothetical destination we chase but never reach," removing the layers of "self-serving species propaganda" to reveal "the naked ape"

underneath (Pettman 8), who is just as driven by instincts and the desire to be physically close to someone – not just in sexual terms – as other animals.

Turner can be seen as incomplete and thus preordained for a (trans)formational partnership also in the sense that, in many ways, he appears as a boy in a man's body. This is attested to by his fear of commitment, or by the tantrums he throws when his carefully constructed world is intruded upon by the dog. At the same time, he is also quick to engage in games with the dog and adapts to the changes around him with the flexibility of a child, explaining why his transformation is unrealistically fast in the film. In this sense, too, Turner is not so different from the dog, whose uncontainable energies resemble those of children, often employed by genre films – like this canine character – as a subversive force that turns the life of the adult (often cantankerous, solitary) protagonist upside down, ultimately humanising the character in the process.[56] The dog's childlike position is also underlined by the scene which marks Turner and Hooch's first time on the screen together, showing the former as he arrives at the junkyard with a muffin in his hand, not unlike a visiting family friend or potential foster parent wishing to gain a child's favour. Here, Hooch's appearance is also similar to that of a mythical monster that the hero must outsmart or appease in order to gain entry. Visualising the subversive power of such character-types, Hooch emerges as a sheer force that governs the encounter as well as the composition of the shots, his body drawing, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, "lines of flight" across the frame (4) – streaks of energy, "beam[s] of light moving at ever-increasing speed" (187) that create an opportunity for a transformative interspecies opening between human and dog (Fig. 13).

[56] Examples using this trope include, among many others, *Léon: The Professional* (1994, dir. Luc Besson), where a solitary hitman (Jean Reno) reluctantly takes in a young girl (Natalie Portman), and forms an unlikely bond with her that softens his hardened exterior, or, the popular animation film, *Up* (2009, dir. Pete Docter), in which a grumpy old widower is forced to travel with an energetic young boy, who ultimately brings joy back into his life.

Fig. 13. Canine “lines of flight” (*Turner & Hooch* 00:08:29; 00:08:37)

This is how the intensity of such interspecies relatings makes its way into the narrative and visual world of this mainstream Hollywood film, which, in turn, foregrounds the fluidity of human–canine love arising from the dog’s unpredictable oscillation between tamed behaviour and feral life-forces. This unpredictability becomes markedly visible in the moment when Hooch jumps on Turner and holds him in a chokehold despite – as we learn – having known him for a long time. Although Amos, coming to Turner’s aid, assures the policeman that Hooch “didn’t even break the skin”, clarifying that “this dog loves ya, boy” (00:09:54), Hooch’s gaze may be seen both as loving and as inscrutable, and is, thus, slightly discomforting (Fig.

14) – an ambiguity characterising his expressions for the rest of the film. Moments like Turner and Hooch's first interaction thus subvert cinematic-generic clichés where the dog's love manifests itself through acts of unconditional loyalty and gentle, unambiguously adoring glances; they remind viewers of the potentially transgressive nature of canine affection, which, in reality, can be unclean and unclear as dogs often display baffling behaviours, are liable to cover people in dirt or drool, and their excited barks, growls, and jumps are prone to breaking the expectations of tender, comforting, "proper" love.[57] Hooch's affective intensities dance on the verge between adoration and aggression, evoking Georges Bataille's notion of eroticism, which describes transgressive phenomena that fuse physical intimacy with a sense of violence and thus "destroy the self-contained character of the participators" (*Erotism* 17). As Thomas Minguy puts it, for Bataille, eroticism constitutes a "realm in which the Self is no more, in which energies are ever moving and stability is impossible. The realm of animality; a night in which separated forms and beings are not, but in which everything is part of a continuity" (35). In *Turner & Hooch*, the dog's approaches – blurring the sharp separations between affection and aggression, spiritual and physical love, the roles of guardian, lover, companion, parent and child, as well as the distinctions between human and animal, self and other – open a state of continuity which destroys the human protagonist's solipsistic self and creates ever-shifting, elusive roles and intersubjective relatings.

Fig. 14. Inscrutable canine gaze (*Turner & Hooch* 00:09:52)

[57] The intensity of Hooch's greeting of Turner is, of course, exaggerated for the sake of comedic farce; in real life, growling, pinned back ears, and biting are signs of fear, anger, and aggression.

Marking the beginning of such a transformative experience, the scene of Turner and Hooch's first encounter is accompanied by the opening theme from Richard Strauss' symphonic poem *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, titled "Sunrise," where the trumpets' three-note crescendo, elevated by the grandiose sounds of timpani and bass – symbolising the rising sun and the awakening of a powerful, cosmic energy – acoustically enhances the charging dog's force already intensified by the use of slow-motion shots. At the same time, the lofty tone comically clashes with and thus highlights the mundane humour inherent in a dog's collision with a human. Furthermore, the music evokes the tone poem's iconic use in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, where it functions to signify mankind's evolutionary transformation from ape to man, then from man to Star-Child – a reference which is slightly recontextualised in this film to allude to the beginning of the coevolution between man and dog, which can itself be regarded as a love story unfolding in a historical dimension. On a smaller scale, Strauss' music signals the moment that transforms Turner's personal narrative of self-contained anthropocentrism into a redemptive interspecies love story, where the dog's affection will "revive the neurotically civilized Human" (Paton 28).

As Priscilla Paton notes, such films as *Turner & Hooch*, projecting tales of companionship between people and animals,

> rewrite a romance plot, in which lovers overcome obstacles and difference—a regenerative difference, it turns out—to rescue each other. The outsider, human or animal, challenges accepted mores and enables change within a community becoming dangerously inbred and self-replicating. In the liminal space created by an outsider-insider interaction, economies based on exploitation of people and resources are softened with a kinship paradigm, so affection rather than currency is exchanged. In happy endings, soul mates are united, and the oppressive forces that once rejected their union now accept them with enlightenment. (29)

Although *Turner & Hooch* does not depict a total interspecies union, which, as Paton adds, seems to be a fallacy (28), and, on a different note, the film has an unhappy ending where the dog dies in action (though leaving behind an identical-looking puppy and thus ensuring the continuation of the human–canine bond beyond the narrative), the eponymous characters do overcome differences in order to get along with and rescue each other. When Amos is killed, Turner takes in Hooch, who, if he wants to stay, needs to be tamed and groomed into an indoor

dog, at least to a minimal extent. Parallel to Hooch's transformation, Turner becomes a much more flexible and open person who is willing to learn from and love others: he gradually warms to the dirty, drooling dog, eventually solving Amos' murder by relying on the animal's acute sense of smell and, also thanks to Hooch, he gives in to the development of a romantic relationship with Emily, thus also finding human companionship. The "oppressive forces" rejecting these transformative unions – in this case, the internalised mechanisms of the anthropological machine that make Turner supress the threatening aspects of his animal nature such as vulnerability and playfulness – are replaced by the regenerative energies of interspecies love which crack the shell of the obsessively organised, clean, and self-contained human while also providing the dog with a new home and partner: affection is exchanged across species lines and brings about a paradigm of redemptive kinship, a process of becoming that, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, works against "the whole 'anthropocentric entourage' of the individuated subject" (qtd. in Baker 136).

However, the beginning of Turner and Hooch's relationship is characterised by distance, resistance, and the human's supposed control over the animal, which hinders the process of getting on together. This enforced discontinuity is reflected by visual elements that can be seen as both symbolic and concrete references to the divide and the assumed hierarchy between man and dog, for instance, the catchpole with which Turner restrains the frantically resisting Hooch and takes him to the vet clinic: the tool is used to minimise contact and maximise control over the animal – a relation that Turner proudly drags through the whole town as proof of his victory over the Beast (Fig. 15). Panning from Turner's arrogant face as he is sitting at the wheel of his clean, safe car, in the putative position of the hero who captured the "monster," to Hooch's muck-covered coat and his muscular, doubly chained neck, the camera highlights the stark contrast between the civilised, admirable Human and the wild, dirty, pitiable Animal, as well as the power imbalance that underpins their companionship from the outset. While the narrative ultimately moves toward intimacy and mutual care, these early images make visible the asymmetry of agency, mobility and bodily autonomy that shapes the characters' bond. Even if it foregrounds affective interspecies becoming, the film thus also sheds light on the fact that this relationship emerges through an act of capture and confinement, which implies broader ideologies and practices that naturalise human authority over companion animals.

Fig. 15. Assumed human–animal hierarchy (*Turner & Hooch* 00:25:13; 00:25:20)

The economy of division and supposed human authority is maintained throughout the part that portrays Hooch's first few days in Turner's home, a period during which the man continues to treat the dog as a Cartesian "beast machine," ignorant about the other's subjective inner life and agency and adamant in keeping clearly defined boundaries between spaces reserved for human life, in his head, the realm of order and civilisation, and spaces designated for the animal, in his view, the realm of disorder and wildness. Not knowing and not wanting to know anything about dogs, Turner ties up Hooch outside the house, and when the dog does not stop barking – probably due to separation anxiety and the distress of being in a new environment – he resorts to shouting: "What? What is it? What? What? If you're hungry, finish the hamburgers. Eat the buns. If you're not thirsty… You know, you're not touching the water, the orange juice, cranapple. What is it? What am I supposed to do? Make you a margarita?" (00:29:45-00:30:03). The sarcastic, syntactically and semantically simplified language suggests that the man considers the dog to be a mindless, insentient automaton whose desires can only be physical needs. The view of human exceptionalism comes to the fore in many other scenes, for example, when, after leaving Hooch in the car which he promptly begins to destroy, Turner starts yelling again only to change his reaction to an even more contemptuous tone: "What am I yellin' at you for? You're a dog. Don't understand a word I'm sayin'" (00:36:30-00:36:36). The falsity of such beliefs is made evident in the ways Hooch is attentively listening to Turner and responds with meaningful glances and growls; of the two characters, the animal proves to be the more intelligent, his gestures implying a willingness to communicate, adjust to and cooperate with the other from the beginning.

Meanwhile, Turner still wants to impose control over and boundaries around the animal; even though after a while he tires of Hooch's barking and lets the dog inside the house, he designates a room for the dog and declares that the rest of the place is his, not realising that he

has entered into a relationship that is also shaped by another subjectivity and agency. The uncontrollable "lines of becoming" between Turner and Hooch are represented by those moments when the dog shakes his head, sending spit around the policeman's pristine rooms – an abject visual manifestation of those fluid forces that gradually connect the characters in a mutually transformative bond (Fig. 16). Although Turner wishes to confine such forces to the space designated for the animal – "This is the room to do that [meaning the head-shaking and drooling]" (00:33:34), the dog's agency is uncontainable, which is symbolically illustrated by the scene where Hooch breaks through the door of the storage room like a battering ram and proceeds to turn the whole place upside down, covering everything in white foamy drool (Fig. 17).[58] On the one hand, Hooch's act in this sequence mirrors Turner's territorial behaviour, blurring the conceptual division between the human and the animal. On the other hand, it shows how dogs "bend places, practices and human desires and intensions to better reflect their 'point of view'" by "bringing in matter (mud, water and worse!)," or, in this case, leaving their own bodily matter in the home, thereby contributing to shaping what Cudworth calls "spaces of muddied living" (3), or, in Haraway's terms, "naturalcultural contact zones" (*When Species* 7). Displaying how Hooch disrupts the domestic order and hygiene of Turner's place, the sequence of destruction in this sense enacts a process of co-construction, revealing the futility of drawing a clear boundary between "human" and "animal" spaces at the sites of cohabitation. The dog brings his own – from a human perspective – strange lifeworld into the house, transforming it into an "uncanny home" (Oliver, "Earth Ethics" 29). Similarly, the canine actor also brings his own lifeworld, agency and bodily matter into the fiction; in this sense, the animal is not only subjected to human-centred representational and shooting practices that aim to construct the image of an unruly creature in this particular scene. The dog *is* an actual creature, whose behaviour, body, subjectivity and agency contribute to co-making the cinematic world into a "heterotopic space" (Cudworth 10), a hybrid site shaped both by anthropogenic constructions and creaturely realities. Beasley romping around the setting is a perfect example of how even mainstream Hollywood films – associated with anthropocentric stories and practices – function as multispecies homes that are co-created by other-than-human bodies, habits, and intentions.

[58] It is important to note that despite its symbolic significance within the narrative, this moment in the film could only come about as a result of rigorous training during which Beasley's stunt double was first taught to jump through paper, cellophane, and other softer materials before finally crashing into the hardboard door. Such moments, of which there are several in the film, remind us that on film sets, canine actors are always – at least to a certain extent – trained, directed, and controlled by humans (McLean 13).

Fig. 16. Liquid “lines of becoming” (*Turner & Hooch* 00:33:30)

Fig. 17. About to rearrange the shared space (*Turner & Hooch* 00:37:41)

Within the narrative, although he initially resists becoming a part of “muddied living” with the dog, Turner is quick to realise that, in order to get along together and find Amos’s killer, he needs to cooperate with Hooch, and for that he must, as Horowitz advises, attempt to familiarise himself with the unfamiliar perceptions, behaviours, and experiences of his new canine companion. For example, instead of trying to contain the dog within a designated room in the house and the counter-productive decision to leave him in the car while working, by

attentively watching Hooch's gestures and reactions, Turner is gradually learning how to live and work with the dog in a way that is beneficial for both of them. His growing flexibility and openness are demonstrated by the changes in his appearance – he does not wear a tie on the job anymore –, while his evolving sense of responsibility is illustrated by his increasingly frequent and pronounced expressions of concern for the dog's well-being. For instance, when the police officers seize a civilian's vehicle in order to chase down the murder suspect, Turner shouts at the car's owner, who jumps in the back seat with Hooch, to be careful not to slam the door on the dog's tail. The change in Turner's attitude towards Hooch is emphatically demonstrated by the scene at the end of the narrative where the policeman, once wishing to kill him, is now crying over the dead body of the dog, who has been shot while trying to save Turner's life. This ending clinches the development of reciprocal care between the characters, which requires sacrifice from both partners, something which "can only be achieved in *caritas*, because . . . [o]nly through love can man renounce his own will" (Arendt 91).[59]

The human's empathy towards the dog most saliently emerges in the scene that takes place after Hooch has successfully identified Amos' killer and Turner prepares for him a special dinner: when Hooch does not touch the delicacies, the man looks at him and asks "What? You're thinking about Amos?" (01:02:10); this time, rather than condescension, his questions signal genuine interest in the dog's inner life, followed by a contemplation about the difficulties Hooch must be experiencing due to the death of his former owner and his placement in an unfamiliar environment: a manifestation of empathy, which, by definition, refers to putting oneself in the other's place. The same scene also marks the first instance of Turner crossing over and lovingly stroking Hooch's ears – an intimate contact that contributes not only to an emotional but also physical continuity between human and animal. Acting on the dog's approving grunts, Turner continues the strokes which gradually turn into a playful tug of war, a chase around the living room, and eventually a wrestle on the floor, where Turner – whose repressed feral forces are activated in the game and, in Deleuzian terms, he is *becoming-animal* – reproduces the bite that Hooch gave him at the beginning of their bromance. These gestures thus introduce an element of reciprocal intimacy and uncontained physical intensity between the characters, outlining a kind of love that blurs the boundaries between self and other, human

[59] In *Love and Saint Augustine*, Hannah Arendt elaborates that, in Augustine's terms, "Man loves the world as God's creation; in the world the creature loves the world as God does" (93). In *Turner & Hooch*, the relation between the main characters embodies a biocentric version of *caritas*, wherein love extends to all vulnerable beings and entails selfless acts of care, which manifest in Turner's willingness to give up his former life to tend for Hooch and the latter's heroic act of giving up his own life for his new human companion.

and animal, adoration and aggression, as well as the distinctions between the categories of *agape*, *philia* and *eros*.

In the latter respect, the characters' interactions can be also seen to enact an interspecies version of queering romantic love, highlighting the implicit homoerotic contents of the buddy cop genre. From the 1980s, buddy cop movies have increasingly tended to heterosexualise their homosocial protagonists and project eroticism onto a displaced Other through off-screen ex-wives, girlfriends who die on-screen, spectacular displays of hypermasculine bodies and homophobic comedy (Fuchs 196; Lavigne 73) – in line with resurfacing hegemonic notions of masculinity, conservative family values and homophobia in the period (Fuchs 196; Mason 61).[60] Yet, as some scholars observed, the genre inherently explores homosocial bonding, offering "a chance to examine the negotiation of queer moments" (Mason 4) and subvert "the conservative reconstruction of masculinity" (8). The depiction of growing intimacy between Turner and Hooch taps into these inherent but often effaced homoerotic implications, outlining a relationship that not only blurs species lines but also "collapses intramasculine differences by effecting an uncomfortable sameness, a transgression of boundaries between self and other, inside and outside, legitimate and illicit" (Fuchs 194).[61] In other words, the film presents a strange love affair, which – demonstrating how human–canine relations can facilitate queer ontologies and aesthetics – disrupts "the homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy as much as it contests that of the human/nonhuman" (Giffney and Hird 8), creating in their stead a fluid unit of multispecies queerness.

The end of the film brings about the characters' mutually transformative union, as a result of which Hooch becomes a domestic pooch and a police dog tracking criminals while Turner transforms into a zoomorphic creature who enjoys nibbling dog biscuits. However, their adjustment to each other's lifestyles cannot be regarded as a form of merging through magical means: their closeness is a result of mundane efforts, opening towards the other with curiosity, attention, and what Shapiro calls "kinaesthetic empathy" ("Understanding Dogs" 185), that is, acknowledging and attuning to the other's emotional, cognitive and physical states and trying to get on together despite the fact that they will never be able to share the other's perceptions, feelings, and thoughts completely. In this sense, too, Turner and Hooch's love exudes a queer

[60] As Mason explains, such sentiments re-emerged partially in response to the AIDS epidemic, the rise of the Republican platform, an increase in anti-abortion rhetoric and campaigns against gay and lesbian demonstrations, representing a backlash against the political and social advancements of the 1960s (61).

[61] The criticism the film received for its dissonant jumble of the buddy cop formula, the man-and-his-dog film, and the romance – a shortcoming attributed to the fact that the screenplay was rewritten five times by five different writers – could be seen as a conservative reaction to its embrace of queer moments through the human–canine bond.

sensibility, which replaces "sameness with otherness as the criterion of inclusion" (Dell'Aversano 77). An important moment in this regard is when Turner is staking out a crime scene with Hooch and the latter starts shaking his head; contrasted with his previous reactions to such behaviour, Turner mimics the dog, in a manner similar to the concerned truffle hunter imitating his dog's behaviour in *The Truffle Hunters*, but here driven by – rather than worry – a curiosity about what head-shaking "does for" Hooch, only to make himself dizzy and conclude that "I guess you have to be a dog" in order to feel the positive effects of this habit (01:13:59). The love between the canine and the human protagonist thus lies not in total assimilation but in the *attempts* at understanding each other and accepting the meaningfulness of the other's actions despite the differences. This is, in other words, not a straightforward love, but a conditional, creaturely one, an ongoing process of "becoming-with-the-other," which is built just as much on continuities as discontinuities. For such a type of love to come across the screen, the actors also needed to approach each other with openness, sensitivity, and respect. As Hanks recalled in an interview, highlighting the stakeout scene, "the whole thing was about, whatever this dog does, I react to" (Hanks n. pag.) – a demanding task that required paying attention to the other and resulted in a special chemistry between both the actors and the characters.

The depiction of the dog's gaze also plays an important part in ensuring that the love between Turner and Hooch is not a projection of narcissistic anthropomorphism used for the conceptual and emotional elevation of the Human, but a relationship of equal partners whose subjective experiences and agentic powers are similarly taken into account both within the diegesis and in relation to the representation. What this means is that, although the film occasionally constructs Hooch as a cute-looking pet whose puppy eyes serve to emotionally move the spectator, for instance, when the dog's eyes project the infamous "I didn't do anything" or "Please let me in"-look (Fig. 18, top row), his gaze more frequently appears to be unreadable, which requires both the human character and the viewer to pay attention to what the dog might think or feel rather than focusing on the feelings that his face generates in us. For example, in the scene where Turner considers the possibility of Hooch missing Amos, the dog's gaze expresses genuine, non-mimetic vulnerability while also leaving both the human character and the viewer uncertain about the canine character's and the actor's actual thoughts and emotions (Fig. 18, second row). Another close-up shows Hooch from the side in semi-darkness, slightly lit from above so that the rims of his eyes and his iris have a golden glow (Fig. 18, bottom). This aesthetic presentation highlights the affective connotations of Hooch's gaze toward Turner, who is finally ready to cooperate with the creature he initially finds repulsive.

Considering that Hooch, at least according to Amos, had been fond of Turner already before his former owner was murdered and the policeman took him in, this shot indicates that the bonding between the human and the dog is initiated by the latter, thereby highlighting canine agency. The dog character's motivations for befriending a "neat freak" policeman, however, remain elusive. Neither can we be sure that Beasley's apparently affectionate glances are addressed to the human actor playing Turner or to his handler off-screen. Although the shot focalises the dog's puppy eyes, its affective power derives as much from the constructed image as from the pupil's bottomless blackness against the iris's golden glow. The inscrutability of the canine gaze ensures an interspecies exchange – both within and across the representation – that remains respectful towards the animal's subjectivity and agency, supporting the argument that even Hollywood films incorporate the uncontrollable, largely unfathomable side of dogs, who therefore emerge as hybrid entities combining techno-cultural constructs and their own creaturely realities.

Fig. 18. Hooch's "puppy eyes" look used for emotional manipulation (top row); and images causing uncertainty about the dog's inner world (second row, bottom image) (*Turner & Hooch* 00:42:56; 00:44:31; 01:02:13; 01:02:46; 00:32:37)

The film also highlights the dog's will through narrative means. For example, Hooch actively resists Turner's attempts to control him through barking, howling and, when the man tries to drag him into the vet clinic with the catchpole he firmly plants his feet in the ground and refuses to move, only to barge into the building after the vet's female dog, with Turner stuck in the dog door (Fig. 19). Symbolically, it is also important that Turner ends up on the floor and shouts threats at the dog from there while Hooch is standing a couple of steps above him: the reversed spatial positioning of the characters implies the collapse of the species hierarchy the man assumed when deciding to take in the dog. Such moments suggest that Hooch enters into his relationship with Turner on his own terms and that his love and cooperation cannot be taken for granted. Meanwhile, Hooch befriends Emily's collie called Camille, who eventually becomes his mate. The scene of the dogs' first meeting – Hooch enthusiastically running after the bitch and dragging Turner with himself through the door – shows that, at this point, the dog is more interested in his conspecifics than his new 'master,' undermining the fantasy about dogs' unconditional love for humans. Furthermore, although – like in *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* – the relationship between Hooch and Camille could be seen as an anthropomorphic projection that mirrors the human romance, the film's narrative also documents the development of the dogs' love for each other, which they express through typically canine behaviours, for example, playfully chasing each other on the beach. By doing so, the film extends the notion of creaturely love to relationships that evolve between nonhuman

animals, which, as Pettman observes, can be just as 'intelligent' as the love developing between humans, even if expressed in very different ways (8).[62]

Fig. 19. Reversed hierarchy (*Turner & Hooch* 00:26:25)

By simultaneously highlighting the creaturely aspects of the human–canine bond, the physical aspects of the human characters' relationship, and the 'intelligent' bonding between the canine characters, *Turner & Hooch* levels "human," "nonhuman," and interspecies forms of love, while also highlighting the dog's agency in forming various intersubjective relations. Although the film presents several love stories, in accordance with the primary focus of the buddy cop genre (the unlikely partnership of two contrasting personalities), it is the human–canine bromance that takes centre stage, generating the greatest change both within the portrayed world and in the representational traditions of classical Hollywood cinema around dogs. Blurring the distinction between the figure of "the faithful dog" and "the despicable dog," *Turner & Hooch* demonstrates the transgressive and thus transformative nature of human–

[62] It is not only posthumanist philosophies such as Pettman's that have destabilised the distinction and hierarchy between "human" and "nonhuman" forms of love. For instance, ethologists and neuroscientists have found many similarities between human and canine equivalents of love. In his research using MRI scans on dogs, Gregory Berns discovered a part in the canine brain called *caudate nucleus*, which, like the corresponding part in the human brain, is responsible for the feeling of anticipation implying that dogs are also capable of desire transcending mere sexual drives (12). With regard to behavioural similarities, Marc Bekoff says that in dogs, social bonding, passion and devotion are the evidence that they can also fall in love: "If you define love as a long-term commitment—meaning they seek one another out when they're apart, they're happy when they're reunited, they protect one another, they feed one another, they raise their children together—then, of course, non-human animals love each other" ("Dogs Can Feel" n.pag .).

canine intimacy, as the creature who easily crosses between the cute, friendly pet and the wild, uncontainable animal develops a particularly powerful bond with his new human companion. At the same time, the film demonstrates how dogs epitomise the hybridisation of artifice and creaturely realities in live-action cinema; although Hooch is constructed as an unruly, in many ways child-like, but ultimately loyal character who changes the life of the protagonist – thereby also reflecting essentially Euro-American, white, middle-class sensibilities around the human–canine bond –, and the dog actors were trained and instructed to act out scenarios that manifest this image, the animals' genuine energies, experiences and actions complete the constructions with a creaturely-phenomenological dimension, showing that even Hollywood films can be seen as an amalgamation of fiction and fact, abstraction and embodiment, human(ist) intentions and other-than-human worlds.

Mediated "Becoming-With" in *My Dog Tulip*

As discussed in the introduction, in developing her theory of "zoomorphic realism," Pick asserts that, in their own ways, all cinematic practices are capable of engaging with both shared and subjective creaturely lifeworlds. This comprehensive notion of zoomorphic cinema is perfectly exemplified by the animation film *My Dog Tulip*, which, relying on the aesthetic and technological tools of its own representational tradition, also captures the dog's oscillation between a familiar, friendly pet and an unfamiliar creature, thus foregrounding the ambivalence characterising the everyday affective relationships between people and dogs. Specifically, in their adaptation of J. R. Ackerley's 1956 memoir of the same title,[63] Sandra and Paul Fierlinger use a playful, metamorphic, doodle-like animation style to portray the strange love affair between the writer's fictional alter ego and his dog Tulip – a real relationship with all the physical mess and emotional confusion that is integral to living with a dog. Reflecting on the book, Haraway notes that this is not a story about complete interspecies harmony, but "about meeting the other in all the fleshly detail of a mortal relationship" (*Companion Species* 34). In my analysis, I shall argue that the visual style of the film plays a crucial role in foregrounding the material and messy nature of this particular human–canine bond: the Fierlingers' hand-drawn animation style combines anthropomorphising and de-anthropomorphising elements, thereby recreating how Ackerley simultaneously perceived his dog as an ideal partner who, in his words, offered him "constant, single-hearted, incorruptible, uncritical devotion" (01:17:03), and an utterly alien creature, whose differences posed various obstacles in the way of achieving a perfect rapport. More graphically than *Turner & Hooch*, *Tulip* highlights the subjective, from a human perspective often alienating aspects of the dog's behaviour, thus animating, in both senses of the word, a radically ambivalent type of love where "the fleeting moments of getting things right" are constantly upended by "comic and tragic mistakes" (Haraway, *Companion Species* 35), and the sense of connection is disrupted by a recurring uncanny feeling. As it will be discussed, this oscillating representation of the human–canine bond is shaped both by the dog-related sensibilities and intersectional identity of the original story's author, the cultural, personal and artistic background of the filmmakers, and the particular features of animation, which, although often associated with artifice, also holds the power to lay bare the realities of multispecies companionship.

[63] Apart from *My Dog Tulip*, the adaptation also draws upon Ackerley's other two biographical novels, *We Think the World of You* (1960) and *My Father and Myself* (1968).

In animating an imperfect version of "becoming-with-the-other," it is important that the Fierlingers' style is in fact very different from the cartoonish aesthetics of popular American animation movies, which tend to simplify the lively realities of nonhuman animals as well as the complexity of their relationships with humans. In Berger's terms, the animals in such films are exposed to anthropomorphisation and anthropocentric narratives to such an extent that they become "transformed into human puppets" (15), "prisoners of human/social situations" (19), or, as Malamud argues, the actual, living creatures are replaced by "simulacrum-animals" that only vaguely resemble their real-life counterparts (74). Both authors regard the Disney industry's productions as the most harmful examples within this tradition, depriving animals of their species-specific identities. As Malamud explains, the Disney cartoons'

> visual iconography is simple, funny, corny … It is colorful and eclectic, though not in ways that very closely reiterate the colors or activities of actual animals. The cartooned-animal aesthetic, popularized in Disney, Warner Brothers, and other studio workshops in the early- to mid-twentieth century, created a common and compelling style of animal representation that served to displace actual representational consciousness of animals. (27-28)

In other words, the visual style of Disney cartoons undermines the possibility of meeting flesh-and-blood animals on the screen; instead, viewers encounter substitutes whose purpose is either to express human qualities or to simply entertain the audience with amusing, animal(-like) images. In contrast, the aesthetics of the Fierlingers' works resembles the illustrations in the European figural-linear tradition, the main features of which include the use of less vivid colours, a childlike manipulation of proportions and depth, and the playful, doodle-like, metamorphic treatment of contours and shapes (Flower 173), which create an effect of constant movement and change.[64] Their style also calls to mind the artistic credo of Paul Klee, who repeatedly argued and demonstrated through his works that the processes of formation and growth are more important than forms themselves: "Form-giving is movement, action. Form-

[64] Among others, the animations of the Fierlingers – who moved to the United States from former Czechoslovakia – show similarities with the style of other European emigrés such as the Romanian-born American artist Saul Steinberg, who is best known for his pen-and-ink drawings for *The New Yorker*, covering a wide range of subjects from mundane situations to politics and projecting a playful, doodle-like, often surreal quality reminiscent of Dadaism while also maintaining an acute observation of reality. As Dean Flower observes, in *Tulip*, the Fierlingers also pay homage to James Thurber (173), another artist who mainly worked for *The New Yorker*, and, specifically his "man and wife cartoons," which offer witty yet insightful reflections on the gender roles and marital dynamics of mid-20th-century American society through a series of satirical illustrations about the domestic life of a married couple, drawn with sketchy, spontaneous, unfinished lines constituting what he himself called "scrawls".

giving is life" (*The Nature of Nature* 269).[65] Ultimately, the visual worlds created by the Fierlingers align their works with arthouse animation, which is very different from mainstream commercial cartoons, emphasising aesthetic experimentation, personal expression, and unconventional storytelling. Drawing from, among others, modernist and surrealist art, as well as experimental film traditions, arthouse animators such as Yuri Norstein and Jan Švankmajer often embrace non-traditional, abstract or handcrafted visual styles rather than polished, computer generated imagery; use techniques like stop-motion, rotoscoping and collage, prioritising raw, textured, or sketch-like aesthetics over smooth forms and motion; and place an emphasis on mood, atmosphere, as well as subjective emotional, psychic, and sensory experiences rather than action-driven plots, thus being particularly capable of animating the non-teleological processes, potentialities, and powers shaping our everyday experiences.[66] An animation aesthetics that enacts the generative and formative forces of life (Klee, *The Thinking Eye* 76), those intensities that Deleuze and Guattari call "lines of becoming," can aptly visualise the energies shaping the constantly shifting, relational dynamics between dogs and humans.[67] One could also call it a queer aesthetics that not only reflects but also facilitates the fluidity characterising Joe and Tulip's affective relationship. As Hayward reminds us, the terms "queer" and "trans-" can refer to anything that surpasses fixed categories, norms and impositions, "whether empirical, rhetorical, or aesthetic" ("More Lessons" 68).

The animated world of *Tulip* is dominated by images that are drawn with ever-shifting shapes, fleeing lines, and colours that bleed into one another, thereby visualising bodies "not in terms of their forms but in terms of what they can do" (Deleuze and Guattari qtd. in Baker 136-137), in other words, in terms of the movements, velocities, and affects they exude and through which they come into contact with and stimulate changes in others. For instance, in the sequence depicting Tulip running towards Joe (Fig. 20.1) – which evokes the sequence of Hooch charging towards Turner –, the sketchy, spontaneous lines do not connect different points but run between them, some of them shooting out completely unanchored in the middle of an empty

[65] The Fierlingers' methods also sharply contrast the mass production techniques of big American studios. As Flower explains, "their work has remained small scale, literally a cottage industry" (173), as they work at home, in separate rooms but close cooperation, Paul doing the line drawings and Sandra the layering and colouring, which allows them to "draw" and "paint" on a computer screen and watch how the results develop on the monitor.

[66] For a detailed discussion of the techniques and aesthetics of arthouse animation, see, for example, the chapter titled "Alternatives in animation production" in Maureen Furniss's *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics* (pp. 29-59). For an exploration of the underlying (e.g. Deleuzian) theories of experimental animation, see Ryan Pierson's *Figure and Force in Animation Aesthetics*.

[67] In this sense, the animation style of *Tulip* enacts not only the relational ontology outlined by Haraway, but also Tim Ingold's ontology of animism, which, drawing on Klee as well as Deleuze and Guattari, "assigns primacy to processes of formation as against their final products, and to flows and transformations of materials as against states of matter" (214).

space, others emerging as part of the dog's contours before running beyond them into the background or mixing with the fill colours, which themselves seem to be sprawling blobs of paint that only roughly delineate the dog's light brown coat and dark mane. The lines, layers, and colours do not follow the rules of figuration to create a well-defined form; they are driven by those streaks of movement, speed and energy that animate Tulip when running towards her owner. This intensity organises the whole image along a diagonal vector that even seems to bend elements that do not organically belong to the dog, such as the curved lines in the right bottom corner, which might represent blades of grass swayed by Tulip's dynamic movement, although in non-figurative terms, they are parts of the composition only to illustrate how the canine body affects its environment.

Fig. 20. Relational intensities (*My Dog Tulip* 00:08:31; 00:52:08; 00:21:49; 00:24:51)

Other images portraying Tulip and Joe's interactions also outline a diagonal vector of intensity, for example, when – driven maybe by an urge to express her love for her owner or maybe to find out what he ate for breakfast – Tulip jumps up to lick Joe's face (Fig. 20.2). In such cases, the crudely drawn, trembling lines of human and dog running parallel to each other follow the physical force and affective power of the animal's gesture, which – albeit its motivation remains unclear – elicits a moment of "partial connection" (Haraway, *Companion Species* 25), when partners belonging to different species co-constitute one vibrant entity that – although not granting complete rapport – significantly corrodes the clear-cut contours of the individual subjects. Besides the sketchy lines, the slanted composition of such images (also

salient in Fig. 20.3) contributes to reflecting how Tulip's interactions with Joe activate a process of becoming that destabilises the rigid boundaries between human and animal, self and other. The process of dissolving borders is explicitly visualised in scenes where Joe strokes Tulip and the latter – with a gesture that has been proven to be a sign of trust and affection in dogs (Stregowski n. pag.) – pushes her weight against the man's legs (Fig. 20.3), seeking comfort in the other's closeness, and thus enacting what Pettman calls a "physical and metaphysical *leaning toward*, in the hope of recognition, encounter, and exchange" (7). The forces of this act yet again draw a diagonal line across the image, evoking the intensity that connects the man and the dog in a mutually comforting interaction, while the blobs and blurs that make up Tulip's figure not only provide a sensory manifestation of the softness of her fur but also capture the state of mellowness when a dog allows someone to pet her; the fur's cloud-like colouring and the partial erasure of the contours of the man's hand recreate the moment when, in the hope of encounter and exchange, owner and dog lean towards and partially absorb one another. Even in scenes depicting moments of rest, for example, when Joe and Tulip are lying on the bed next to each other (Fig. 20.4), one can detect this process of cohering, of co-constituting a multispecies unit by showing a mutual desire to be in the other's proximity, which the Fierlingers realise through blurring the contours and partially incorporating the figures in each other's compositional planes. In short, in all these images, the bodies of man and dog are not visualised as fixed, individuated forms, but in terms of "movement and rest, slowness and speed" (Deleuze and Guattari 254), that is, as interacting, mutually affecting, constantly changing formulations with fleeing lines and fuzzy contours.

The animation style of *Tulip* is also capable of bringing together human and dog in a "strange kinship" because it can simultaneously enmesh species-specific features, and, with its use of toned down colours and simplistic but perceptive rendition of figures, capture the irreducible essence of individual species and animals. For example, the sepia-coloured flashback sequence that recreates the day when Joe adopted Tulip from her former owners – a working-class family who kept the dog in their tiny backyard and seldom took her out – establishes Tulip as a full-fledged subject, whose lively self-world exerts an animating effect on the human protagonist as well as their relationship. Amid the uniform terraced houses, the piles of tools and coal in the backyard, the clothes hanging limp on the washing line, and the mechanically moving working-class couple, all of which appear as a static, simplified sketch devoid of life and emotional content, Tulip's figure is characterised by liveliness, vibrancy, and the continuous, miniscule rearrangements of its contours (Fig. 21.1). Her figure exudes a sense of distinctive dogness paired with the creaturely excitement of being set free from confinement.

The dog's energy is also transferred to Joe, who cannot help following Tulip's sudden movements so that the lines of his figure also slightly rearrange themselves with each fictional pull on the leash (Fig. 21.2, 21.3). Although less conspicuously, Tulip's form is also affected by that of Joe: when, on their way home, the dog occasionally stops and looks up at the man, or when Joe gives the frightened animal a reassuring snuggle, the lines of the dog's figure settle into stillness (Fig. 21.4). This sequence, too, thus activates mutual transformations, molecular becomings, processes that are shaped by the bodily and affective relatings between man and dog, demonstrating how animation films also bear the traces of embodied interspecies interactions, which we can detect with the help of what Hayward calls "fingeryeyes" – the special optic-haptic perception with which we can sense the technological imprints of entangled multispecies sensoria. At the same time, the sequence also shows that, using tools within their means, animation films are able to foreground the affective forces of human–canine bonding, thereby contributing to shaping the interspecies unit which, in turn, transforms into an anthrokynematic assemblage.

Fig. 21. The animated becoming of Tulip and Joe (*My Dog Tulip* 00:05:07; 00:05:36; 00:05:44; 00:06:42)

The film also employs visual and acoustic tools to enhance the affective aspects of Joe and Tulip's interactions, which further contribute to evoking a continual intermingling between human and dog rather than total assimilation. In this light, the opening scene, rather than simply *recreating* the events leading up to Ackerley's return from work, aims to *perform* the subjective emotional imprint of what the owner and the dog respectively experience at the moment of their

reunion. The sequence begins with lights, ringing phones and popping flash bulbs: the images and sounds of a press conference at the BBC headquarters. Joe, however, cannot wait to get back to Tulip; he sneaks out from the office into the London traffic, steps right onto a red double-decker, then changes to a taxi which can take him home quicker to his beloved dog in Putney. Meanwhile, the fictitious camera cuts to Tulip who is looking longingly in the direction from which she expects Joe. From her soft whining and impatient gestures the viewers can suspect that Ackerley is close; indeed, he is now entering the building, jumps up the stairs and as he reaches the flat, Tulip bursts out of the door, greeting him with effusive joy (Fig. 22). To a certain extent, this sequence is coloured by Ackerley's imagination, as it depicts the dog as a princess in a fairy tale, longing for the return of her prince. In Ackerley's original narratives, one driving force is the fact that he sees Tulip as a princess imprisoned by her working-class family, and himself as the hero rescuing the "damsel in distress." An openly declared homosexual and therefore a target of society's contempt, Ackerley probably projected his own frustration on his dog, both in real life and in his biographical texts, and this transferential dynamic also seeps into the adaptation, where Tulip replaces Joe's "Ideal Friend", whom he never found. Although casting her as an imprisoned princess, the opening sequence does not completely anthropomorphise the dog, because it also helps imagine what it is like for her to be waiting for her master; unable to enter the dog's inner world, it encourages the viewers to be aware of her subjective experiences.[68] By alternating Ackerley's and Tulip's viewpoints, using a style of animation that evokes movement, speed, and affect, and accompanying the images with an up-tempo jazz music that builds up to a crescendo, the scene enacts the parallel emotional states of man and dog longing for each other's company and the affective forces that are exchanged between them when reuniting after hours of separation. As Flower notes, "[t]he Fierlingers use no words for this exuberant prelude; its speed and momentum, supple, richly saturated colors, and—especially when Tulip appears—its leaping and swirling lines are irresistible. And so is the music, all a seamless continuity" (170). The scene thus provides a visual and acoustic manifestation of those uncontainable lines of desire that pull both man and dog into each other's proximity and which, upon their meeting, unite them in a vibrating multispecies entity.

[68] This sequence is similar to the opening scene of the popular animated film *The Secret Life of Pets* (2006, dir. Chris Renaud), which – although overtly anthropomorphising and cutefying its animal characters – also gives a glimpse into what pets, depending on their species identities and personal temperaments, might be thinking, feeling, and doing while their owners are away. For instance, the protagonist dog, a Jack Russel Terrier named Max, strongly attached to the young woman who took him in from the streets, plants himself in front of the door every morning, waiting for Katie's return with suppressed excitement – a realistic representation of dogs suffering from separation anxiety in their guardians' absence.

Fig. 22. The affective pull between man and dog (*My Dog Tulip* 00:00:42; 00:01:37; 00:02:25; 00:02:28)

A similar effect is evoked by the images which depict the kisses exchanged between Joe and Tulip, for example, in the scene where, cross with the dog for her unruly behaviour at the vet, Ackerley biffs Tulip's nose and, in what looks like a gesture of appeasement, the dog licks the man's face (Fig. 23). The anger triggered by the dog's behaviour and the emotional turmoil caused by the master's blow are animated through a rapid succession of images composed of rough lines giving the impression of being aggressively scratched on the digital drawing board, which are followed by images of Tulip bending backwards towards Ackerley, the spontaneous lines of her body driven by a sudden urge to forgive and/or beg for the owner's forgiveness. In contrast to the violent intensity of these images, the sequence showing Tulip's conciliatory licks animates the parallel calming down of tempers – the dog's arising mellowness and the owner's regret and relief upon the dog's forgiveness – through a sustained composition with a diagonal vector of energy running in a different direction to signal the changing trajectory of the interaction's emotional charge. The fluid, continuous, constantly vibrating lines of the dog's snout and the man's face etch out one amorphous shape – the visual manifestation of human and dog coming together in an amorous, continuously changing unit, while the translucency of the colour on Tulip's tongue and lack of contour on Ackerley's nose effectively visualise the momentary dissolution of species and subject boundaries.

Fig. 23. Dissolving species and subject boundaries (*My Dog Tulip* 00:20:45-00:20:50)

As Lynn Turner observes, reflecting on Carolee Schneemann's daily photographic portraits of her morning kisses with her cats – comprising two sequences titled *Infinity Kisses I* (1981-1988) and *Infinity Kisses II* (1990-1998) –, the interspecies kiss "solicits an undecidability into the divisions between subjects and species once thought to be decisive" (63). Documenting how her pets Cluny and Vesper "ritualistically, ardently kiss [her] on the mouth" each morning (Schneemann 264), Schneeman "opens herself to the risk of another signatory, naming herself *as a signed body*, as recipient of the repeated actions of Cluny and Vesper" (Turner 67), exposing her body as a site of simultaneously everyday and ecstatic moments of interspecies bodily entanglement, or, in Haraway's terms, the material-semiotic traces of "a nasty developmental infection called love" (*Companion Species* 3). Without completely "dissolving those who kiss into a pool of sameness" (Turner 80), Schneemann's images produce figures "of co-constitution and of reproduction exceeding both species as transfections pass – or communicate – through viral vectors" (Turner 72). While the photographs graphically highlight the erotic aspects of such fleshy encounters, the artist's ink sketches prepared for the wall installation of *Infinity Kisses I* (Fig. 24) provide a dynamic presentation of those material-emotional vectors that connect the woman and her cats in one passionate unit. Closely resembling the subject and style of these sketches, the images of Tulip's licks on Ackerley's nose visually enact the lines of emotional energy and bodily transfection that – if not fully but

– significantly dissolve self–other and human–animal boundaries when members of different species kiss.

Fig. 24. Carolee Schneemann, an image from *Infinity Kisses I*; sketched storyboard for the wall installation (1981-1988)

Similarly to Hooch's overpowering overtures towards Turner, the images of Tulip and Joe's kisses also emphatically evoke Bataille's notion of eroticism, wherein the partners' interactions create a "continuance of being beyond the confines of the self" (*Erotism* 17), a realm in which "energies are ever moving and stability is impossible" (Minguy 35). In other words, the love that unfolds between Joe and Tulip is also visualised as a transgressive love affair, whose constantly shifting intensities not only dissolve the conceptually imposed boundaries between self and other, human and animal, but also question the rigid distinctions between different aspects and manifestations of love as they evoke the desire to be reunited with a long-lost friend or family member as well as the sense of homely intimacy resulting from long-term cohabitation, resemble the emotional intimacy normally associated with romantic love, and also show similarities with the fervency of erotic passion. The hybrid nature of human–canine love is also detectable in Ackerley's original texts, for example, the passage in *My Father and Myself* where the writer describes the eagerness with which he longs to return to his beloved Tulip: "my single desire was to get back to her, to her waiting love and unstaling welcome. So urgent was my longing every day to rejoin her that I would often take taxis part-way, even the whole way, home to Putney from my London office, rather than endure the

dawdling of buses and the rush-hour traffic jams in Park Lane. I sang with joy at the thought of seeing her" (169).[69]

Although such passages confirm that the dog in many ways became a substitute figure for the urban gay childless writer – a fact that, as will be discussed later, also significantly shapes the film adaptation's portrayal of the human–canine bond – Ackerley is quick to highlight that his love for Tulip is unlike the feelings he has experienced in or expected from inter-human relationships. As the author explains in the original text, also quoted in the film, "[Tulip] offered me what I had never found in my sexual life, constant, single-hearted, incorruptible, uncritical devotion" (169), which eventually drove him to abandon his life-long, emotionally exhausting, sexually frustrating, repeatedly disappointing quest to find the "Ideal Friend:"

> From the moment [Tulip] established herself in my heart and home, my obsession with sex fell wholly away from me. The pubs I had spent so much of my time in were never revisited . . . I never prowled the London streets again, nor had the slightest inclination to do so. On the contrary, whenever I thought of it, I was positively thankful to be rid of it all, the anxieties, the frustrations, the wastage of time and spirit. It was as though I had never wanted sex at all, and that this extraordinary long journey of mine which had seemed a pursuit of it had really been an attempt to escape from it. I was just under fifty when this animal came into my hands, and the fifteen years she lived with me were the happiest of my life. (169)

Ackerley's reflections suggest that, although his love towards Tulip shared the affective forces with different forms of inter-human love, it was also fulfilling in its own ways to such an extent that it overwrote his personal, socially enforced desire to find an ideal (sexual) partner. His words emphatically evoke Hayward's concept of "trans," which she uses to describe processes where "something that starts one place . . . ends in another place" ("More Lessons" 68), *trans*cending fixed forms and categories, and thus serving as a helpful "trope for reworking the relationality of male and female, of human and animal" (69), and, specific to Ackerley and

[69] As Ackerley notes with his characteristic cynicism, the radical transformations that Tulip induced in him even led some of his friends to suspect that he had sexual intercourse with the dog, which never seriously entered his mind: "What little I did for her in her burning heats—slightly more than I admitted in *My Dog Tulip*—worried me in my ignorance of animal psychology, in case, by gratifying her clear desires, which were all addressed to me, I might excite and upset her more than she was already excited and upset" (170).

Tulip's relationship, also reshaping our assumptions about "love" and "desire" as well as the distinctions between "lovers" and "companions" of a different kind. As Ackerley and Tulip's case demonstrates, human–canine love is radically queer, replacing restrictive categories with something more fluid and transformative. Still, as Ackerley reminds us, the metamorphoses incited by interspecies love do not entail complete merging: one of the aspects that makes his love for Tulip uniquely intimate is the dog's "significant otherness" (Haraway, *Companion Species* 34), which compels him to step out of the world of his own fantasies and try to get along with a flesh-and-blood creature who actually needs him.

The film visualises the transformative yet differential love between Tulip and Ackerley discussed in the source texts not only through an animation style that favours sketchy lines, unstable forms and richly saturated colours but also through playfully shifting between anthropomorphic and species-specific representation when it comes to portraying the canine character. An important scene in this regard is the one which provides a visual adaptation of the first chapter of *My Dog Tulip*, recounting Ackerley's problem of finding a vet for his nervous dog. As a doctor – proving to be more well-informed in canine psychology than the others Ackerley previously visited – eventually enlightens Joe, the problem with Tulip is that "She is in love with you, so life is full of worries for her. In order to protect you, she wants to be free, so she doesn't like people touching her" (00:22:15-00:22:24). In this sequence, the hand-drawn animation simultaneously anthropomorphises Tulip, who at one point appears as a woman gazing longingly up to Joe, thereby envisioning a romantic, heterosexual, human relationship, and de-anthropomorphises her, as the female figure turns back into an Alsatian bitch, deconstructing the anthropocentric, heteronormative love fantasy (Fig. 25). These self-reflexive changes between anthropomorphic and species-specific images reflect Ackerley's growing sensitivity towards the subjective experiences of his dog, outlining the development of a mundane, material relationship which is based on the condition of paying attention to the other's gestures "without searching for comforting commonalities" (Ruddick 122), and results in a dynamics where the animal is treated as a full-fledged subject rather than simply an anthropomorphised human substitute.

As many critics have noted, Ackerley was particularly keen on learning about the canine psyche and physiology while also becoming increasingly aware of the challenges of bridging the gap between human and dog minds – a sensibility which rendered his biographical works about his relationship with Queenie a unique combination of witty fantasy and empathetic

realism rather than a simple case of sentimental anthropomorphism.[70] As Paul Fierlinger said in an interview, Ackerley writes about his dog "in such unsentimental colors and understands the dog as an animal, not as a person" (Krieger 170). In this sense, Ackerley's writing largely influenced the tone and style of the Fierlingers' film adaptation – described by Judith Krieger as "animated documentary" and by Paul himself as "cartoony realism" (177) – which, unlike live-action films, is capable of at once visualising abstract thoughts, flights of fancy and the facts of creaturely (co)existence.[71] This style has also been shaped by the Fierlingers' experiences as European emigrés, fleeing their domineering parents and totalitarian country (the former Czechoslovakia) to be able to make independent animation films and live peacefully in America with their dogs, whose presence had simultaneously filled their works with a sense of comfort and a humour arising from interspecies misunderstanding.[72]

In *Tulip*, this ambiguity manifests itself in, among other elements, the above-discussed visual metamorphoses (Tulip turning from a human female into an Alsatian bitch and vica versa), which ultimately signals the paradoxical nature of how we perceive, relate to, sympathise with, speak about and represent dogs, switching back and forth between inevitably anthropomorphising them and correctively considering their own, largely foreign perspectives, experiences, and behaviours. As it was elaborated in the introduction, these partially resist our understanding, our projections, and our representational practices, giving way to essentially ambiguous human–canine relationships characterised by an uncanny mixture of familiarity and unfamiliarity. This ambiguity is also foregrounded by the Fierlingers' film through acoustic means, as Ackerley's retrospective monologue about his developing bond with Tulip, conveyed through the voiceover narration, as well as the diegetic dialogues between Joe and other characters, are frequently interrupted by the dog's barking, which remains untranslatable to human language, retaining its subversive foreignness. In other words, the strangeness of the relationship between Ackerley and his dog – arising from the latter's phenomenological, behavioural and ontological differences – has also made its way into the film, which – reflecting the actual connection's ambivalence – becomes a heterogenic space simultaneously shaped by human and canine ways of being in, making sense of, and communicating with the world.

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[70] See, for example, Kiang 131; McIntyre 201; Schine n. pag.

[71] As Paul explained in the same interview, this is why *My Dog Tulip* would not have worked well as a live-action film: apart from the costs and efforts necessary for training a dog, "there are a lot of things that Ackerley says and thinks about that can only be successfully portrayed, in my opinion, with animation" (Krieger 174).

[72] For example, in *Still Life with Animated Dogs* (2001), Fierlinger recounts his life through the relationships he formed with his dogs, presenting not only moments of sensory attunement but also scenes of failed communication, such as when a woman futilely calls "Molly, Molly" to her dog in the park, and by doing so numbs her companion's attention to her cries.

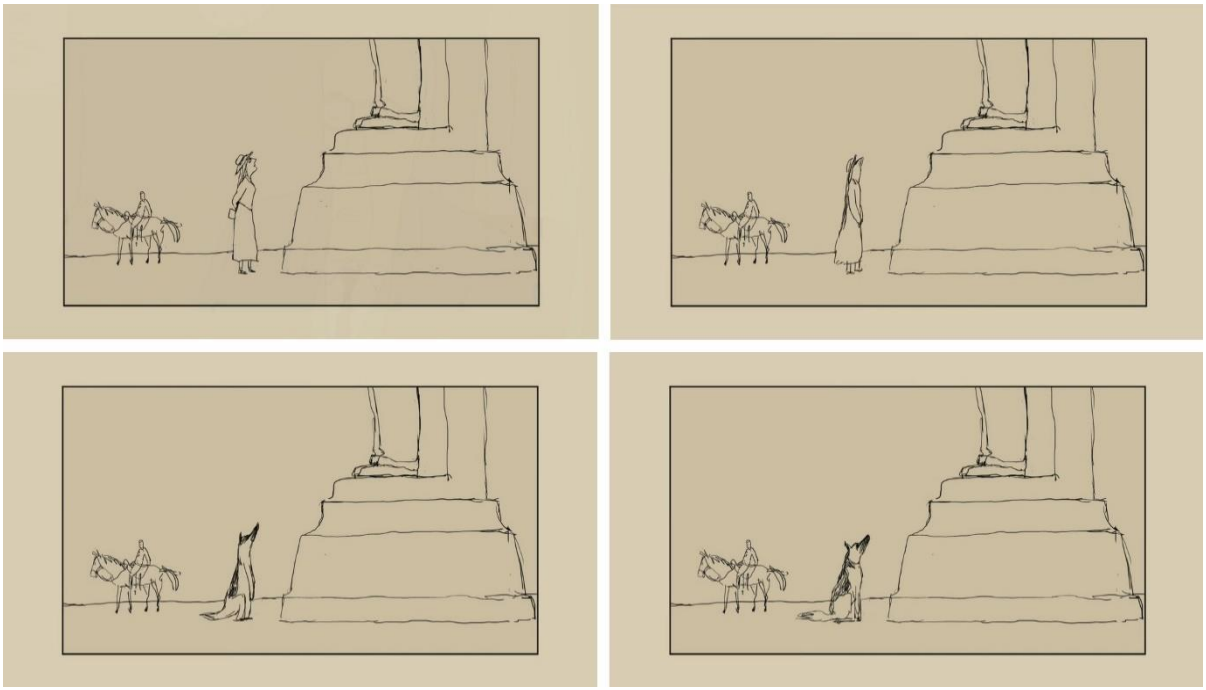

Fig. 25. Metamorphosis from fantasy character to real-life creature (*My Dog Tulip* 00:22:06-00:22:08)

Drawing attention to the comical effects of anthropomorphisation also serves as a means of foregrounding the complex intersubjective relationship between Tulip and Joe. In the scene following Tulip's adoption, the voiceover narrator (Christopher Plummer) cites the part from *My Father and Myself* which recounts how "this beautiful creature came into [Ackerley's] life and transformed it," adding that "[b]y the end of the first eventful day, [Tulip], too, had undergone a metamorphosis, from beggar maid to a princess. And it was [he], the somewhat shabby hero of [his] own storybook, who had rescued her and won her heart" (00:09:03-00:09:28). The comparison of the dog and the man to fairy tale characters becomes so exaggerated at this point that the structure of the metaphor, which originally uses the dog as a signifier of human romance, changes: the princess turns from referent into sign, the dog from sign into referent, in other words, it is the image of the Beloved that is shaped into Tulip's own image, not the other way around. The film's playful, doodle-like, metamorphic animation style is particularly apt in enacting this change: the sketchy lines, porous contours, ever-shifting shapes, and free-flowing colours visually manifest how – rather than being pre-fixed – figures, forms, and configurations (i.e. Ackerley, Tulip, and their relationship) are shaped like pebbles under the pressure of intra-active forces, in this case, the dog's unpredictable affective influences on the human subject, which gradually make him abandon his quest to find the "Ideal Friend." The latter process is given a concrete visualisation in the film: the scene adapting Ackerley's original sketch of a jug that, in the writer's mind, contains all that he desires in a

partner – "a delightful mix of good companionship and intellectual stimulation" (00:15:45-00:06:00). The object slowly takes on Tulip's shape, enacting how the dog gradually moulds the owner's expectations to her own flesh-and-blood self (Fig. 26).

Fig. 26. The mental image of the "Ideal Friend" transforming into Tulip (*My Dog Tulip* 00:15:53; 00:41:50-00:41:57)

In this respect, the film's visual strategies – similarly to the source texts – also evoke a resemblance to the camp style of early twentieth-century queer writers such as Ronald Firbank and Lytton Strachey, whose works were "instrumental in producing a queer social visibility which sets a challenge to essentialism" (Letissier n. pag.).[73] Jack Babuscio identifies four basic features of camp – irony, aestheticism, theatricality, and humour – which undermine essentialist notions by emphasising incongruity (the most common incongruous contrast being that of the masculine/feminine), self-projection through style, performance and role-playing, and a comic appreciation of the contradictions of lived experiences (40-47), which is why camp "is different from the detachment that facilitates mockery" (Kleinhans 161). Scholars like Babuscio and Butler argue that the outrageousness of camp lies not so much in the frivolous, theatrical parody of canonical literary styles and traditional gender identities as in exposing the fantasies of the original, and showing that both the text and the self are, instead, fluid and performative (Butler,

[73] As, for example, Joseph Brooker suggests, queer writers like Firbank engendered "a canon alternatively conceived, a cultural history parallel to the norm" (207), or, in Peter Nicholls' terms, "other modernisms" which – in contrast to the canonical modernism of Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and Wyndham Lewis, formulating an "absolute fixing of sexual difference" as a part of their masculine-associated aspirations for achieving objectivity and clarity (190) – instead used stylistic innovations to perform "a release from the ideological 'truths' of gender" (218).

Gender Trouble 188). In light of these aesthetic features, one can argue that *Tulip* is not only characterised by a camp politics where subjects and intersubjective relationships take part in constant, performative transformations rather than settling in fixed, normative categories, but, through its metamorphic treatment of shapes, contours, and figures, it also projects a camp poetics, which visually manifests the notions of fluid identities and relationships, in this case, the queer and protean nature of the human–canine bond.

Besides the playful, doodle-like aesthetics, the film also employs other typically camp features as a way of foregrounding the fluidity of Ackerley and Tulip's relationship. For instance, as previously mentioned, the narrative is made up of the writer's largely non-chronological musings, memories, and often surreal imaginings: the whole film is an absurd non-story with a narrative lacking direction, drama, and suspense, following instead the subjective trajectories of Ackerley's mind as he revisits his everyday adventures with his dog – themes which, as Paul Fierlinger argues, are easier to render in animation than in live-action films (Krieger 174). Specifically, *Tulip* evokes the storytelling practices of arthouse animation films, which focus on mood, atmosphere, and psychological processes rather than action-driven plots. Regarding its theatrical voiceover narration, episodic structure, and bizarre fantasy-scenes, it also resembles the narrative style of Firbank, whose novels often forego conventional plot structures in favour of creating an atmosphere of extravagant triviality, employ elliptical structures and language (impressionistic, vignette-like sequences; witty, epigrammatic dialogues; abruptly cut off, fragmented sentences), and present exaggerated situations filled with irony, innuendo, and non-sequiturs, capturing the absurdity, elusive meaning, and fluid, non-teleological flow of everyday experiences – aspects that are also echoed in the meandering narrative recounting Tulip and Ackerley's shared life.

Firbank is also known for interspersing the main plot with outlandish metaphorical scenarios, which tend to construct self-contained referential worlds within the larger narrative. In *Vainglory* (1915), which revolves around the absurd ambitions of Mrs. Shamefoot determined to have a stained glass window commemorating her installed in a cathedral, but, as is typical in camp narratives, is less concerned with plot than with portraying the rarefied world of upper-class eccentricity, Firbank often describes inanimate objects with features reserved for sentient beings, creating absurdly vivid images about the entities that the portrayed social group, obsessed with aesthetics and appearances, values the most. For instance, a group of chairs prepared for a function is described "waiting patiently all day to be placed, heedless, happily, of the lamentations of Thérèse, who, while rolling her eyes, kept exclaiming: 'Such wild herds of chairs; such herds of wild chairs!'" (54), while later on, Mrs. Shamefoot imagines the stained

glass window as “a sumptuous sapphire, changing black,” which becomes “incoherent a little” as the time passes and begins “to mumble,” evoking the image of a confused person (132). Conversely, Firbank also uses unexpected yet vividly expressive metaphors when describing humans – for instance, a lady is compared to “a very thin camel” (60), while the character called Mira Thumbler is described as “a mediaeval-looking little thing, with peculiar pale ways, like a creature escaped through the border of violets and wild strawberries of a tapestry” (65) – which quickly recreate their own little fictions whenever these characters appear in the narrative: microcosms where the distinction between the signifier and the signified becomes loose and irrelevant. In a similar manner, the imaginary scenarios animated on the pages of Joe’s fictional sketchbook call forth their own referential worlds, alternatively envisioning Tulip as a fully anthropomorphised animal, a hybrid creature dressed in a skirt, and as a fully canine figure, thus playfully blurring the fixed categories of human and nonhuman, anthropomorphising fantasy and creaturely reality, as well as, more broadly, abstraction and actuality. The fact that the fantasy sequences (for example, the scene where Ackerley, after having cleaned up the dog’s mess in front of a greengrocer’s shop, is irritated by the shopkeeper’s contemptuous comment and fantasises about dumping it all back on the pavement) are much more sketchy than the rest of the film simultaneously suggests that these instances depart from the portrayed reality and that the latter is just a more elaborately drawn, coloured version of Joe’s imaginations. These sequences thus create a sense of ambiguity typical of the poetics of camp, which perfectly captures the ambivalent, constantly shifting perceptions characterising our relationships with dogs.

The irony of putting human and canine lovers in fixed, normative categories is emphatically evoked by a scene which, reinforcing the conflation of (portrayed) reality and imagination, presents one of Ackerley’s outlandish, Firbankian fantasies within the frames of an otherwise realistic, elaborately animated situation: the image of a London park where the man and his newly adopted dog take their first walk together transforms into that of a savannah, with Ackerley in the foreground, his suit and beret changed to an animal skin skirt and a feather headdress, performing what seems to be a nuptial dance with Tulip (Fig. 27). The emotional and physical intensity of the moment yet again creates a diagonal “line of flight” in the composition that brings together the figures in a vibrant multispecies unit, a continuity recalling a totemistic relationship, which is one of the most common cultural markers of the interconnectedness between the human and animal worlds. Insofar as the African landscape is the imaginary setting for events in human prehistory, the scene can also be interpreted as a fictional, ritual re-enactment of man and dog’s first encounter, as well as a metafictional

reflection on how each love story focusing on the interpersonal relationship of a human and a dog, including this film and *Turner & Hooch*, is also always a re-presentation of the evolutionary love story between our species. Although these connotations emphasise the notion of mutual metamorphosis between human and dog, which is also reinforced by the accompanying voiceover narration, it is interesting that, while Joe is transformed into an African prince, Tulip appears in an unaltered canine form. In this way, the scene effectively recreates how Ackerley simultaneously anthropomorphises the dog, perceiving her as a princess showing unconditional devotion towards her prince – in short, an ideal human substitute – and sees her as a subject in her own right, whose body and behaviour could not be more different from that of a human lady.

Fig. 27. The ironic fantasy of interspecies marriage (*My Dog Tulip* 00:09:11)

This visually and narratively implemented complexity also evokes the notion of "supplementary love," coined by Kevin Morrison in his analysis of Woolf's *Flush*. As Morrison argues, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's affection towards her dog "involves both substitution and accretion, requires an acknowledgment of that which, by virtue of its foreignness, exceeds the other—opening up possibilities for mutual transformation" (97). Visualising Tulip both as a substitute for Ackerley's "Ideal Friend" and as a full-fledged subject who, due to her radical difference, generates significant transformations in the human character, the animation simultaneously undermines the popular image of the dog as the idealised lover – an image perpetuated by mainstream cinematic depictions about the human–canine bond – and detaches

the negative connotations of inferiority, emotional overindulgence and sexual promiscuity from the notion of the canine substitute – associations reinforced by films such as *Best in Show,* discussed earlier in this chapter. As it unfolds on the screen, the love between Tulip and Ackerley thus not only blurs the boundaries between "lofty" and "creaturely," "platonic" and "sensual," "proper" and "improper," "homosexual/heterosexual" but also between "primary" and "substitutive" forms of love, reminding us that "all loves function, in a sense, within a chain of substitutions" (Garber 135), which does not make them less meaningful or valuable.

The combination of anthropomorphisation and de-anthropomorphisation through which the film highlights the ambiguous nature of human–canine love can be also observed in the scenes dedicated to the depiction of Tulip's urinating and defecating habits. These scenes provide a visual documentation of Ackerley's developing sense of curiosity about and attention towards his dog's subjective experiences and expressions, thereby contributing to portraying an interspecies relationship where the distances between human and dog are partially transcended but the significant differences are also acknowledged. Similarly to the source texts, the film does not fail to emphasise that in the process of attuning to each other's gestures, movements, and behaviours – something which was described in the introduction through Shapiro's notion of "kinaesthetic empathy" – human and dog will not only be involved in moments of connection, recognition and exchange but also in misconnections, misrecognitions and mistakes. An important episode in this regard is the one where Joe, driven by a bucolic fantasy, decides to visit his old friend Captain Hugh on his estate in Kent, also bringing along Tulip. As they prepare to go to bed one night, Ackerley – believing to have mastered the interpretation of his dog's signals – informs the viewers that "Tulip is a very quiet sleeper, although she will usually pay me one visit in the night and put her nose against my face. Perhaps I cry out in my dreams or do not, and she wishes to reassure herself that I am not dead" (00:35:55-00:00:36:10). Now, however, the dog wakes Joe in the middle of the night in an unusual manner, urgently pulling at him. Half-asleep, Joe thinks that Tulip wants to find the cat whose meowing disturbs the silence of the night, and, promising that they will visit her in the morning, turns away. However, soon he hears the unmistakable sounds of the dog having diarrhoea on the floor of Captain Hugh's cottage. Joe regretfully admits that although Tulip "had used every devise that lay in her power to tell [him] something, [he] had not understood" (00:38:38-00:38:43). This episode thus juxtaposes the human owner's overly confident observations about his nonhuman companion with the acceptance of the fact that one can only have a partial understanding of the other's expressions and experiences.

After his spectacular failure to understand Tulip's signals, Joe decides that, in spite of the inevitable misunderstandings, he will do everything in his power to imagine what it is like to perceive the world from a dog's perspective, and thereby regain Tulip's trust. His increasing empathy and sense of responsibility to attend to Tulip's needs – which, like Turner's attitude towards Hooch, evokes the notion of *caritas* – is marked by ethologically accurate observations about his dog's behaviour. For instance, the narrator states, drawing from Ackerley's original text, that "dogs read the world through their noses and write their history in urine" (00:39:50). The scene also uses aesthetic means to enact how Joe is trying to make sense of Tulip's habits, with a series of images categorising her different types of urination ("a necessity" and "a social"), thus projecting what in the introduction was proposed to be called kin-aesthetic empathy, that is, a visual representation that not only reflects but also reinforces the owner's growing sense of somatic sympathy towards his dog by highlighting the process of attunement to the animal's bodily gestures and behaviours. The creature-conscious representation is nevertheless supplemented by an anthropomorphic image of Tulip, who now appears as a dog dressed in girl's clothes and walking upright on the pages of Joe's fictional sketchbook, but continues her communication with the environment in a typically canine manner, carefully examining, rubbing herself with and spraying the droppings of other animals (Fig. 28). Thus, the scene renders the dog's urinating rituals simultaneously meaningful and, from a human perspective, absurd, thereby contributing to animating an interspecies love which involves just as much rejoicing in the other's differences as bonding over what Acampora calls "somatic commonalities" (30). At the same time, the scene also shows that while Joe's kinaesthetic attunement to Tulip's *Umwelt* reflects an effort to overcome anthropocentrism, such attempts remain constrained by the inevitable anthropomorphisation that accompanies the way we perceive and represent the worlds of other animals; the hand-drawn sketches of Tulip skipping over rocks, bones, and other debris suggest that, despite his genuine efforts, Ackerley creates yet another fantasy rather than fully accessing the dog's lived reality.

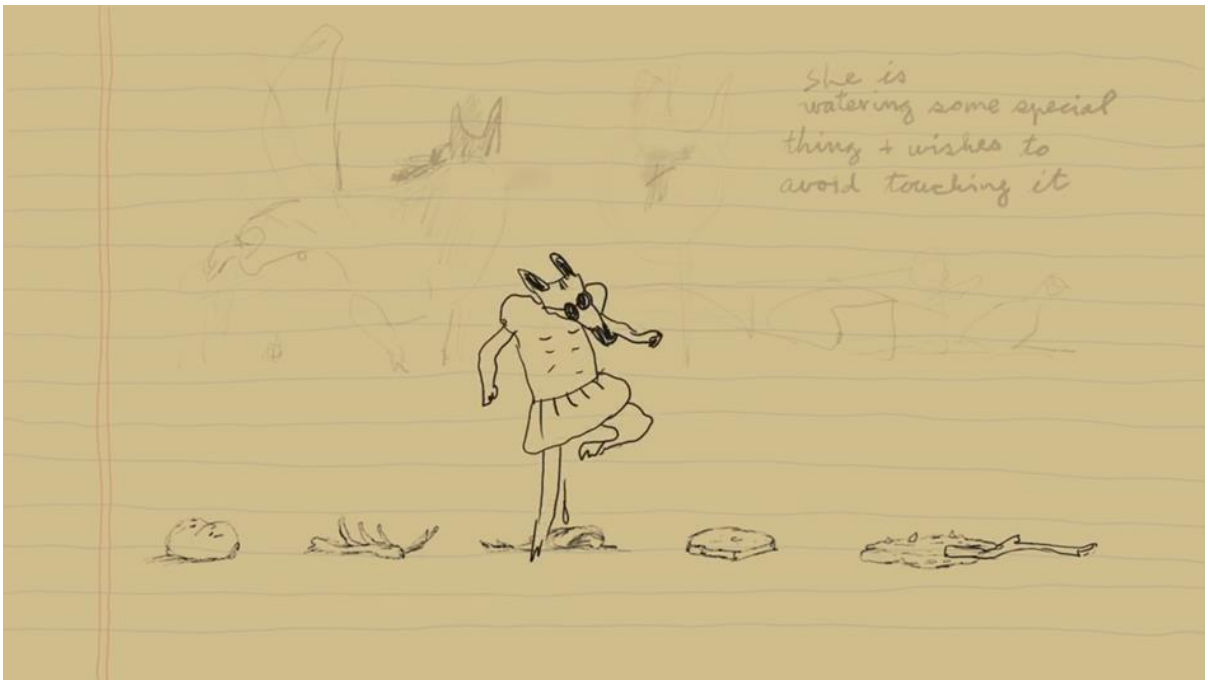

Fig. 28. Constrained attunement to the dog's *Umwelt* (*My Dog Tulip* 00:40:59)

The film pictures sexuality as another important aspect of the intimate but differential relationship between the human and the dog. Almost the entire second half of the narrative is dedicated to chronicling Joe's attempts to find a mating partner for Tulip before he realises that in so doing he has transferred his own expectations regarding love on his dog. In her discussion of the novel, McHugh argues that sharing experiences connected to sex unites the gay man and the canine bitch in a multispecies community that contributes to shaping the identity and agency of both the human and the animal, for which she develops the term "pack sexualities" ("Marrying My Bitch" 23). She highlights the fact that in Ackerley's time, both homosexuality and animal sexuality presented a challenge to heteronormativity, as a result of which the former was criminalised while the latter was kept outside the public sphere due to the prudishness surrounding it. The social contempt and public regulations concerning their respective love lives caused both gay men and dogs frustration, and sharing this experience contributes to shaping the collective multispecies identity in the film. For example, the scene which recounts how – in his increasingly desperate attempts – Ackerley engages a "curious figure" in the park (asking whether he would be willing to mate one of his Alsatians with Tulip in the bushes, where they are not exposed to the public eye) draws a parallel between the contemporary judgement around canine sex and the closeted sexual lives of gay men, whose endeavours to

find partners were often forced into the abject symbolic spaces of parks and public restrooms.[74] However, expanding McHugh's idea of "pack sexuality," one might suggest that *Tulip* establishes a kinship between human and dog by enacting not only the shared, but also the unshared experiences, since the animation emphasises that Joe develops respect and care for Tulip not only because their sexual experiences are similar but also because they are different.

The film brings forth the simultaneous familiarity and strangeness of canine sexuality with the help of its idiosyncratic hybridisation of anthropomorphising and de-anthropomorphising strategies. In the scenes chronicling Joe's attempts to find a mate for Tulip, the latter appears simultaneously as a female dog in heat, playfully teasing the male dogs, and as a strange human-dog hybrid dressed in a little girl's clothes, who is playing hard to get in front of her suitors (Fig. 29). While the more realistic sequences engage with the owners' external perspectives, the graphic scenes animating Ackerley's original sketches portray the dogs' actions with a mixture of ethological accuracy and childlike imagination – a combination which helps visualise the mysteriousness of canine sexuality. In such scenes, the behaviour of the dogs is rendered at once familiar and as something beyond the comprehension and control of the human owners. For instance, to Ackerley's disappointment, Tulip sometimes lets a male dog "reach under her skirt," while at other times, she bashfully pushes them away for reasons that remain unfathomable to Joe. By simultaneously humanising and dehumanising Tulip's figure, these scenes thus render the dog's expressions of desire as meaningful as those of human desires, but only fully understandable for the fictional conspecifics, visually manifesting Ackerley's sympathetic curiosity for canine sex,[75] as well as, more broadly, the ambivalence with which we simultaneously identify with – and inevitably anthropomorphise – our dogs and perceive them as utterly alien creatures whose presence, as Serpell observes, becomes repulsive when their behaviour reveals too much of their animal natures (313), for example, when they engage in sexual activities. This sense of consternation is particularly strong in the scene where Tulip mates with a stray mongrel – an act that, for Joe, seems more like "some dire situation of peril" than "the embraces of love" (01:11:15), placing an obstacle in the way of achieving a perfect interspecies rapport and empathic attunement with the dog. Notably, the animation in this scene retains the dogs' canine forms, reinforcing the human protagonist's sense of

[74] As Karalyn Kendall-Morwick argues with regard to the novel, although this way, Ackerley offers a critique of how city life polices canine and human gay bodies (114), his text – and, in a similar fashion, the film, too – shows that dogs and their human partners also shape the urban space through their routine movements and behaviours, thereby challenging the notions of urban modernity itself (123).

[75] In this respect, too, the film takes inspiration from the attitude of the real-life Ackerley, who "earnestly sought to understand the facts of canine sex, on Tulip's behalf" (Flower 169).

alienation in the moment of witnessing his companion's sexual act. As this and many other scenes in *Tulip* show, animation films can also incorporate and foreground the uncontrollable, largely unfathomable and at times disturbing creaturely dimensions of the dog's lifeworld, which, in turn, transform the metanarrative of perfect interspecies harmony into a much more complex and, in many aspects, strange and ambivalent love story.

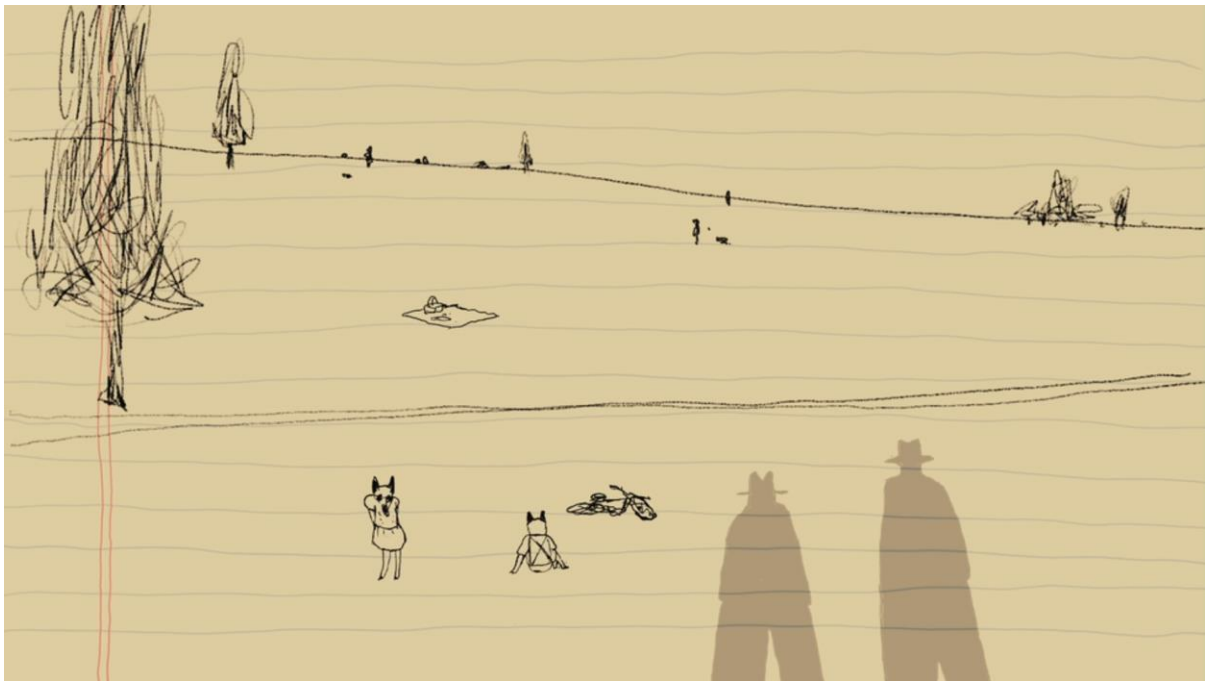

Fig. 29. The mysteriousness of canine sexuality (*My Dog Tulip* 00:56:08)

The ambivalence characterising the portrayed human–canine bond also manifests itself in the film's simultaneously carnivalesque and grotesque world. The presence of uncontained bodily functions and fluids – such as the scene where Tulip chases Captain Hugh's cat, when she defecates on the pavement, or when she is in heat and attracts packs of male dogs clinging to her bottom like leeches, driving her into a frenzied state in which she tears Ackerley's clothes and flesh with her teeth (Fig. 30) – evoke Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque, which marks the ritualistic celebration of corporeality, bodily openness and excess, as well as the "suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (10). The latter aspect, for example, appears in the way Tulip draws Ackerley into encounters with people and animals he would otherwise never meet, as the dog does not respect the rules of human society such as the necessity of maintaining a proper distance between different social classes. The carnivalesque abundance, the blurring of inside and outside, as well as the subversion of order are also enacted by the film's aesthetics, as ordinary locations such as the home, the park and

the streets become sites of uncontainable bodily excess and metamorphosis through Tulip's relatings with others and her environment. While the Fierlingers' transgressive animation style reinforces this Bakhtinian carnivalesque intermingling of human and animal, the naturalistic representation of the dog's defecating habits and sexual activities also introduces a quality closer to Wolfgang Kayser's understanding of the grotesque, wherein such bodily processes do not signify regeneration or communal festivity but are reterritorialised into a negative "marker of otherness" (Goody 154), an "expression of alienation" (152). As Kayser describes it, the grotesque inscribes familiar elements in a context where they become unrecognisable and menacing, "nocturnal and inhuman" (157), thereby instilling in us a "fear of life" (185). This interplay between carnivalesque entanglement – in the Bakhtininan sense – and grotesque estrangement – in the Kayserian sense – underlines the film's complex representation of interspecies love, highlighting the tension between bonding and alienation at the heart of our affective relationships with dogs.

Fig. 30. Carnivalesque / grotesque canine excess (*My Dog Tulip* 01:01:12)

Depending on the film's style, genre, cultural embeddedness, and representational technologies as well as the specific characteristics of the portrayed relationship, both *Turner & Hooch* and *My Dog Tulip* thus enact the formation of co-constitutive ties, the "becoming-in-relation" between the human and the canine companion through the depiction of interspecies intimacy. In this sense, both films evoke the protean nature of human–canine love, which, rather than a magical merging of two subjects with a definite result, is an ongoing process of co-

shaping each other's perceptions, behaviours and wills: a messy, mundane, conditional kind of love, which entails as many moments of connection as ones of friction. *Turner & Hooch* portrays this strange relation by revising the buddy cop genre's narrative formula of an unlikely partnership as a story of redemptive love between an overly meticulous policeman and an unruly dog who, by virtue of his radical difference, opens up possibilities for mutual transformation; by the end of the narrative, the human and the dog undergo a double metamorphosis, as Hooch's feral forces turn the neurotically civilized human into a zoomorphic creature, while the dog becomes tame, clean, and cooperative, at least to the extent necessary for living together with the man. In contrast, while the playful, doodle-like, metamorphic aesthetics of *Tulip* visually reinforce those energy flows that connect Ackerley and Tulip in a multispecies unit, its oscillation between anthropomorphising and de-anthropomorphising representation also foregrounds the unalterable aspects of the dog's being, among them, the unparalleled intensity of her love, which – as the analysis revealed – is capable of bending even the representational space. In a more graphic manner than *Turner & Hooch*, *Tulip* also points out the alienating aspects of the dog's behaviour, thus animating a radically ambivalent type of love which not only blurs species lines and the rigid categories that Western humanist thought has drawn between different affective forces, but also infuses the sense of comforting rapport we feel in the company of our dogs with a recurring uncanny feeling. While the analyses in this chapter examined how the perception of the dog's foreignness is reflected in representations of interspecies love, the next chapter focuses on films revealing how the creaturely aspects of dogs can also become a basis of marginalisation and violent exclusion.

Chapter 2: Creaturely Vulnerabilities

"Few of us are not in some way infirm, or even diseased; and our very infirmities help us unexpectedly." (*William James: The Varieties of Religious Experience)*

Continuing the dissertation's underlying chronological-thematic thread that follows the significant stages of a human–canine relationship, this chapter explores the cinematic traces and transformations of creaturely vulnerability: an aspect exerting a major influence on how we relate to dogs both within and beyond the private sphere of the home. Like the animal's wild energies, abject bodily functions, and the transgressive forces of interspecies intimacy, the conditions and consequences of our shared vulnerability are normally suppressed in our relationships, and when they do resurface, they usually evoke negative reactions. The four films analysed in this chapter – two documentaries, *Los Reyes* (2018, dir. Iván Osnovikoff and Bettina Perut) and *Stray* (2020, dir. Elizabeth Lo), giving a glimpse into the shared fates of urban stray dogs and human misfits; and two animation films, *The Plague Dogs* (1982, dir. Martin Rosen) and *Isle of Dogs* (2018, dir. Wes Anderson), portraying the persecution of (potentially) contaminating canine bodies – reveal the processes of how the vulnerabilities shared by people and dogs (in these cases, precariousness and susceptibility to infection) evoke fear, disgust and abjection as well as larger-scale mechanisms of violent exclusion. Drawing on, among others, the biopolitical theories of Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, Zygmunt Bauman, and Judith Butler, I argue that by exposing these psychological and social mechanisms, the analysed films also inadvertently reveal the inherent connections between humans and animals, humanity and animality, individual and community. While the documentaries highlight how vulnerable humans and free-roaming dogs are similarly subjected to the contingencies of life, including the vagaries of nature and the wanton whims of economic and political regimes, the animation films show how, when the ontological and physical proximity of humans and dogs becomes threatening, such as during an epidemic, the aggression of man quickly comes to the surface. These films, taken together, thus outline at least two aspects – vulnerability and violence – which continuously erode the conceptual systems Western humanism has built on the notions of the species divide and human exceptionalism.

As elaborated in the introduction, the dog's indelible, unpredictably emerging animality can be particularly unnerving given these animals' otherwise highly domesticated behaviour and the fact that they are mostly perceived as our close companions and familiars – a perception that clashes spectacularly with their creaturely side. As demonstrated through the overview of

what Harel calls the "paradigm of the despicable dog," the negative feelings evoked by the unexpectedly revealed animality of dogs serve as the driving force of many – not exclusively mainstream horror – films. A notable example from contemporary European art cinema is Kornél Mundruczó's *White God* (2014), which dramatises the effects of a new biopolitical measure introduced in the fictional Hungarian capital – one that orders mixed-breed dogs to be removed from family homes – on the lives of the teenage girl Lili and her mongrel dog Hagen. The film shows how the closeness between mankind and the so-called beasts evokes fear, violence, and the arbitrary rejection of those – in Kristeva's terms, abject – subjects and groups "from which one wants to distance oneself because [they] conjure up an uneasy or repulsive association [with animality] and thus threaten firm ego boundaries" (Kuzniar 6). At the root of such reactions is what has been called our vulnerability. As Cora Diamond observes, [t]he awareness we each have of being a living body . . . carries with it exposure to the bodily sense of vulnerability to death, sheer animal vulnerability, the vulnerability we share with them. This vulnerability is capable of panicking us" (22), and, as *White God* suggests, it can also trigger violent forms of excluding elements identified as unwanted. When Hagen is tossed out on the motorway by Lili's father – a slaughterhouse inspector epitomising the portrayed system's normalised cruelty against animals –, the act of physical abandonment signifies the conceptual (and actual) exclusion of undesirable subjects from the imaginary human community: the mechanism Agamben called the anthropological machine. As it was explained in the introduction, this ideological machine not only distinguishes humans from other animals, but also isolates the animal within the human, including those creaturely forces and vulnerabilities that are part of our make-up just as much as that of animals. In this sense, Hagen's abandonment also implies the desired exclusion of Lili, who, similarly to the dog, is a simultaneously wild and vulnerable subject inhabiting the family home against her father's will. However, while Hagen is exposed to various – mostly human-induced – afflictions after his relinquishment, Lili is spared actual physical suffering, suggesting that human–animal relations constitute – even more so in modernity – "an area of sharp separation, a zone in which the upkeep of human integrity, as it were, exacts a devastatingly violent price on animals" (Pick, *Creaturely Poetics* 1). Exposing the "impending threat of becoming animal" (Redmalm, "To Make Pets Live" 250), vulnerability induces a constant renegotiation of the boundary between humans and animals, humanity and animality.

At the same time, creaturely vulnerability can also potentially undermine the ideologies and practices of human–animal separation, precisely by virtue of being shared across species. This idea constitutes the foundations of Anat Pick's *Creaturely Poetics*, which traces the

notions of "the creature" and "the creaturely" back to the ideas of Simone Weil, specifically to her claim that "vulnerability is a mark of existence" (qtd. in Pick, *Creaturely Poetics* 1). Taking her cue from Weil, Pick describes the term "creaturely" as "the condition of exposure and finitude that affects all living bodies whatever they are" (Pick, "Interview" n.pag.), a condition of bodily vulnerability resulting from being subject to "natural necessity and powers from without" (*Creaturely Poetics* 4). In this sense, creatureliness includes the basic dependencies on nourishment, shelter, and a suitable environment; the body's exposure to natural elements; its susceptibility to infirmity, illness, and injury; as well as the conditions of aging and mortality. David Herman's semantic shift to "the creatural" slightly expands the notion to also account for the states of being "subject to the requirements of the surrounding environment" and "the vicissitudes of time" (*Creatural Fictions* 3), that is, the vulnerability to spatial and temporal contingencies, which also affect both human and nonhuman beings. Creatureliness thus "emphasises the fundamental continuity between humans and other animals" (Herman 3), or, as Mathew Abbott argues, the creature is "a being that dwells in the gaps between species, a threat to the very system of classification" (86).

Pick suggests that cultural representations foregrounding trans-species vulnerability by eliciting an attentiveness "to the bodily and the embodied" project what she coins a "creaturely poetics" (*Creaturely Poetics* 5). As discussed in the introduction, Pick ascribes a particularly creaturely quality to cinema, which – as she explains through Bazin's theory of realism – is capable not simply of representing but also of capturing and then *re*presenting the embodied reality of its subjects, who are exposed to the material contingencies of life regardless of species identity. In other words, Pick highlights that, due to its immediacy and embeddedness in material reality – to which I proposed to add the ability to evoke sensory and kinetic experiences as well –, cinema is capable of enacting the states of creaturely vulnerability that all beings are subjected to (113). In Pick's terms, films that intensify these states can therefore potentially engender a "creaturely thinking" (7): an alternative epistemology and ethics which acknowledges rather than denies the states of bodily frailty and finitude shared by humans and animals, and which treats these as the basis of extending an ethical consideration to others. In this regard, Pick's conceptualisation of "creaturely ethics" shares the underlying notions of posthumanist ethics, which, as it was highlighted in the introduction, turns away from cognitive capacities towards materiality, affect, and the ineffable, emphasised by feminist animal studies scholars (Weil, "Report on the Animal Turn" 13). Pick also outlines an ethics where it is bodily vulnerability and its affective powers – most importantly, the elicitation of empathy towards

"the suffering of the creaturely estate" (57) – rather than language, that can effectively create attentive and caring attitudes towards other creatures.

Drawing on Pick's extended theory of "zoomorphic cinema" – according to which the moving image can foreground both universal and species-specific experiences –, I argue that, using their own representational techniques, the documentaries and animation films analysed in this chapter all create a "creaturely poetics" that highlights the human and canine subjects' shared yet subjectively experienced conditions of vulnerability. In other words, the four films not only show how bodily exposure and finitude similarly affect humans and dogs but also emphasise that the latter experience such states differently and that they are more vulnerable to the mechanisms of (bio)power that continue to maintain sharp separations between humans and other animals. Vulnerability thus emerges as one of the aspects that join humans and dogs in an intimate yet differential relationship, albeit not exactly in the same manner as love. For, in this chapter, the "strange kinship" between humans and dogs not only reflects perceptual, behavioural and ontological differences, but also addresses the imbalances that render the lives of dogs more exposed to external forces than human lives. Using their specifically adjusted capacities of "creaturely cinema," the four films ultimately picture canine lives as distinctly yet unquestionably vulnerable while also problematising the violent mechanisms of the anthropological machine, thus calling for a revaluation of anthropocentric biopolitics and ethics. As Diamond observes, "to acknowledge [vulnerability] at all, let alone shared, is wounding" (22). It may terrify us, evoke avoidance, ignorance, and violence. Yet, as these films show, it may also help us develop more open, caring ways of seeing the world and the creatures in it.

Multispecies Precarity in *Los Reyes* and *Stray*

"I'll be leaving then. 'Cause she called me a fucking dog." (Los Reyes 00:11:00)

The documentaries discussed in this subchapter, *Los Reyes* (2018, dir. Bettina Perut and Iván Osnovikoff) and *Stray* (2020, dir. Elizabeth Lo), explore the condition of precarity, which denotes shifting states of insecurity and affliction under the pressures of the prevailing social, political and economic systems. By tracing the parallel states and trajectories of human and canine vulnerability in the portrayed urban environments, the films extend the notion of precarity to the lives of nonhuman animals while also emphasising that the nature and degree of their suffering are different. *Los Reyes* and *Stray* thus signal a change in the critical discourse on socioeconomic uncertainty which has begun "to think of precarity 'beyond' the human" only recently (Puar 171), at a virtual roundtable discussion in 2012, including, among others, Lauren Berlant, Judith Butler, and Jasbir Puar. These scholars have called attention to the fact that, although in the past two decades animal studies has radically reshaped the humanities in that it has endeavoured to replace anthropocentrism with more creature-conscious perspectives, treating the human as the single subject of discourses on precarity and its representations is still taken for granted, nonhuman beings thought to be "incapable of experiencing precarity as such, as a subjective and not just objective condition of vulnerability" (Shukin, "Precarious Encounters" 115).[76] As long as animals and other nonhuman beings cannot give (human) voice to their experiences, one will never know for sure how they are affected by the accelerated political, economic, social, technological and environmental changes of the 21st century as well as its local ramifications.[77] Yet the refusal to contemplate the question entails that human precarity is a standalone phenomenon, unrelated to other creatures' shifting states of well-being and affliction. As Nicole Shukin puts it, "to allow 'the human' to go unquestioned as the

[76] Precarity is generally understood as a condition created by political, economic, and employment systems which lead to a diminished capacity to plan for a coherent future (see, for example, Kalleberg, Standing, Walsh). As Bauman defines it in *Liquid Modernity*, precarity is a state of uncertainty where "plans for the future tend to become transient, protean and fickle" (137). Precarity today is often connected to neoliberalism, which "proposes that *human* well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms" (Harvey 2), but it also leads to unstable work conditions, limited social security, and a widening gap between people who are integrated into the system of production and profit and the ones who are left behind. As the language of these definitions suggests, the human being is treated as the axiomatic subject of precarity.

[77] This is why Kari Weil argues that nonhuman animals have become the representatives of what Derrida calls "absolute alterity" ("The Animal" 11): "unlike in women's studies or ethnic studies, those who constitute the objects of animal studies cannot speak for themselves, or at least they cannot speak the languages that the academy recognizes as necessary for such self-representation" (Weil, "Report on the Animal Turn" 2). And this is exactly why posthumanist ethics encourages shifting the attention from our capacities to our inabilities and shared vulnerabilities when it comes to the ethical consideration of others' experiences. It signals a return to Jeremy Bentham's insight that "the question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?" (311).

assumed subject of precarity is to enable a misrecognition of the life forms that are historically, materially, socially, economically, affectively and (bio)politically intricated with that subject" ("Precarious Encounters" 116). I would even go as far as to suggest that to deny the connections between human and nonhuman states of vulnerability is to comply with the very power mechanisms, those apathetic, hierarchising, exclusory machinations that make lives precarious in the first place. The films to be analysed in this subchapter might be said to pick up on the issue raised at the 2012 roundtable discussion and think precarity "beyond the human."

Showing how socially marginalised humans and urban street dogs are linked in their states of precariousness, the films analysed in this subchapter also allow the viewers to see whole networks of interconnected vulnerable lives. In this regard, the representation of precarity in *Los Reyes* and *Stray* recalls Haraway's relational ontology discussed in the introduction, especially the idea that species do not come into being alone but "co-make" each other, reflected in the neologism *humanimal* ("Donna Haraway on the 'humanimal'"). Haraway's notion of co-constitution implies that the species with shared evolutionary histories and the creatures whose lifeworlds intersect in the same space are connected in their experiences of well-being and suffering even if not in the same manner or to the same degree. Haraway states that when considering "any question in the world one really cares about these days, that matter, whether it's who is hungry . . . or what sorts of cruelty and brutality and caretaking are going on," in other words, questions connected to precarity, one has to be aware that "these are *humanimal* worlds . . . you can't think these one species at a time" ("Donna Haraway on the 'humanimal'" 00:00:27-00:00:54). Haraway thus ultimately suggests that precarity is a relational issue, since the shifting states of vulnerability, affliction, and violence affect lives that are temporally, spatially, materially, affectively, socially, economically, and (bio)politically interconnected. As Berlant put it at the 2012 roundtable discussion, precarity "is the situation of relationality itself, insofar as our dependencies are vulnerabilities" (qtd. in Puar 171). Precarity is therefore best approached through a multispecies approach as "there is no human without those networks of life within which human life is but one sort of life" (Puar 173).

This comprehensive notion of precariousness is particularly relevant in the case of stray dogs, whose number is significantly higher globally than that of their homed counterparts: according to recent estimations, between 75% and 85% of the global dog population (700 million to 900 million) are considered free-roaming or stray (Cosgrove n. pag.), and they may develop intimate bonds with humans, wherein they will share in the experiences of exposure to outside forces. For example, many homeless people are reportedly emotionally attached to street dogs (Singer et al.; Taylor et al.), who often become, if not pets in the traditional sense,

definitely companion species in Haraway's terms.[78] As the analysed films will show, street dogs also often form emotional connections with neighbourhood communities and human individuals, typically in places, including many Latin American countries, where bylaws do not restrict the free movement of animals in the public space (see, for example, Kwok et al.). As Jörge Dünne highlights, street dogs "share their existence as 'non-persons' with certain humans" (7), that is, as entities who, from the perspective of the modern neoliberal state, are regarded as unimportant, unwanted, and are excluded from the political-legal-ethical community. Recognising this, cinema also seems to have broadened its focus in its representations of precarity, showing that humans and other animals are connected in their exposure to the forces of modernity, neoliberalism, and the related biopolitical regimes of abandonment and exclusion. As *Los Reyes* and *Stray* show, these shared states often arise in the contemporary city, where the parallel precariousness of human and nonhuman lives is continuously reproduced (Dünne 7).[79]

Los Reyes, shot by Bettina Perut and Iván Osnovikoff in Santiago, the capital of Chile, and *Stray*, filmed by Elizabeth Lo in Istanbul, are two contemporary documentaries that map the shared states of vulnerability among stray dogs and marginalised humans in the portrayed urban environments. Perut and Osnovikoff's film records the everyday life of the Los Reyes skate park, in the north-western part of Santiago, regularly visited by local youngsters who are reluctant to conform to the roles their families and the Chilean neoliberal society at large require of them but build a subtle concordance with the park's canine inhabitants. *Stray* follows three stray dogs whose lives become similarly entangled with those of human outcasts, in this case, a group of young Syrian refugees illegally squatting on an Istanbul construction site. Recording

[78] Although Haraway's prime example for companion species is the owner–pet relationship, in the same interview where she explains the term *humanimal*, she clarifies that the notion of interspecies co-constitution also applies to relationships beyond the pet–owner dynamic: "I think people make a mistake with my work sometimes by thinking I'm talking about pets. I happen to love pets, I think that's an important historical identity, if you will, or practice. Pets are very interesting. But they're not the definition of *humanimal*. They're one kind of thread within a very complex fabric" (00:01:04-00:01:24).

[79] This is especially the case in the so-called "undeserved areas," characterised by high rates of unemployment, low educational attainment, and poverty, where dogs are less likely to be sterilised or receive basic veterinary care such as essential vaccinations and regular check-ups. The lack of sterilisation exacerbates overpopulation problems, which, in turn, put more animals on the streets in poor health. Unvaccinated animals are exposed to the risk of contracting diseases, and they can also pose a threat to humans and other animals through, for example, the spreading of rabies. Additionally, untreated animals endure a wide range of health issues that could otherwise be effectively managed (Arluke and Rowan 2-3). Besides the obvious lack of resources, the precarious human individuals and groups (e.g. homeless people) forming a relationship with street dogs also face systemic and institutional bias, which prevents them from seeking help in caring for their canine companions (9). This mutually influential relationship between human poverty and canine precarity is effectively portrayed by *Patas de kiltro* (*Street Dog Walking*, dir. Alina Astudillo and Guillermo Gonzalez, 2002), a short documentary showing how people in the poorest, hilly neighbourhoods of Valparaíso, the second largest city in Chile, are the most zealous in taking care of stray dogs, who thus reproduce there in the largest numbers, only to funnel down into the city, where their lives come to resemble those of the homeless, sleeping rough, scavenging for food, struggling to survive.

the relationships of the primary human and canine subjects, both films end up tracing whole networks of interconnected humanimal lives, thus ultimately mapping exuberant sites of multispecies conviviality that provide a home to but also extend beyond the communities of the precarious youngsters and the dogs.

The co-existence of humans and animals in the portrayed cities and, by extension, their filmic representations, are shaped by historical, social, cultural and legal factors. Notably, both in Santiago and in Istanbul, stray dogs have been allowed to roam free for centuries. Chile has few animal protection laws to prevent owners from abandoning their dogs who therefore often end up on the streets as *quiltros* – a term used by the native Mapuche people since the 16th century to refer to Chilean stray mongrels.[80] Since the country is free of rabies, there are no national dog population control laws, which is another factor that has contributed to an eighty percent surge in the number of *quiltros* in the capital over the last decade, resulting in Santiago's present population of over a million stray dogs. Although a national sterilisation plan was launched in 2014, people have protested against more severe laws since then. In recent years, the dire living conditions of street dogs have led to the passing of the *Ley de Tenencia Responsable de Mascotas y Animales de Compañía* (2017), commonly referred to as *Ley Cholito*, which introduced a new legal category for dogs cared for by local communities (Dünne 4). In fact, Santiago's strays have always enjoyed a relatively high level of well-being due to the locals' kindness, and sense of collective responsibility for the dogs, who join commuters on their way to work, lie under café tables during lunch hours and sit in the park among playing children. In return for their company, citizens care for the animals by regularly feeding them and dressing them in sweaters. In this sense, Santiago's strays are deeply imbedded in the city's social and cultural milieu as well as the urban eco-system, and this specific local status of dogs is also reflected in the analysed documentary depiction.

In Turkey, the history of free-roaming dogs dates back to the Ottoman era, when they functioned as guards for neighbourhoods, helped eat the garbage and would alert people in case of intruders or fires. This, however, "wasn't just a functional relationship; it was seen as a good deed to feed and take care of them" (Kimberly Hart qtd. in Hattam 2021). This reciprocal care relation between people and community dogs has survived into the present, although with a

[80] Originally, the expression was used for little indigenous dogs (Latcham 60). Considering this aspect, Dünne argues that the designation "confers not only a specific visibility to street dogs which is missing in other languages and equally in many other Spanish speaking countries, it also evokes colonial and pre-Columbian history which includes a specific connotation of marginality" (3). Using *quiltros* in the sense of mixed-breed dogs specifically bears the connotation of racial and ethnic inferiority echoing colonial-era *cuadros de casta*. In this sense, the term itself connotes the meaning of shared human–canine marginalisation.

two-century-long interruption from the early 1800s to the 1990s, during which the authorities tried to eradicate stray dogs in their attempts to westernise cities by imposing order and stricter hygiene rules on the streets. This led to periodic mass killings in the last century,[81] only arrested by the 2004 animal protection law. The latter gave animals a legal right to inhabit the streets, banned killing and capturing strays, and prescribed that municipalities must take care of free roaming animals by establishing feeding stations and providing spaying-neutering operations. Thanks to the additional efforts of citizens, community dogs have been not only surviving but thriving in Turkey's urban environments. As Elizabeth Lo, director of *Stray* recounted her experiences while filming in Istanbul, "[p]eople really see a dignity in the dogs, they see them as fellow citizens, as belonging to their streets and communities" (qtd. in Hattam 2021), which Lo, similarly to Perut and Osnovikoff, also tried to capture in her documentary.

However, at the time of writing, the long-standing balance between the human and canine habitants of Turkish cities, reflected in Lo's documentary, seems to be under threat once again. In the summer of 2024, president Erdoğan's government passed a law that allows municipalities to capture and euthanize stray dogs deemed a threat to public health or safety. The president said that this "radical solution" is a reaction to the recent rise in the stray dog population (about 4 million at present), the growing number of attacks, and the possibility of the animals spreading diseases (qtd. in Christie-Miller n. pag.). However, the renewed modernisation attempt goes against an integral part of Turkish culture, which is normally championed by Erdoğan's nationalistic discourse, but, in this case, it has become associated with the sensibilities of liberal-minded metropolitans and, as such, something to be nipped in the bud.[82] In light of the recent developments in Turkey's animal control laws, the multispecies communities portrayed by *Los Reyes* and *Stray* emerge with an ever-increasing sense of precariousness.

Apart from reflecting the local cultures of the human–canine relationship as well as the growing social and critical awareness around the lives of animals and multispecies relations, which significantly influenced the filmmakers' stance towards their subjects, *Los Reyes* and *Stray* also join a recently emerging trend within documentary filmmaking, where filmmakers

[81] The cruellest among such acts took place in 1910, when around 80,000 strays were banished to Sivriada, an island near enough to the city for the people to hear the howls of the dogs slowly dying of hunger.

[82] Losing Istanbul and Ankara in the 2024 March elections, Erdoğan is likely trying to divide people with the new anti-stray law, which is again ironic as the care for community dogs has been bringing people together rather than separating them. The importance of street dogs in the local communities is evidenced by the intense debate around and the ongoing public protests against Erdoğan's law. Yet the fact that the presence of strays dating back thousands of years can be discontinued by an arbitrary decision perfectly demonstrates the degree to which animals and the relationships they form with human caretakers are exposed to the forces of neoliberal capitalism and its concomitant (bio)political regimes.

experiment with innovative, creature-conscious filming and representational techniques to foreground the subjective phenomenological experiences of animals.[83] Reducing human authorial control over the filming process, the directors of these contemporary documentaries often let the camera crew be guided by the nonhuman subjects and thus explore spaces within the portrayed environment that are normally hidden from us; they often adjust the pace of the films (during both shooting and editing) to the rhythm of the animals' lives; and they also use specially designed stabilisation systems and/or harnesses, creative camerawork, and varying degrees and versions of the subjective point-of-view technique, which enables both filmmakers and viewers to attune to the lifeworlds of other beings without fully anthropomorphising their perspectives. Evoking Pick's extended theory of creaturely cinema, these films thus highlight not only shared but also species-specific experiences, by trying to absorb and accentuate the subjective creaturely realities of the portrayed subjects as part of a corrective reaction to the effacement of animals in cinema.

Driven by this intention, both *Los Reyes* and *Stray* set out to offer an intimate portrait of the lives of street dogs. Perut and Osnovikoff initially wanted to make a film about the precarious young skaters of Santiago, and, since they raised funds for this project, they could not altogether abandon this thematic thread. Yet once they began filming, they felt the focus to be conventional and somehow empty, ignorant of the complexity of life in the portrayed urban space. Then one day, as Osnovikoff was skating in the park, he became enthralled by two dogs playing with a ball in one of the skating bowls: Football and Chola, whose names remain unknown right until the end credits as a gesture of resisting cinema's anthropomorphising constructions. When Perut saw the dogs, too, it was decided that the film was going to revolve around them, which implied changes in the methods of shooting as well as the film's aesthetics based on the intention to "dehumanise" the cinematic gaze.[84] As the directors stated in an interview,

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[83] Examples include *Kedi* (2016, dir. Ceyda Torun), which focuses on the lives of stray cats in Istanbul; *The Truffle Hunters* (2020), which highlights how truffle hunting dogs experience their environment, as it was discussed in the introduction; and *Space Dogs* (2019), which follows the lives of street dogs in Moscow, to be analysed in the dissertation's coda. *Gunda* (2020, dir. Victor Kossakovsky) and *Cow* (2021, dir. Andrea Arnold), could be also mentioned, though they centre on the experiences of farm animals, a sow and a cow, respectively.

[84] The Chilean documentary filmmaker duo have long been interested in portraying eccentric figures and social outcasts in their country, often through idiosyncratic, ethnographic portraits that resist the conventional, moralist understandings of the documentary form. Since their debut *Chi-chi-chi-le-le-le, Martín Vargas de Chile* (*Martin Vargas from Chile*, 2001), followed by *Un hombre aparte* (*A Man Aside*, 2003), they have played a central role in revitalising Chilean documentary cinema. Their style is marked by a playful yet unflinching perspective, extreme close-ups, fractured frames, and an attention to the sensory and the material, often weaving together, as we can see in *Los Reyes*, landscapes, animals, and humans. Their films also often explore the absurd and/or tragic dimensions of Chilean identity, from ex-boxers, Santa Claus impersonators, to rebellious young skaters. Among their key works are *Welcome to New York* (2005), *La muerte de Pinochet* (*The Death of Pinochet*, 2011), *Surire* (2015), and

> [w]hen the dogs appeared, the choice of that object for the film influenced the whole filmic language, we had to change the way of making the film. We used a fixed camera because it dehumanizes the register, the technical apparatus acquires autonomy, and we liked that. If we shoot the dogs with a handheld camera, the potential of accessing the animal subjectivity is diluted because human intervention can be perceived in the shot. The fixed camera has the virtue of being independent from human subjectivity. (Gutiérrez trans. by Dünne 26)

Although, as it was suggested before, human authority over the visual world cannot be completely ruled out as long as the camera frames the image depending on human visual perception and sets the stage for what will appear on the screen according to the director's decisions, the fixed position allowed the filmmakers to reduce their own intervention and, in a manner reminiscent of Bazin's cinematic realism, record life as it unfolded in the actual space. Drawing on Bazin's conviction that cinema holds the "power to lay bare the *realities*," "the complex fabric of the objective world" (*What is Cinema? Vol. 1*, 15, emphasis added), Pick argues that films can capture the multiplicity of creaturely subjectivities and agencies co-existing in a shared environment. Enacting this notion, the fixed camera used in *Los Reyes* records how Football and Chola actively interact with, exert their influence upon, and form their own subjective lifeworlds (*Umwelten*) within the objective world of the skate park, portraying them as agents rather than objects passively inserted into their environment.

Establishing the agentic role of the dogs both within the recorded reality and the filmic *mise-en-scène,* the first scenes after the opening image – a panoramic shot outlining the objective world co-habited by the human and canine subjects (Fig. 31.1) – record the strays acting as the primary inhabitants, gatekeepers, or, indeed as the title suggests, the "kings" of the park: Football sitting in the middle of the gravel road leading into their territory and Chola, the younger, more rambunctious dog chasing after bikes, motorised vehicles, horses and mules. In these little introductory shots, the dogs occupy the visual focal points, and – at least when they are resting – they appear in the centre of the foreground (Fig. 31.2, 31.3), but since the

Los Reyes (2018). Their most recent feature-length documentary, *La Casa* (2023), turns its gaze toward a newly renovated mansion and its surroundings – dogs, sprinklers, a colony of ants – mediated through the voices of neighbours and domestic workers, projecting a multispecies focus that the duo first developed in *Los Reyes*. (For more on Perut and Osnovikoff, see, for example, their official website, https://perutosnovikoff.com/en/inicio-english/, or Samuel Brodsky's article in *Cinema Tropical*, "Life in Focus: Documenting Chilean Stories with Bettina Perut and Ivan Osnovikoff" (2023)).

camera is fixed, the images also record Chola's movements in and out of the frame as she is running after "intruders," traversing the planes of the composition depending on her own will (Fig. 31.4). Rather than serving as the vehicle of human control, the camera thus acts as a tool of observation, a looking glass through which the filmmakers and viewers can behold the lively interactions unfolding between the canine subjects and their environment.

Fig. 31. Kings of the park (*Los Reyes* 00:00:42; 00:00:55; 00:01:33; 00:01:18)

That the dogs act upon their surroundings and create their own meaningful lifeworlds within the larger reality of the skate park is also made evident in the serialised scenes recording their playing. At the beginning of the film, they engage in a game with the local youngsters when their football flies out of the nearby field. After the football deflates, the dogs continue playing with tennis balls, and they gradually grow less reliant on human participants until they end up playing on their own, repurposing human-designed objects and spaces for their own enjoyment: Football encourages Chola to drop the ball by barking, then Chola pushes the ball into a halfpipe with her nose, after which they follow the movements of the ball through the bowl (Fig. 32). This series demonstrates what Horowitz describes as a "clash of *Umwelts* . . . when dog meets human" (*Inside* 23). Drawing on Uexküll's theory, Horowitz explains that humans and dogs perceive objects differently, according to their species-specific *functional tones* (24), that is, on the basis of how they can act upon them. For example, a chair might be an obstacle for a dog in her path towards the kitchen, while for us it has a *sitting tone*, a *hanging*

our coats tone or a *decorative tone*, depending on the context. However, living in close proximity with humans, dogs can learn that a chair might be jumped on in order to reach the food left unattended on the dining table. Although the chair will still have a different *functional tone* for them, Horowitz's example suggests that dogs also act upon and add meanings to the objects around them. In a similar manner, although Football and Chola's games differ from the human football players' and the skaters' activities, they follow similarly inventive rules, thereby showing an alternative yet equally meaningful form of interaction with the environment.[85] Chola and Football thus emerge as active world-shapers, *Umwelt*-creators and meaning-makers, which is also reflected in the film's aesthetics.

In this respect, it is also important to mention that these two dogs are not strays in the traditional sense: unlike the dogs in *Stray* or *Space Dogs* (to be discussed in the conclusion), they clearly belong to the portrayed space and do not roam far, the local community (supported by the municipality) provides them with dog houses (which they, however, rarely use for sleeping), and they are most likely fed regularly, otherwise they would wander off in search of food, like the strays in the other films. In this sense, Football and Chola belong to the category of what has been called "community dogs," referring to unowned animals who live in public spaces and are cared for collectively by members of a community, sometimes also receiving help from local authorities, medical professionals, and animal rights activists. Unlike stray dogs, community dogs thus have a stable presence in a specific area where they receive food and shelter. In this sense, although having no owners, Football and Chola are full-fledged residents of Los Reyes, who contribute to creating a heterogenic site of multispecies cohabitation, similarly to how – as it was discussed in relation to *Turner & Hooch* – pet dogs shape the private sphere of the home, though arguably with greater freedom. At the same time, while Perut and Osnovikoff strove to capture and then re-create the processes of canine world-building as they unfolded in reality, this approach also meant that they did not intervene even when, for example, they saw that Football's health was deteriorating, which points towards the complex ethical dilemmas related to the representation of animals both within and beyond the practices of documentary filmmaking.[86]

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[85] The dogs' agency gains a further dimension when learning that the tennis balls appearing in the film were the incentives used by the directors to make Chola and Football "act" in front of the camera (Dünne 24). The dogs indeed acted but not in the sense Osnovikoff and Perut had imagined it: they appropriated the balls to their own use. When playing their game, the dogs simultaneously enact the fiction envisioned by the directors and their own experiences, creating a link between representation and reality in a manner evoking Pick's zoomorphic realism.

[86] For a detailed discussion of this question, see, for example, veteran wildlife filmmaker Chris Palmer's *Shooting in the Wild*, which offers both an insider's account and a critical examination of the ethical issues specifically concerning nature documentaries, including the extent to which the filmmaker should or should not intervene into the portrayed animals' lives. The latter dilemma is succinctly summarised by the question: "At what point must

Fig. 32. *Umwelt*-creation through play (*Los Reyes* 00:37:31)

Osnovikoff and Perut's commitment to a non-interventionist approach also shaped how the human subjects are depicted in *Los Reyes*. In the attempt to foreground the dogs' subjective experiences and agencies, the skaters, the film's original subjects, were reduced visually to shadow figures, glimpses of faces and bodies, and vocally to fragmentary dialogues and voices blending with the noises of the city. Whereas Football and Chola occupy various frame sizes and usually appear in the foreground of the compositions, humans are never directly shown in close-ups; they either appear in wide shots, in the background, photographed from a high angle, as silhouettes, blurred figures with their backs to the camera, sometimes as metonymic images – a hand lighting a joint, feet resting on a skateboard – or, even further removed associations such as cigarette boxes, water bottles or tennis balls, which all end up in Football's jaws, thereby losing their meanings, their *functional tones* if you will, as defined by the human world (Fig. 33).

we insist that the ends," in this case, a film that will bring people into contact with the subjective world of the dogs, "do not justify the means?" (Palmer 16).

Fig. 33. Human traces in a canine-centred world (*Loy Reyes* 00:03:58; 00:04:26; 00:08:54; 00:14:11)

In *Los Reyes*, the filmic *mise-en-scène* – which usually treats the human figure as the standard of framing, the human subject as the only figure who stands out of and shapes the environment, and the human perspective as the viewpoint from which the setting and the objects are construed – is transformed into a zoomorphic, or, more specifically, cynomorphic space, where the dogs' ways of being in and making sense of the world take centre stage. The centrality of canine lifeworlds is also reinforced acoustically, as the human conversations are fragmented, detached both from the bodies that produce them and the larger context in which they make full sense. Additionally, the skaters are often too drunk or stoned to make a clear point, which further contributes to transforming human language into a background noise – instead of a main meaning-making mechanism, just one element among the many that compose Football and Chola's perceptual world. These representational choices are all informed by the directors' realisation that humans are not the single subjects in the portrayed environment. As Perut said in an interview, "we couldn't take out the skaters" – which suggests that the human and nonhuman subjects' lives are inextricably entangled – "but we also didn't want to show them, because we think that the human being is not the center of the world" (Reed n.pag.). In other words, the representation of dogs in this documentary has been shaped significantly both by the local particularities of urban human–canine relations and the filmmakers' awareness of these cultural-social-ecological specificities.

While Perut and Osnovikoff came to their realisation about the situated interconnectedness of human and other-than-human lives through the filming process, Lo followed a de-anthroponormatising approach from the outset, informed by the director's conviction that dogs deserve more narrative time and space in cinema than they are usually granted. As Lo said in an interview, "[m]uch like Virginia Woolf's *Flush*, I knew I wanted *Stray* to be told entirely and truly from a dog's perspective – and not an anthropomorphic projection using animals as a vehicle as so many other films have done, but truly be about trying to use the medium of film to represent a dog's life" (Barzey n.pag.).[87] Accordingly, the line of ancient wisdoms interspersed throughout the documentary begins with an observation from Diogenes that "human beings live artificially and hypocritically and would do well to study the dog." The opening quote didactically emphasises the director's vision in which the film's subject is "a dog's life" shown from a dog's perspective. Although both films decentre it to a certain extent, as mentioned before, the human perspective cannot be completely eliminated as long as the film is conceived and created by humans with the help of human-made apparatuses. In fact, both films were significantly shaped by the directors' social, cultural and educational backgrounds and their specific approaches to documentary filmmaking. Furthermore, both *Los Reyes* and *Stray* bear the traces of the cultural, socio-political and ecological particularities of the spaces where they were shot, where the dogs are embedded in whole networks of vulnerable lives. Pramod K. Nayar refers to this phenomenon as "ecoprecarity," which he explains as "the vulnerability of *all* lifeforms, their attendant ecosystems and relations between and across lifeforms/species" (*Ecoprecarity* 14). According to Nayar, the intertwined states of multispecies vulnerability and the fragility of the ecosystems are central to many contemporary cultural texts, which come to form an "ecoprecarious imagery" (15). In my view, this comprehensive notion of precarity not only constitutes the central subject in *Los Reyes* and *Stray* but is also apparent in the films' aesthetic worlds, which could be therefore said to project not only a creaturely but, by extension, an ecoprecarious poetics.

For example, in *Los Reyes*, the teenagers' fragmentary conversations blend in with the muffled roar of cars, the throbbing of water sprinklers, the chirping of birds, and the scraping

[87] As the above quoted interview excerpt suggests, the up-and-coming Chinese-American filmmaker's work reflects a more conceptual approach to documentary filmmaking than the ethnographic, hands-on style of Perut and Osnovikoff. Educated at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts and Stanford University's MFA program in Documentary Film, Lo has developed a rigorously observational style informed by critical reflection on cinema's power to decentre dominant perspectives. Her award-winning shorts – including *Hotel 22* (2014), on a Silicon Valley bus functioning as a homeless shelter, and *Mother's Day* (2017), portraying children visiting their incarcerated mothers – already reveal her concern with the visibility of marginalised lives and the ethics of looking. With *Stray* (2020), she wished to extend this concern beyond human lives.

metallic grinding of skateboards on the concrete, the combination of which provides the acoustic backdrop throughout the film. The viewers' ears are thus sharpened to how dogs (presumably) perceive the world around them sonically, but this rendition also amplifies how human and canine realities intersect in the shared space. Furthermore, if one listens carefully, the skaters' seemingly disconnected dialogues outline a pattern of recurring topics including school and work problems (dropping out, not finding well-paying jobs in the neighbourhood), family and housing issues (one of the boys tells his friends that he has been thrown out by his grandmother because of spending all his time smoking and skating), romantic relationships and sexuality (one of the girls talks about her pregnancy on the phone with her brother, who already has a baby with his young girlfriend), conflicts with the police and drug dealers (someone shares the story of how he was mugged by officers, while someone else talks about how he was robbed by rival dealers), and plans for the future (which involve growing marijuana plants indoors or opening cannabis stores, but are mostly shadowed by a lack of prospects). The teenagers' disses, cries of anxiety and economic despair provide an insight into the precarious human conditions under Chile's neoliberal regime, which emerge parallel to the dog's vulnerable states.

By reducing the skaters to silhouettes, fragments, and limbs swooshing by on skateboards, the creators of *Los Reyes* ensured that the dogs' phenomenal worlds are visually foregrounded. Yet the documentary is not comprised exclusively of point-of-view shots from the dog's perspective. In fact, similarly to the soundscape, the film's visual world suggests a lateral arrangement of different creaturely realities and ways of perception: what could be construed as canine point-of-view shots – imitating dogs perceiving the skaters at the periphery of their vision (Fig. 34.1) – alternate with shots where the human and canine figures appear together in the same frame, sometimes interacting with each other (Fig. 34.2), sometimes immersed in their own worlds (Fig. 34.3). The film even contains what could be seen as human point-of-view shots; for example, the skaters' disembodied voices complaining about the hot weather are accompanied by images – depicting Football and Chola resting in the park's grassy, irrigated area – which arguably assume the teenagers' perspective as they look over to the dogs, probably envying their position under the sprinklers (Fig. 34.4). Evoking Pick's term of "creaturely cinema," such scenes simultaneously suggest a shared bodily exposure to the elements and emphasise that the humans and the dogs experience this state differently.

Fig. 34. Lateral arrangements of creaturely realities (*Los Reyes* 00:10:27; 00:04:55; 00:27:36; 00:16:47)

Furthermore, what were originally intended to be objective shots captured with the fixed camera are often affected by the filmmakers' and the viewers' inevitable anthropomorphisation. For example, in the opening shots, discussed a few paragraphs back as examples of the film's zoomorphic realism, Football and Chola also appear as humanised characters: Chola as the younger, nimbler protagonist, chasing passers-by, Football as a calm, elderly hobo with bleary eyes, a stoic expression on his face and an object perpetually clenched in his blunted jaws, which contributes to his projected and perceived eccentricity. On the one hand, such images support the argument that all screen dogs – even those appearing in documentaries – emerge as essentially hybrid entities combining anthropogenic constructions and their own phenomenological realities. On the other hand, by moving between canine, human, and objective points-of-view, the film also enacts how the skate park hosts a multiplicity of co-existing lifeworlds. This notion is also emphasised through the cycles of the irrigation system, as well as the municipality workers and volunteers engaged in various maintenance activities around the park – recurring sequences constituting the film's visual and acoustic backdrop – which signal that the dogs' lifeworld is embedded in the larger urban ecosystem, including those often invisible people who keep the city running as well as those (also often unnoticed) creatures who live on the trees, in the grass, or in the fur of larger animals. Notably, the filmmakers recorded the lives of bugs and insects through the use of macro lens (Fig. 35), which sometimes renders the portrayed beings' actions meaningful (for example, when the camera

zooms in on insects collecting nectar from a flower or a business of flies biting Football's ears), while other sequences retain the mysteriousness of these creaturely realities, visualising them instead as Uexküll originally imagined different *Umwelten*: as impermeable, hermetically sealed soap bubbles. For example, there is a two-minute sequence showing how some beetle-like insects are trying to climb across a yellow plastic tape wrapped around a tree, even capturing the moment when one of them encounters a larva. The way they keep falling off the plastic might be perceived as comic from a human perspective, but the meaning of their activities remains elusive. Such scenes therefore present interconnected yet incongruous lifeworlds unfolding both in a shared environment and in completely different spatial, temporal, and phenomenological dimensions, which are encapsulated in the film frame but remain impervious to the human gaze. This layered visual world is intended to reflect the director's ultimate decision "to put the dogs into a world that was *beside* them, a world with skaters, other animals, with another kind of existence, and more" (Reed n.pag., emphasis added).

Fig. 35. Different scales of life (*Los Reyes* 00:26:18; 00:26:28; 01:04:04; 00:31:06)

The aesthetic world of Lo's film – following three strays, Zeytin, Nazar and Kartal, and a group of young Syrian refugees living on the streets of Istanbul – also traces the parallel realities of precarious human and canine lives, yet it is intended to provide a more comprehensively embodied perspective of the latter: reflecting the director's vision of portraying "a dog's life" from a dog's point of view, *Stray* aims to present us with an emphatically canine perceptual universe. The film's first sounds – intermingling urban and

natural noises – give a subtle introduction to the acoustically perceived world of Zeytin, who essentially becomes the focaliser of the dogs' experiences, indeed, a "canine anthropologist" leading the filmmaker and the viewer through the city and presenting it from her perspective (Horowitz, *Inside* 98). Like in *Los Reyes*, the noise of the traffic blending with the sound of seagulls remains an aural murmur throughout the film, momentarily interrupted by shifting human conversation fragments, cries, and calls. Lo said in an interview that the documentary "being largely dialogue-free was important because the dogs aren't hanging onto every word," so the film's sound designer, Ernst Karel, developed an "aural language" in which "human dialogue becomes radically secondary to heightened frequencies" (Barzey n.pag.).

By analysing recent creature-centred documentaries through Dylan Robinson's postcolonial theory of *listening positionalities*, Ina Karkani proposes that cinematic soundscapes presenting us with other creatures' sonic worlds can reconfigure representational conventions and the ontological boundaries between human and nonhuman bodies (34). Critiquing "the normative and unmarked forms of listening privilege within *settler colonial listening positionality*" (Robinson 10), which often appropriate and assimilate indigenous sound and music into Eurocentric frameworks, Robinson argues that settlers should recognise their culturally implicated positions, acknowledge the limits of their understanding, and listen in ways that respect the indigenous sovereignty of sound (39). Following this theory, Karkani suggests that films like *Stray*, which "present us with alternative perceptions and relationships to the living world" can also foster "non-anthropocentric and ontologically non-hierarchic" relations through cinematic sound (34). In *Stray*, this strategy does not mean a complete immersion into the animals' auditory perceptions; by mixing sounds that are comprehensible to the human viewer and sounds that are comprehensible only to the dogs (canine *functional tones* in the literal sense), Lo's documentary encourages an awareness rather than an appropriation of the wholly other sonic worlds that intersect with human perceptions in the urban environment.

However, a key difference between *Los Reyes* and *Stray* is that while the former only includes diegetic sounds, thereby adhering to Bazinian realism, which prescribes limited intervention (both during shooting and post-production) into the recorded reality, the latter combines the "aural language" attuned to the sonic perception of the dogs with original soundtracks composed by Ali Helnwein, serving to intensify the perceived atmosphere and emotional charge of certain sequences, that is, the feelings generated in and/or envisioned by the *human* director and the composer. For example, the opening montage – showing dogs resting on the beach, crossing busy roads, and playing in the park – as well as the subsequent sequence – recreating Zeytin's morning as she searches for food, chases a cat and sniffs the

scent trails left in the grass from the previous day – are accompanied by slow-building, hopeful cello music. The latter abruptly stops when Zeytin freezes in her tracks at the sight of a potential playmate (Fig. 36) – a moment recalling the part in *The Return of Boston Blackie* where Strongheart's attention is diverted by the appearance of a cat –, the pause in the soundtrack signalling the dog's high-strung emotional state. Although at such instances, canine experiential reality seems to rise above the added music, the latter always returns when the recorded situation presents an affective or atmospheric content that is easily readable from a human perspective. For instance, when Zeytin and Nazar hear the calls of their human friends and join them as they wade through the happy commotion at Galata Bridge, the accompanying high notes and harmonic scales convey the feelings of joy and excitement; the sequences recording how the dogs scavenge for food at night and engage in fights with rival packs are accompanied by melancholic cello music that also highlights the homeless boys' daily struggles; and when provisions are handed out by the local foodbank, the music becomes mellow and hopeful again. In *Stray*, the dogs' realistically recreated acoustic perceptions – fragmentary human conversations, bird songs, traffic noises, barks, the boys' calls and other high-frequency sounds – thus alternate with composed, melodised, emotionally filtered versions of the animals' experiences.

The film's closing montage sequence, composed of scenic shots showing dogs freely roaming among ancient ruins, in the mountains and on the beach (Fig. 37) – hitting with a strong sense of irony amid Turkey's renewed anti-stray campaign – is accompanied by a triumphant melody which, due to its resemblance to organ music, also imbues the images with an exalted quality. Similarly to the quotes inserted in between the documentary sequences, the use of music thus serves to convey the director's vision, which, inspired by the philosophical school of cynicism (coming from the Greek *kynikos* meaning *doglike*), regards dogs as symbolic models of an ideal way of living, based on the tenets of self-sufficiency, lack of shame, and loyalty to truth. While trying to celebrate this perceived way of life by foregrounding the canine subjects' embodied experiences, *Stray* thus, perhaps paradoxically, also creates a highly constructed, allegorised version of the dogs' lived reality, also apparent in the way the canine subjects' names are revealed through captions, which contributes to their absorption into humanising symbolic and narrative structures. Like the protagonists of Perut and Osnovikoff's documentary as well as all the other cinematic canines studied in the dissertation, Zeytin, Nazar and Kartal emerge as hybrid entities whose embodied experiences are transferred to the screen together with human meanings and intentions.

Fig. 36. Stopped in one's (sound)tracks (*Stray* 00:17:19)

Fig. 37. Cynic visions (*Stray* 01:05:49; 01:06:17; 01:06:00; 01:06:46)

In Lo's documentary, the oscillation between the attempts to focus on canine perspectives and convey the director's personal vision is also detectable in the visual world, where the shots aestheticising the dog's lives – also appearing in *Los Reyes* – alternate with technologically facilitated sequences intended to highlight the animal's embodied realities. In order to bring the viewers into contact with the visually perceived world of the canine protagonists, *Stray* consistently uses the point-of-view shot technique. In the opening sequence,

the camera is closely following Zeytin's hind legs treading through public flowerbeds, then it switches to subjective perspective so that we are looking down at the purple bloom as if through the dog's eyes (Fig. 38.1, 38.2). At one point, Lo even attached a GoPro camera to Zeytin's neck via a harness, thereby allowing viewers to move and see *together* with the dog as she is making her way through the rubble of a construction site where she regularly meets the young Syrian refugees (Fig. 38.3). In these shots, their interactions are recorded in the most unabridged manner possible. However, even when the film leaves the subjective point of view, it continues following the dogs at a very close range (Fig. 38.4), which Lo managed to achieve with the help of an Easyrig,[88] an underslung camera and by crouching low throughout the filming process, as she said, "to mimic the height that dogs are seeing" (Mitchell n.pag.). Like the shots imitating Football and Chola's perspectives in *Los Reyes,* the images taken at a dog's eye level in *Stray* reflect the portrayed strays' experiential reality, their parallel world where the sights, sounds, scents and other sensory stimuli are not necessarily detectable or comprehensible to the viewer.

Fig. 38. Foregrounding the canine point of view (*Stray* 00:00:45; 00:01:01; 00:51:02; 00:13:27)

Similarly but more consciously than *Los Reyes*, Lo's documentary also calls attention to the limitations of human understanding and cinema's capacity to present other species' perceptions on the screen. Sometimes the camera switches to an external angle only to ensure that the viewer does not get too comfortable in the point-of-view shot of the dog wandering on

[88] Easyrig is a body harness system which spreads the weight of the camera onto the operator's body, thereby making shoulder mount, freehand and gimble-mount operation less arduous.

the streets; for instance, after the above-mentioned flowerbed scene, Zeytin is again shown from outside, apparently staring at something in the city (Fig. 39, top). The camera doggedly focuses on her features, not allowing the spectator to understand what she is looking at. Lo thus makes sure that the dog's visual perspective remains subjective. Another scene foregrounds – for a human observer – undetectable scents which help Zeytin perceive the world around her: the camera focuses on her snout as she is sniffing at the airborne messages (Fig. 39, bottom). Juxtaposing the chanting of the muezzin – which, for some viewers, is comprehensible, ringing with the *functional tone of worship* – and a blurred scenery in the background with the implied, albeit incomprehensible, odours in the foreground, this scene not only centres the canine perspective but it also emphasises how the distinct human and canine perceptual worlds converge rather than merge in the city.

Fig. 39. Limiting the human gaze (*Stray* 00:01:11; 00:05:06)

In *Stray*, too, human and nonhuman perceptions, spaces and temporalities appear side by side, occasionally interacting with each other within the larger urban environment. In Perut and Osnovikoff's documentary, this is achieved through the use of a fixed camera, which allows the filmmakers to capture the co-existing, equally lively yet subjectively meaningful interactions of different creatures with their surroundings; the alternation between canine, human, and objective points-of-view, which enacts how the skate park hosts a multiplicity of perspectives; the adjustments of the camera lens, which makes it possible to capture different scales of life; and through a creative use of the film's compositional planes, which consistently places the dogs and other nonhuman animals in the foreground while the human subjects are pushed to the background, thereby replacing hierarchical, anthropocentric ontologies with a lateral arrangement of creaturely realities. Furthermore, the pace of *Los Reyes* is attuned to the rhythm of the dogs' lives, which manifests itself in serialised sequences documenting their daily rituals (such as waking and sleeping, playing and barking, running around and guarding their territories), alternating with "more eventful" scenes (for example, when external elements disrupt the skate park's usual atmosphere, such as people cleaning the space, changing weather conditions, or shifts in the skaters' routines; or when Football is shown to be developing health issues, which becomes apparent in the way his movements slow down and he starts limping). However, these events do not correlate with the plot developments of classical dramaturgy. As Pick would describe them, drawing on Bazin's concept of "pure duration" (*What is Cinema? Vol. 2*, 80), these are pro-filmic events constituting time as it unfolds in reality (*Creaturely Poetics* 115-116), the temporality of creaturely life, which includes the processes of aging and bodily deterioration.

Besides using acoustic and visual techniques (e.g. the consistent use of the subjective canine point of view), Lo also adjusted the pace of her film so that it reflects both the shared and the subjective temporal dimensions in which the dogs and the portrayed humans live. As Lo said in an interview,

> A lot of times, we would just be waiting and waiting and waiting for Zeytin to wake up – and sometimes she wouldn't wake up until 5pm. Her rhythms were her own. We just had to surrender our desires for whatever we might expect of a film's story and hand it over to her. Sometimes she would chase after sounds that we couldn't hear or smells that we couldn't smell. It was just a process of letting go and trying to immerse. (Godwin n.pag.)

As a result of tuning the filming process to the dogs' rhythms, *Stray* also has an oscillating pace, comprised of quick takes characterised by sudden, jerky camera movements as Lo was trying to keep up with the dogs, alternating with long takes in which seemingly nothing important happens – an uneventfulness that also characterises the homeless youths' perception of time albeit, in their case, it is connected with the negative experiences of precarity, living day to day, without prospects. Similarly to *Los Reyes*, *Stray* thus also uses temporal techniques to signal the interconnected yet in certain aspects incongruous experiential realities unfolding in the larger, objective environment.

Stray, however, also calls attention to the multiplicity of perspectives through its markedly dehumanising portrayal of the city, which is informed by the culture-specific perception of the public space and the local particularities of human–street dog relations. On the one hand, well-known sites in Istanbul (such as the Blue Mosque, Taksim Square, Istiklal Street, and the fishers on the banks of the Bosporus) are revisited through a canine-centred point of view, shot from a low angle, thus encouraging the viewer to imagine how the dogs see the city. On the other hand, Lo's camera also captures how the strays' lives regularly intersect with human activities taking place on the streets. Consequently, *Stray* portrays a diverse cross-section of Istanbul's inhabitants (including garbage collectors, restaurant owners, fishermen, protesting women, and passers-by) highlighting how, in Turkish culture, the streets serve as a stage for daily life, of which the presence of stray animals is an intrinsic part. As many ethnologists, zooanthropologists, artists and other types of visitors of the city have noted, specifically in Istanbul, the street dog is a "common fixture," who "vies for food and space with other inhabitants of the streets: cats, nocturnal rats, various scavenger birds, the urban derelict, members of the poor" (Fortuny 78). Notably, the film reveals the generally tolerant and caring attitude of the public toward stray dogs: rather than being shooed away or mistreated, the dogs are fed, smiled at, and – at the time of shooting – still allowed to coexist with people in various urban zones, from the bustling port and tourist districts to the city's outermost hills. This portrayal is shaped by the particular culture of human–street dog relations in Turkey, where the previously mentioned westernisation attempts at controlling urban stray populations coexist with the traditional Islamic taboo against dogs, the religious notion of the sanctity for all life, as well as the accepting attitude of the majority of today's human citizens, most of whom bear an appreciation, respect and care for the animals; as Kim Fortuny notes, "[m]any contemporary Turkish people, religious or otherwise, refer to the street dog as a living soul, [which] leads many in the general public to set out food for them and not refer them to the municipality that may take them away to worse conditions than the streets, or more likely extermination" (82-

83). More recently, these sensibilities have drawn people to the streets to protest against the president's culling campaigns, which would result in removing the nonhuman fellow-citizens from the shared spaces that they are considered to be an integral part of. Reflecting the portrayed culture's specific approach to urban life and interspecies relationships, *Stray* – more markedly than *Los Reyes* – thus reveals the reality of multispecies conviviality, where human and canine lifeworlds form dynamic, reciprocal relationships both with each other and the larger environment so that they together contribute to shaping what, at first sight, seem to be anthropogenic cityscapes (Acampora 12). As Kris Hill notes, drawing on Dominique Lestel's ideas, "urban spaces are more than just human societies and human architecture" (91): they are spaces of what Lestel calls "hybrid communities" ("Dissolving" 109) constituted by entangled, co-dependent, multispecies subjects who are connected in their experiences of both well-being and suffering ("Hybrid Communities" 62).

Since, in many respects, *Los Reyes* and *Stray* render the dogs' and the human outcasts' experiences analogous, most reviews and interviewers discussing these two films suggest that the strays serve as symbols of human precarity, their vulnerable states accentuating the marginalised situation of the human outcasts. As Leo Goldsmith argues, in *Los Reyes*, "the representation of animals functions . . . as a means of indexing those characteristics that humans have lost or failed to achieve: namely, their humanity" (n.pag.). In a similar vein, Whelan Barzey suggests that *Stray* "seems to draw a comparison between the position of stray dogs and the most ostracised in our society" (n.pag.). Indeed, one could easily compare the situation of the dogs and the skaters in *Los Reyes*, since, in a sense, they are discarded by the same system: Chile's corrupt neoliberal economy. Although the country is seemingly prosperous, as the protests in October 2019 showed, it still suffers from the legacy of the Pinochet regime as well as more recent neoliberal reforms (elimination of subsidies, welfare reforms, privatisation of state-owned companies, the health sector, education and pensions) which have caused high levels of inequality in the first two decades of the 21st century (Albertus and Deming n.pag.). As their fragmentary conversations suggest, the young skaters have limited access to education and employment in Chile's unbalanced distribution of resources, power, and capital, hence ending up with temporary jobs or as drug dealers in Santiago's streets, while Football and Chola, due to their being heavyweight mixed-breed dogs coming with a high cost of maintenance, were probably abandoned by their owners. For these reasons, Goldsmith similarly argues that it is possible "to see in the figure of the stray – the de-domesticated animal – a kind of symbolic archetype of contemporary life. Chola and Football have a home (the park) and even individual homes [the dog houses] . . . but are nevertheless homeless" (n.pag).

In this sense, *Stray* and *Los Reyes* join a trans-cultural tradition of connecting the stray dog with images of vulnerability, poverty, and marginalisation, which, for a long time, evoked primarily negative associations. As McHugh points out, "[t]he ancient cross-cultural histories of urban dog massacres to promote physical and spiritual health indicate how canine strays, like indigent humans, have long been identified as symptoms of social problems," representing "ideological as well as physical threats" (*Dog* 130). However, as the general Western attitude towards the marginalised and the needy began to shift in the 19th century, stray dogs increasingly became associated with abuse, cruelty, and unnecessary human suffering. For McHugh, a prominent example of this historical tendency is Francisco Goya's *Perro semihundido* (*The Dog*, 1820-23), which she reads as the embodiment of "the Everyman in despair" and "the futility of struggle in a 'malevolent environment'" (132).[89] In our cultural imagination, the stray has therefore become a metaphoric representation of "the broad social structures of poverty and exploitation" (133). This allegorical dimension is also present in *Stray* and *Los Reyes*, which, by placing vulnerable human and canine lives beside each other, allow one to visualise the dogs as metaphors for how neoliberal systems create a widening gap between the rich and the poor, the well-connected, the influential and the ones left behind, which Bauman identifies as the side-effect of order-building and economic progress (*Wasted Lives* 5).[90] Rather than overwriting them, these metaphorical layers coexist with and complement the creaturely-phenomenological dimensions within the two documentaries, contributing to underlining the shared vulnerabilities of people and animals through the means of abstraction.

However, while raising awareness about the analogies between human and canine experiences of suffering, *Los Reyes* and *Stray* also draw important distinctions between human and canine states of vulnerability. On the one hand, shooting the films with the intention of foregrounding the canine perspective allowed the filmmakers to highlight that living on the

[89] This painting also appears in *Heart of a Dog*, analysed in the next chapter, where it serves a similar (though re-contextualised) metaphoric purpose of conveying the director's feelings about her dog's suffering.

[90] Due to foregrounding the stray dog's subjective perspective, *Los Reyes* and *Stray* could be even classified as *cynomorphic* texts – a tradition dating back to Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead* (2nd century BCE), and including such notable works as Cervantes' *The Dialogue of the Dogs* (1613), Bulgakov's *Heart of a Dog* (1925) and Paul Auster's *Timbuktu* (1999) – which express social critique from a dog's perspective (see Ziolkowski; Kuzniar 186). According to McHugh, this tradition has extended into the visual arts, where the stray mutt evolved into the canine version of the *flâneur* by the 19th century, simultaneously embodying marginalised groups and personal freedom, thus being a perfect tool for critiquing bourgeois values and institutional structures (*Dog* 133). One of the most significant representatives of contemporary *cynomorphic* texts is John Berger' *King: A Street Story* (1999), which can be interpreted as an intertext of *Los Reyes* and *Stray*. As Georg Zipp observes, "King attempts to change the way readers see poverty by way of what could be termed . . . a visual dislocation from first world privilege" (168). Like the dogs appearing in the documentaries, King, trotting through the streets as a canine *flâneur*, offers a perspective that is both close and distant, and can thus effectively explore social inequalities.

streets is not entirely a negative state for dogs; most of the time, Football, Chola, Zeytin and the others seem content to live in the public space. This on-screen behaviour correlates with sociological studies which found that "[n]eighborhood dogs are akin to homeless people who have a place at night to sleep or 'crash' but consider the street more their 'home'" (Arluke and Rowan 32). In contrast, what one can infer from the fragmentary conversations between the young skaters featured in *Los Reyes* is that they are anxious and ashamed about living a "dog's life". For example, one of them is outraged after he is called a "fucking dog" (*perro culiao*) by his grandmother: "It made me feel bad" (00:10:51). The director of *Stray* observed the same disparity between the Syrian refugees and the dogs: "I think there's a qualitative difference between people and animals living without homes, and I don't think a meaningful comparison can be made. The dogs seemed very content in Istanbul to be free to call any pavement their home, whereas for humans who were homeless, it was a hardship to endure" (qtd. in Barzey n.pag.). In this sense, the street dogs apparently transcend human practices of precarisation.

On the other hand, the dogs can be perceived as worse hit by precarity, since, devoid "of the skills to solicit rights by bargaining or coercion" (Bauman, "What Prospects" 20), they are unable to escape the natural elements or change the course of modernisation. To highlight the disparities between human and canine conditions, *Los Reyes*, for instance, recurrently juxtaposes the skaters' ignorance of their relatively privileged status with the dogs' inescapable state of vulnerability. In several shots, the camera focuses on such details as the dogs' rain-soaked fur, dry, cracked, bleeding paw pads, or the flies on the ears of the weathered Football (Fig. 40) – conditions which impair their quality of life. As we learn later on, the teenagers have the opportunity to escape their precarious position, only, they do not want to. They are complaining about being treated badly by their parents and the police, but they also admit that they prefer using and selling drugs and skating over studying or working: "I don't want to work" says one of them, "Let others do the work" (00:26:58). Yet when the youngsters no longer find this way of life viable, they enter the social-economic system they have stubbornly resisted: "If you don't contribute," says another, more mature skater, "you are just a drain . . . I graduated and I should be working. That's what I'm planning to do, bro. I'll join the fuckin' system" (00:59:29-00:59:43). While the humans are seemingly able to leave the periphery (both metaphorically and physically), the dogs continue to stay there, exposed to the elements as well as the life-threatening prospects of human malevolence.[91] The possibility to choose to live in

[91] Football, the older dog was poisoned one year after Petru and Osnovokoff finished shooting.

or leave the park, granted to the kids but not the dogs, reveals that vulnerability is "unevenly distributed across species lines" (Lorey qtd. in Shukin, "Precarious Encounters" 118).

Fig. 40. Inescapable exposure (*Los Reyes* 00:21:55; 01:04:47; 01:03:44; 01:05:44)

At the same time, the documentaries also show how, in their distinct vulnerable states, the dogs and the human subjects are mutually drawn to each other's company, forming multispecies communities that serve as alternative, potentially resistant configurations against the existing systems of hierarchy and marginalisation. For instance, when Football and Chola are (seemingly) suffering from loneliness, the effect of steady rainfalls on the skate park's social life, their whole being lights up as some younger kids arrive to the site with apparently no other purpose than that of playing fetch with the dogs. Also, in the midst of all kinds of insecurities, the *quiltros* lodging in the skate park provide a sense of familiarity, community, and home for the human misfits. A similar sense of interspecies communality persists in *Stray,* where the symbiotic relationship between the canine citizens and human outcasts predated the filmmakers' arrival into the shooting location (just like in the case of *Los Reyes*). In fact, it was Zeytin and Nazar, the two adult dogs, who led Lo to the refugees. In this film, too, the dogs' presence in the humans' lives creates a sense of community that grounds them against the drifts of non-belonging.[92] Thus, even though they are discarded by modernity in different ways, the experiences of precarity conjoin the portrayed human and canine outcasts, to use Shukin's

[92] So much so that the boys feel a profound urge to take care of a dog that is only theirs, so one night they steal the puppy called Kartal from the guards' hut at the edge of the building site.

words, “in a new kinship based on shared resilience, recovery and repair” (“Precarious Encounters” 115). In this respect, too, *Stray* offers a more constructed representation as it creates a story about the formation of a small human–animal community, chronicling their turbulent daily lives, and then the dissolution of the group when the boys are arrested and Kartal, the puppy they stole, is taken away by the police. In contrast, the aesthetics and the narrative of *Los Reyes* seem to be driven by the forces of creaturely vulnerability as it unfolds in reality, including the conditions and contingencies of bodily exposure, frailty, and finitude. If there is a story in *Los Reyes*, it is the story of Football’s aging and death, the pure, inherently moving processes of life.

To varying degrees, *Los Reyes* and *Stray* thus attune to, absorb, and accentuate the states and processes of creaturely vulnerability that all living bodies – irrespective of species categories – are subjected to. At the same time, by using specific filming devices and methods, different variations of the subjective point-of-view technique, and canine-centred visual, sound, and timescapes, the documentaries highlight not only the shared but also the species-specific experiences of precarity. In fact, due to the filmmakers’ innovative, creature-conscious use of focus, perspective, sound, and pace, the dogs of *Los Reyes* and *Stray* emerge as agentic world-shapers who co-create shared and subjective meanings in the space they cohabit with the human subjects. Foregrounding the humans’ and the dogs’ parallel experiences, the “creaturely poetics” of *Stray* and *Los Reyes* engender a comprehensive vision of multispecies relations that at once acknowledges the interconnectedness of vulnerable lives (i.e. “ecoprecarity”) and the disparities between different species’ conditions – disparities which, under the modern neoliberal state and its accompanying biopolitical regimes, are often exploited for the sake of bolstering the walls round a putatively enclosed human community.

Intercorporal Infections in *The Plague Dogs* and *Isle of Dogs*

"It is early afternoon.
You sit on the grass
with your rough face on the dog's neck.
Right now
you are both as still as a snapshot.
That infectious dog ought to let a fly bother her,
ought to run out in an immense field,
chasing rabbits and skunks,
mauling the cats, licking insects off her rump,
and stop using you up.
My darling, why do you lean on her so?"
(Anne Sexton: "Your Face on the Dog's Neck")

The creaturely condition that connects the films in this subchapter includes the living body's susceptibility to infirmity and disease, specifically, its openness to viral infections. This condition is more likely to evoke negative reactions and representations than precarity, since it does not produce necessarily visible signs and is much harder to control. As some side-effects of the recent coronavirus pandemic – among others, the quarantining and relinquishing of pets in Asia, Europe, and the US, the killing of animals in public places as a measure to avoid virus transmission in China, and the mass culling of minks in Denmark and Spain – showed, whenever humanity faces an epidemic crisis, the idea of zoonotic infection poses an existential risk: a threat reminding us of the porousness of the boundaries that separate us from nonhuman animals, and ultimately, of our animal nature, to which people tend to react by (re)drawing the physical and conceptual boundaries between human and animal lives. From a Kristevan psychoanalytical perspective, zoonosis is thus something that triggers *abjection*, the process where one distances oneself in an ontological, moral and physical sense from entities associated with a threatening otherness,[93] while, in biopolitical terms, it is one of those phenomena that intensify the mechanisms of the anthropological machine, which works towards maintaining a

[93] While Kristeva approaches this problem from a psychoanalytical perspective, in their book *The Worm at the Core*, Sheldon Solomon, Tom Pyszczynski and Jeff Greenberg offer an explanation, which they term "terror management theory" (TMT), from the perspective of social and evolutionary psychology. According to this theory, people struggle with a basic psychological conflict arising from one's self-preservation instincts colliding with the awareness of one's finite creaturely existence. This conflict causes a persistent sense of terror even "in the absence of looming danger" (Solomon et al. 18), which we attempt to manage through cultural views and practices that serve to counter our biological reality with seemingly more significant meanings and values (i.e. escapism, beliefs in immortality). Solomon et al note that one of the pervasive ideas that comfort us is that of human superiority over animals, the notion that we can rise above the material conditions of life while other animals cannot: perceiving and treating them as inferior and separate helps us deny our shared fate (176). In her book *How to Be Animal*, Melanie Challenger specifies this ongoing self-deception as the "civil war of the mind" (64), which, as she explains, can resurface any time an existential threat (e.g. a pandemic) reminds us of our animal nature (142).

conceptual separation between humanity and animality, but also often – especially at times of perceived danger – leads to violent practices of excluding those subjects who are associated with the latter. As Christos Lynteris puts it, during a zoonotic pandemic, "all the talk of One Health, multispecies relationships and partnerships melts into thin air, and what is swiftly put in place . . . is an apparatus of culling, stamping out, disinfection, disinfestation, separation and eradication; what we may call the sovereign heart of public health in relation to animal-borne diseases" (2). These responses point to the prevalence of what Roberto Esposito calls the modern "immunitary paradigm" (*Immunitas* 7): a system that encompasses diverse societal processes including the preparedness for and management of emerging infectious diseases through quarantines, isolation, and other forms of regulated containment. Besides the already introduced theories on the rejection of (animal) otherness, including the Kristevan notion of abjection and Agamben's concept of the anthropological machine, Esposito's insights on modern biopolitics provide the specific theoretical framework on which the discussion of zoonotic diseases and their cinematic representations is built in this subchapter.

Not unlike Kristeva, Esposito argues that all the above-mentioned measures are in fact reactions to a (perceived) risk of border violation, a threat of some uncontrollable force worming its way through the boundaries "between the inside and the outside, between self and other, the individual and the common" (*Immunitas* 8). Considering the latter, Esposito states that immunity implies a state of particularity, which, as Timothy Campbell notes, "requires the means by which the individual is defended from the 'expropriative effects' of community, protecting the one who carries it from the risk of contact with those who do not" (Esposito, *Bios* 47 qtd. in Campbell 4). For Esposito, the immunitary reactions to border violation are specific to the modern subject, who is constituted through their attempts to sever ties with the community. In this sense, Esposito's view resonates with Benjamin's, Horkheimer and Adorno's theories, discussed in the introduction, as well as, more specifically, Butler's conceptualisation of the violent, self-centred subject who "seeks to restore and maintain its mastery through the systemic destruction of its multilateral relations . . . but only at the price of denying its own vulnerability, its dependence, its exposure, where it exploits those very features in others, thereby making those features 'other to' itself" (*Precarious Life* 41).[94]

Although neither Esposito nor (initially) Butler extend the notion of community to animals per se, in this subchapter, I rely on Dominique Lestel's and other posthumanist

[94] Here Butler hints at the social relational ontology which she developed in *Precarious Life* (2004) and *Frames of War* (2009) and which also informed her standpoint at the 2012 roundtable discussion on precarity, quoted in the previous subchapter.

thinkers' ideas according to which our communities are inevitably multispecies configurations, and, specifically, the views of Matías Saidel and Diego Rossello, who suggest that the "notion of *communitas* . . . can include, beyond Esposito's account, non-human animals as well" (135). This argument is especially valid since Esposito's definition of the modern subject as someone who attempts to attain immunity coincides with the way Western humanism defines man through the denial of his relations with animals and animality. Applying Esposito's conceptualisation of immunity to the context of contemporary zoonosis reveals that the biopolitical measures of culling, isolating, and eradicating animals are immunitary reactions to the risks posed specifically by multispecies relations, namely, the possibilities of "absorption, invasion, vulnerability" and with these, "the breaking of a boundary imagined as secure" (Bashford and Hooker 4), in which the "animal" – construed as "other" saturates the tissues of the "human" body (either the individual body or the body politic).

What is thus frightening about cross-species infection is its ability to confront us with the facts of shared creaturely vulnerability and human–animal interrelatedness. This is why Esposito argues that, upon closer inspection, immunity and community are not contradictory terms, but should be read dialectically as each other's complements, one inscribed reciprocally in the logic of the other. As Campbell puts it, "immunity presupposes community, but also negates it" (4); specifically, the immunitary responses to zoonotic diseases confirm the immanence of interspecies connections, which, in turn, generate anxiety and the need for biopolitical measures of separating, isolating and excluding animals. These (re)actions, aided by a language by which man separates himself from his own creaturely condition, serve to maintain the imaginary boundaries between *bios* and *zoe*, or what Derrida, describing Western religious and metaphysical paradigms, refers to as "transcendental" and "bio-zoological life": a system that "calls for sacrifices in almost parasitical form so as to protect its own dignity" ("Faith and Knowledge" 51). The rhetorically facilitated biopolitical regimes that differentiate between human and animal life, while also construing the former as valuable while the latter as dispensable, (seemingly) mar the capacity of zoonosis to inspire a posthumanist appreciation of multispecies relations.

Nevertheless, Esposito argues that an "opening to [immunity's] reversal in community" (*Immunitas* 170) could become a site where an "affirmative biopolitics" could emerge (*Bios* 18): a biocentric paradigm "based upon a politics of life . . . as opposed to a politics over life" (qtd. in Campbell 3), which would also deconstruct the binary categories of sacred (human) and sacrificable (animal) forms of existence. According to Esposito, such an "affirmative biopolitics" can only be established if we recognise the extent to which our societal processes

operate to immunise the collective political and moral body from the categories associated with community. Only then can we form a new onto-politics and ethics where the value is attributed to shared material life. Esposito emphasises that "this is not a pure return to a primitive condition, but . . . a way of being human that is no longer defined in terms of alterity from our animal origins" (*Third Person* 114). Regarding the context of zoonosis, I imagine this as an ethical and biopolitical paradigm where animals are not automatically treated as threats to be excluded or eliminated but as parts of the political, legal, and moral community, lives that are just as vulnerable and valuable as human lives and which also need to be protected.

Nonhuman animals tend to be framed as "epidemic villains" when they (are perceived to) carry infectious diseases that may also spread to human populations (Lynteris 1-2).[95] Due to the resurgence of zoonotic diseases in the 21st century, modern biosecurity regimes envision these maladies as "catastrophic" (9), reinforcing the status of animals as "epidemiological rogues" (1), and justifying acts of systemic violence against them. One well known cinematic example that portrays this process is the 1982 science-fiction horror *The Thing* (dir. John Carpenter): although not explicitly focusing on human–animal relations, the film employs sled dogs as a starting point for the spread of a shape-shifting alien parasite, which assimilates and then imitates other organisms. The susceptibility to infection creates paranoia, fear and conflict among the human characters, a group of American researchers based in Antarctica, who no longer trust each other because any of them could be a host to the eponymous Thing. The film exposes the primal human fear of bodily vulnerability, intercorporal connection, and mutability, which are manifested through the originally canine-borne parasite. Similarly, in the 1983 American horror film *Cujo* (dir. Lewis Teague), based on Stephen King's novel of the same title, a family dog, a friendly St. Bernard contracts rabies and transforms into a deadly predator.[96] By ending the narrative with the destruction of the dog, *Cujo* restores the sense of human exceptionality, separation, and protection from the rest of the material world, the threat

[95] Although animals have always been viewed as sources of potential danger, especially after the rise of bacteriology in the early 19th century, they began to be systematically identified as "reservoirs and spreaders of diseases affecting humans" (Lynteris 3). Coinciding with the spread of colonisation, epidemiological discourses became invested with "militaristic tropes and colonial moralities" (5). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the "sanitary-utopian aspiration to liberate humanity of zoonotic and vector-borne diseases" further increased the attempts to separate humans and animals on account of the latter's' perceived threat to public health (6-7).

[96] According to Stephen Prince, what renders such animal characters horrifying is that they expose the permeability of the imaginary boundaries between the "human" and the "animal" body (where body is understood both in individual and collective terms). In Prince's words, the monstrous characters of horror films expose an ongoing preoccupation with "the question of how humans may be separated from the rest of the animal world, the question of what human uniqueness consists of and how it may be kept" (129). As Margaret Mead puts it, they reveal "the beast in man," and with it, "the thin veneer of civilization," which suggests "that we do not trust mankind to be continuously human" (184-185).

of which is embodied by the pet turned into a menacing canine monster. As *The Thing* and *Cujo* show, dogs are especially susceptible to activating our immunitary responses because, due to their ontological and physical proximity, they are extremely likely to violate the borders between the "human" and the "animal" body. As Lucinda Cole puts it, referencing Aristotle's categorisation of animals, this is because "of all the 'more perfect' creatures, they are the ones who most frequently and characteristically cross and re-cross the lines between singular objects of affection—'man's best friend'—and dangerous populations" (111). Able to live beside us as loyal companions and also roam the streets in threatening packs, dogs dance on the "wavering line between the domesticated and the verminous" (112).

Due to this liminality, as David Redmalm observes, dogs occupy "an ambivalent zone of indistinction" when it comes to the management of zoonotic diseases ("To Make Pets Live" 250). This concept was originally coined by Agamben to denote places – such as concentration camps, refugee camps, and prisons – that are inhabited by what he refers to as *homines sacri* (the plural form of *homo sacer*), originally a juridical term for the legally outcast in ancient Roman law. The liminal *homo sacer* is no longer fully human but not merely animal either: "his entire existence is reduced to a bare life stripped of every right by virtue of the fact that anyone can kill him without committing homicide" (*Homo Sacer* 89). Yet, as Agamben adds, "he is in a continuous relationship with the power that banished him precisely insofar as he is at every instant exposed to an unconditioned threat of death" (90).[97] Therefore, in such cases (including interventions into the lives of refugees, prisoners, as well as the military management of epidemics), the absolute distinction between *bios* and *zoe* ceases to exist: the *homo sacer* "is pure *zoe*, but his *zoe* is as such caught in the sovereign ban and must reckon with it at every moment" (90).[98] In Redmalm's formulation, zones of indistinction are organised "to produce a context where the boundary between valuable and disposable life is dissolved so that life can be seen as *bios*, yet treated as *zoe*" (250). Although Agamben does not discuss the biopolitical status of nonhuman animals per se,[99] as Robert Kirk points out, the latter are also often placed in zones of indistinction designed to transform them into similarly liminal beings – into

[97] In connection with concentration camps, Agamben also notes that, as a consequence of his simultaneous reduction to "bare life" and his constant exposure to political power, the inhabitant can no longer distinguish between suffering from natural elements (e.g. the cold) and suffering inflicted by the hands of the law (i.e. the SS).
[98] In this respect, Agamben's theory largely draws on Foucault's insights on modern *biopower*, where the body is always already exposed to the mechanisms of state power, thereby politics effectively turns into *biopolitics*. Agamben expands on this notion by claiming that in zones of indistinction, the subjects "are not only . . . animals whose life as living beings is at issue in their politics, but also – inversely – citizens whose very politics is at issue in their natural body" (91), suggesting a more radical blurring between biological and political life.
[99] Agamben is first and foremost concerned with the *notion* of animality which, as he argues, is essential to the mechanisms of the anthropological machine and to the making of *homines sacri*.

animalia sacri (198). As pets, dogs often hold more privileged positions than humans, but many – especially those with a non-breed status, those living on the streets, in shelters, breeding facilities, or laboratories, and, at times when the human–animal boundary is threatened such as during epidemics, even pet dogs – are exposed to conditions where their status precariously oscillates between inside and outside, *bios* and *zoe*, cared for and abandoned or banished.

In the two films analysed in this subchapter – Martin Rosen's *The Plague Dogs* (1982), an animation film based on Richard Adams's 1977 novel of the same title, and Wes Anderson's stop-motion film *Isle of Dogs* (2018) – zones of indistinction appear in the form of animal-testing laboratories, military interventions aimed at managing viral diseases, and a trash island to which dogs are banished in Anderson's film (ostensibly) to protect the human population from a fictional zoonotic disease. These films thus reveal the psychological and biopolitical mechanisms on the basis of which such zones operate: the constant attempts to cover over, quarantine, or exclude entities that threaten to expose the permeable boundaries between humanity and the rest of the bio-community, "the borderline between normality and pathology, health and illness, the desirable and the repulsive, the accepted and the rejected, the *comme il faut* and *comme il ne faut pas*, the inside and the outside of the human universe" (Bauman, *Wasted Lives* 28). As Bauman highlights, the maintenance of this border requires constant vigilance, revealing that it "is anything but a 'natural frontier' . . . Quite the contrary, it is the boundary that divines, literally conjures up, the difference between . . . the admitted and the rejected, the included and the excluded" (28). I argue that, by revealing the inherent vulnerability of the excluded, supposedly menacing canine lives together with the violence of the exclusionary practices, *The Plague Dogs* and *Isle of Dogs* rewrite zones of indistinction as sites of potential change, where an affirmative biopolitics and ethics can emerge.

Both films foreground a shared bodily exposure to diseases while also highlighting – through the techniques available to animation and stop-motion – the subjective experiences of the portrayed canine subjects. By doing so, *The Plague Dogs* and *Isle of Dogs* provide two animated versions of what Pick calls a "creaturely poetics," showing that "however fantastical, even non-photographic, film springs forth from the world to which it ultimately returns" (Pick, "Three Worlds" 21). Here, however, I also emphatically call upon phenomenological film theories, namely, the ideas of Vivian Sobchack and Jennifer Barker, who construe the moving image as a lived albeit "materially nonhuman" body which directs "its perceptive and expressive activity outward toward the world" (Sobchack, *The Address* 225-226). In other words, these theorists perceive film as not only capable of absorbing embodied reality but also interacting with the body of the viewer, forming a relationship which, in Barker's terms,

functions as "a full-bodied opening into and suffusion of one with the other" (146). Following these insights, I propose that these animation films initiate a series of technophenomenological exchanges between the filmic world and material reality. The first exchange occurs when the filmic bodies – foregrounding canine experiences through narrative, visual, and other sensory means – are invaded by insistently other phenomenologies, which, in turn, alter the films' aesthetic makeup. The cinematic images are cynomorphised, or, in this context, one could say that they perform the state of being infected by canine bodies. However, these two films not only incorporate the creaturely perceptions and experiences of the portrayed canine subjects into their own bodies, which I regard to be the accumulation of the film's *mis-en-scène*, the employed perspective (filmic gaze), the aural elements, and the film's affective powers. Using means available to their type of animation, they also transfuse those creaturely experiences (back) to our reality by bringing us into an embodied, multisensorial contact with the canine bodies on-screen. In the latter respect, it is important to note that the characters in Rosen's and Anderson's films – contrary to representations of dogs as cute, clean, innocent pets – are portrayed realistically, as creatures prone to become filthy, catch diseases, and behave violently. *Plague Dogs* and *Isle of Dogs* can thus evoke not only empathy, but also our immunitary responses, which, as Esposito argues, affirm an inherent state of interspecies connection. Enacting human–animal continuity both within and across the diegesis, these films themselves can therefore be seen as zones of indistinction, not in the sense that Agamben uses the concept, but in terms of acting as sites of interspecies contact, working against the portrayed mechanisms of separation, exclusion, and purification both on and vis-à-vis the screen.[100]

The Plague Dogs tells the story of two dogs, Rowf and Snitter, who escape from a secret laboratory located in the British Lake District. Within the walls of the ominous Animal Research, Surgical and Experimental Station – making up the satirical acronym ARSE –, the dogs have been subjected to gruesome experiments: Rowf has been put through endurance tests where he has been repeatedly drowned and resuscitated, as a result of which he is justifiably hydrophobic, while Snitter has had a brain operation which not only left his head scarred, but also causes hallucinations in which his traumatic memories confuse his perception of reality. *Plague Dogs* thus introduces the dominant human–animal relations of the portrayed world through a typical zone of indistinction, where members of the multispecies community are

[100] To clarify, the films do not give practical advice on how to deal with zoonotic diseases (although *Isle of Dogs* suggests that vaccination is a more ethical method of virus management than eliminating animal populations). Rather, they stress that community is inscribed in the logic of immunity, that by recoiling from contact with animal "others," we in fact confirm our corporal connections. They criticise the system that denies this connectedness, instead calling for an alternative onto-politics and ethics.

turned into *animalia sacri* that can be tortured and killed with impunity. This zone is gradually extended to the whole fictional world as the dogs escape the lab only to find themselves in the barren wilderness of the Lake District: once residents learn that there are feral animals killing sheep in the fell, and that they may even carry germs of experimental bubonic plague, Rowf and Snitter become "epidemic villains" targeted by a steadily intensifying systemic hunt, at the end of which they are pushed into the sea. Although the closing images show the dogs trying to swim to a nearby island, the film offers an ambiguous answer as to whether they finally reach it. By representing how human-controlled biopower persecutes, then rejects the (potentially) sick canine bodies,[101] the film thus reveals the mechanisms of the modern "immunitary paradigm," which constantly recreates the human–animal boundary in the name of advancing science or protecting public health. Furthermore, the film draws on specifically British perceptions around dogs: while they are conventionally regarded as loyal companions and cherished members of the family, Rowf and Snitter are recast as dangerous outlaws, displaced from the domestic space. This reversal is reinforced by the choice of the Lake District as the setting: traditionally idealised in British cultural memory as a site of communion with nature, the Lake District here becomes the stage for state violence, fear, and expulsion, also reflected in the visual representation of the landscape. The juxtaposition between the region's pastoral associations and the persecution of the dogs intensifies the irony of the characters' fate, highlighting the fragility of emotional attachments when confronted with discourses of security and control. By presenting a series of symbolic border-crossings and bringing viewers into a visceral contact with the dogs' experiences of suffering, *Plague Dog* also calls attention to the permeability of the species boundary, exposes the immorality of eliminating the putatively dangerous animal "others," and (potentially) engenders what Esposito calls an "affirmative" ethical approach where value is attributed to creaturely vulnerability. As Hadas Marcus argues, the film ultimately "elicits identification with the dogs and revulsion toward the characters who persecute them" (229).

The process of creating an affective and sensory connection between the viewers and the canine characters already begins during the opening credits as the images bring us into contact with the perceptual world of the dogs. The initial darkness paired with the noises of choked gasps for air give the opening sequence a sensorial quality so that the viewer might feel transposed, if not into the body of the drowning animal, at least beside him in the water, feeling

[101] It is never confirmed whether Rowf and Snitter have actually contracted the plague. It is much more likely that they have not: one of the sheepdogs, sniffing at them, concludes that they are healthy, claiming that he always sniffs out illness.

as if she was choking herself. The scene continues to draw us into the dog's experiential world once the visuals appear, the first image showing what is presumably the bottom of a water tank: a light solid mass; a darker, blue layer above it traversed by wavy lines moving like seaweed, as well as occasional white circles and swirls resembling bubbles and the shimmering of light under water (Fig. 41). The image is difficult to comprehend through semiotic means, but can evoke the multisensorial, creaturely experience of being immersed in a pool of water. The depiction of unidentifiable clusters of matter, flows, and intensities also evokes the Deleuzian notion of the "molecular" which, like "becoming-animal," refers to states and processes that dissolve solid boundaries and identities; we are immersed into a fluid condition of "unstable particle-flows" and "substances" (Deleuze and Guattari 40), a kind of primordial soup from which forms are built, a visualisation of the ontological permeability between different species.

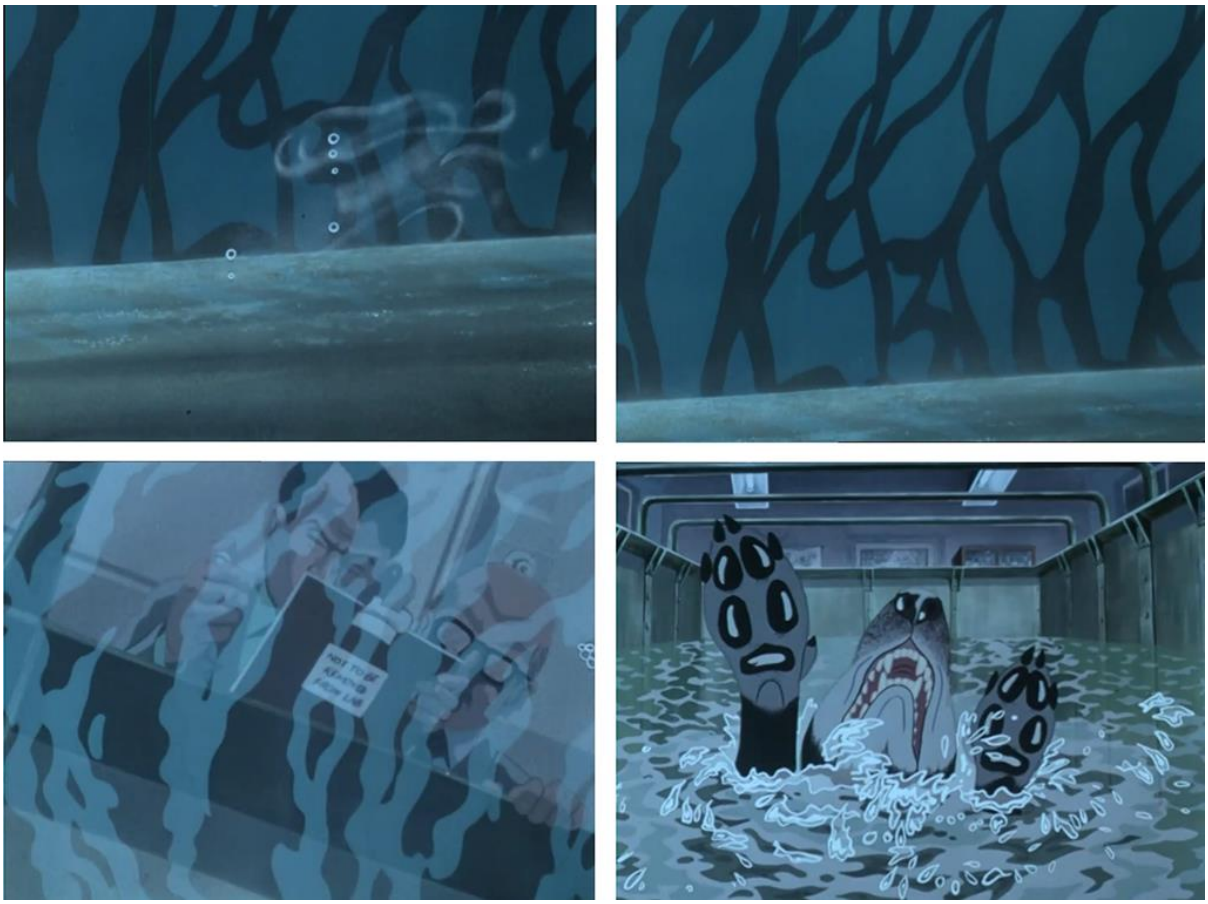

Fig. 41. Ontological permeability and multisensorial visuality (*The Plague Dogs* 00:01:36-00:02:10)

Resembling the formation of distinct shapes and entities, as the blue part of the picture grows and the lighter one at the bottom fades, the abstract underwater imagery turns into clarity: the viewer starts to realise that the fictional seeing subject is raising his eyes towards the water's surface. And as the hands of scientists grasping a rail and holding a notepad appear, followed

immediately by a sudden change of perspective and the nose of a dog emerging from the water, it becomes clear that we have been witnessing some sort of immersion experiment from the point of view of the canine subject (who is later introduced as Rowf). Devising an animated version of ontological permeability and multisensorial visuality, the opening sequence thus evokes a sense of shared bodily fragility between the human viewer and the suffering canine character, which can serve as the basis for a creaturely ethics. As Hayward argues, a film's "attention to texture as it is generated through the constitutive supplementarity of vision and touch can offer novel prehensions of the relationships between species" ("FingeryEyes" 582). Whereas optic visuality "permits a transcendent, distant and arguably disconnected, point-of-view," multisensory visuality, "comprising the tactile, kinaesthetic, and proprioceptive senses" functions by "contiguity, contact and resonance" and is therefore especially capable of facilitating an empathetic engagement vis-à-vis the screen (582).

The Plague Dogs continues to introduce the hostile environment of the research station through a canine perspective, thereby maintaining the embodied connection between the canine subjects and the viewers. For example, when Rowf – now accompanied by Snitter – pushes through the door of their kennels, the two of them come upon a row of technicians' gloves (Fig. 42). Shown from a low angle mimicking a dog's eye level and announced by a loud, hair-raising note, the gloves immediately evoke negative bodily reactions, forcing us to relive the horror the dogs must have suffered – literally – at the hands of the scientists. Additionally, the dogs' physical escape, as they push through different rooms and eventually out into the hills, can be seen as a series of symbolic transgressions between the safely guarded borders of the "human" body – represented by the lab where the "unruly" entities are (supposedly) contained within cages, tanks and restricted rooms[102] – and the uncontainable and threatening "animal" body –

[102] One of these caged lifeforms is a monkey living in a small steel container. The narrative of Rowf and Snitter is interrupted by the recurring appearance of this captive creature, which, similarly to the opening sequence, creates an embodied sense of shared bodily vulnerability, as if the viewer were forced inside the cage together with the animal, who is shown shivering, covering her eyes, and rocking back and forth just as we would in a similar situation. These images recall the Harlow Monkey Experiments, a series of studies conducted by psychologist Harry Harlow in the 1950s and 1960s to investigate the effects of maternal deprivation and social isolation on infant rhesus monkeys, which were heavily criticised for their cruelty. The recurring images of the little monkey in *The Plague Dogs* are an effective reminder of the persistence of systemic violence against lab animals. At the same time, by showing how the monkey is eavesdropping on the scientists, these images also suggest that animals retain their agency even when humans believe they have completely deprived them of it. This cultural critique of animal experimentation had earlier appearances, for instance, in Brigid Brophy's novel *Hackenfeller's Ape* (1953), which gives voice – at least in part – to the captive animal's perspective. Similar sensibilities can later be found echoing in Philip Larkin's poem "Ape Experiment Room" (1965), which undoubtedly evokes Harlow's monkey experiments. Larkin's verse captures the repetitive suffering of animals within the confines of scientific research, drawing attention not only to the violence of experimentation but also to the human failure to recognise nonhuman sentience. By echoing this imagery, *The Plague Dogs*'s critique of laboratory practices is situated within a longer tradition of British cultural responses to animal experimentation.

represented by the wild, open countryside. This part of the film thus uses two strategies to break down the boundary imaged as secure between the "human" and the "animal" body (where body is understood both in individual and collective terms): while the dogs' fictional escape symbolically reflects the uncontainability of intercorporal contagion, the foregrounding of canine experiences through multisensorial means enacts a series of exchanges wherein the filmic body becomes saturated with the dogs' corporealities, which in turn evoke the viewers' embodied reactions.

Fig. 42. Hands of horror (*The Plague Dogs* 00:09:06)

Foregrounding typically canine experiences, including olfactory impulses, also allows the film to expose the artificially constructed (b)order that "distances life from itself" (Esposito, *Immunitas* 19). For instance, as Snitter sniffs a strange odour coming from the closed quarters of Dr. Goodner (just one satirical human name among many in the film), and alludes to "some terrible sort of disease in there" (00:10:10), we learn that the bubonic plague, blamed on the dogs by the press subsequently, is in fact a product of experiments probably ordered by the Defence Ministry.[103] In other words, by emphasising the dogs' experiences through multisensory means, Rosen's film makes viewers reconsider humans as the real "epidemic villains" and animals as the victims, or, even potential aids in initiating an "affirmative biopolitics," which attempts to find solutions to shared dangers by taking into consideration the significance of interspecies interactions. This latter idea is supported by the fact that the moment when Snitter sniffs out the plague in Dr. Goodner's room refers to dogs' ability to detect disease

[103] This fictional element recalls the experiments conducted on guinea pigs and monkeys, exposed to germs of bubonic plague, on the Isle of Lewis in 1952 (E. Willis 287).

through their superior sense of smell, which, paradoxically, renders them extremely useful in times of an epidemic.[104]

Portraying the protagonists' plight in the inimical landscape through a canine perspective, the film continues to underline that the separation between human and animal worlds is not natural but constructed and maintained by biopolitical apparatuses. Once outside the research station, Rowf and Snitter find themselves in the barren hills of the Lakeland, which quickly does away with their hope of escape. The hostility of the environment is emphasised by the cold, toned down colours with which the animators chose to depict rural England, and which – incidentally or intentionally – also evoke canine visual perception.[105] Moreover, the background gives the impression of a still painting created with wide brushstrokes, producing a hazy, rough-and-ready landscape-image that accentuates the grimness of the dogs' experiences (Fig. 43). The style of animation – created by hand before the technology of rotoscoping was available – also coincides with the visual acuity of dogs, which has evolved to sense motion from even a great distance but produces a less clear picture (compared to what humans see) in the case of stationary objects or a still environment. In my view, this particular visual rendering of the landscape is yet another example of how the filmic body incorporates canine perceptions as a way of counteracting the portrayed immunitary paradigm that wishes to exclude the dogs from the political and ethical community.

Fig. 43. Canine visual perception incorporated into the filmic image (*The Plague Dogs* 00:16:18)

[104] The first evidence for their ability to smell disease, published in *The Lancet* in 1989, was of a dog constantly sniffing a woman's mole that turned out to be a melanoma (Williams and Pembroke 734). Since then, the use of sniffer dogs has developed into a separate field within disease diagnostics, and has proved effective in detecting cancer as well as other diseases like diabetes, malaria, and COVID-19 (Photopoulos 10).

[105] Dogs are dichromatic, which means that they can only make out yellow and blue, but cannot see red and green hues, hence the muted, bleak version of the countryside.

Applying a de-anthropomorphising approach similar to that of *Los Reyes* and *Stray*, the visual world of *Plague Dogs* also undermines anthropocentric ideologies by centralising the dogs' experiences and portraying them as agentic subjects who actively interact with their environment. The liveliness of the dogs is conveyed through the juxtaposition of the rudimentary, inanimate landscape, which appears as a static backdrop against the characters' movements, and the detailed, vibrant figures of Rowf and Snitter, who thus emerge as protagonists not only of the film but also of the represented world. Also, the dogs are portrayed in a variety of different shots as they interact with each other as well as with the human and nonhuman animals living in the fell, while – as in *Los Reyes* – we hardly see fully developed human characters either in their totality or close-ups. On the rare occasions when the imaginary camera assumes a human perspective, it presents the totalising vision of the "human gaze" that aims to observe and control the animal subjects – for instance, while in the lab, after the experiment, Rowf's limp, vulnerable body is shown from the scientists' point of view, or, when hunted by the military, the dogs are seen from the perspective of a helicopter pilot who tracks the animals' movement across the land (Fig 44, top row). Most of the time, however, the imaginary camera foregrounds the dogs' perspectives, even when it does not assume a subjective point of view (Fig. 44, bottom row), showing that the filmic gaze can be used not only as a tool of representational control over the portrayed animals, but also as a channel through which the viewer can witness their lively, intelligent, meaningful interactions with other subjects and their surroundings. In other words, *Plague Dogs* provides an example of how animation films can also act as a "zoomorphic stage" (Pick, *Creaturely Poetics* 106), where the lifeworlds of other creatures are rendered visible, sensible, and significant in their own right.

Fig. 44. The human gaze and the canine perspective (*The Plague Dogs* 00:03:32; 01:30:24; 00:03:23; 01:05:47)

Similarly to the documentaries discussed in the previous subchapter, the animation film also highlights the meaningfulness of canine *Umwelten* through acoustic means, as human speech only seeps through fragmentary telephone conversations, television news, or is reduced to mere background noise. Also, while amongst themselves or interacting with other animals, the dogs communicate through human speech, when people are present, their utterances are heard as barking or whimpering. Adopting the creature-conscious language of Adams's original text, the film furthermore ensures that, even when they speak, the dogs make up their own phrases such as "rip-beak" (referring to buzzards) and "white-coats" (referring to the laboratory workers). Rather than unreflexively anthropomorphising canine communication, the film thus reminds viewers that animals do not speak our language in reality. This way, making them converse in the fictional universe can be seen as a gesture of connection and inclusion. As animal studies scholars highlight, anthropomorphism is not necessarily to be deplored (Armbruster 22); giving animals voice and subjectivity can call attention to other modes of being and making sense of the world (Heise 505), "[t]he reality of other minds" (Scholtmeijer 89), other selves (Fudge, *Pets* 50), as well as other experiences and stories that are worth telling but which we can only present by "translating" them into human languages. This view on anthropomorphising animal expression is also supported by sociologists Clinton Sanders and Arnold Arluke, who see the practice as a way of incorporating "mute companions into the 'language community'" (64), which can lead to the view that animals are "minded coactors" (63).

I believe the audiovisual focalisation of the dogs' perspective in *Plague Dogs* serves this very purpose, that is, of creating a sense of community with the dogs, and reminding us that their experiences are just as valuable as ours. As Gillian Elizabeth Bliss observes, the representation of sound in the film "support[s] the visual storytelling and help[s] to give some

insight into an animal gaze on the world" (103). This view is also endorsed by the fact that Rowf and Snitter's conversations do not resemble traditional *cynomorphic* tales, where the canine narrator usually offers eloquently conveyed philosophical reflections on the human condition (Ziolkowski qtd. in Kuzniar 186). In *Plague Dogs*, the dogs' conversations revolve around their own experiences and mainly concern questions of survival.[106] For example, after they are chased out from a backyard where they plundered the dustbins for scraps, Snitter tells Rowf that "The proper thing, if you want to get food out of a man, is to go and make friends first" (00:18:53). Such utterances indicate the intelligence with which dogs react to the events around them, while they also highlight the animals' vulnerability, which can, in Pick's words, give rise to a "creaturely ethics" wherein empathy is directed towards "the suffering of the creaturely estate" (*Creaturely Poetics* 57).

To this end, *Plague Dogs* also breaks with the traditions of American cartoons that, besides extreme anthropomorphisation, perpetuated an image of animals as being dumb, innocent, and invulnerable. As Paul Wells argues, "the animal, particularly in the dominant American model, attained a naturalized role as a phenomena [sic] seemingly immune from the vicissitudes of experience and, perhaps more important, as the embodiment of resilience and continuity" (13). In contrast, Rowf and Snitter are portrayed as vulnerable creatures who are dependent on nourishment, shelter and a suitable environment, whose bodies are exposed to natural elements, and who are vulnerable to illnesses and injuries. One of the scenes that highlights their vulnerability is when, after weeks of starvation, the dogs "attack" a car and take everything that is edible. Although the man reporting the case calls the dogs "wild and ferocious" (01:14:29), the photos he takes, showing Rowf and Snitter hungrily ripping through cans of milk, cartons of cornflakes and packets of flour (Fig. 45), render their "madness" extremely familiar. Their physical vulnerability is also made painfully obvious through their broken bodies – Rowf's tortured lungs and Snitter's scarred scalp – and through their increasingly protruding bones. Additionally, the characters are also portrayed as capable of sustaining long-term mental injuries: due to the immersion experiments, Rowf develops an

[106] Just as in the case of the documentaries analysed in the previous subchapter, the naming of the dogs also plays an important role in shifting the representation of animal lives on the scale between anthropomorphisation and creature-conscious depiction. Here, most animal characters bear conspicuously nonhuman names: Rowf, resembling the sound of barking, is an example of onomatopoeia, a form of verbal mimicry retaining the traces of a primal connection between man and the natural environment; one of the shepherd dogs is called Wag, another reference to a typically canine behaviour; while Tod simply means *fox* in the dialect used in the portrayed area of northern England, although it also evokes the Cockney rhyming slang "on my tod" (meaning "on one's own"), which reflects the fox's independent nature. Snitter's name is a bit different, mirroring both his once-domesticated status, and – through a reference to the informal word *snit*, meaning a state of agitation or distress – his anxious and traumatised personality. In the portrayed region's dialect, *to snitter* can also mean *to snicker* or *chatter*, linking to the character's inquisitive and talkative nature in the story.

incurable distrust of people, while Snitter grieves his former master who was run over by a car when trying to save him. The little dog feels guilt for having caused the death of his owner, a trauma expressed visually in black-and-white memory sequences. By depicting the dogs as both physically and mentally vulnerable, *Plague Dogs* thus challenges the representation of animated animals as inviolable beings as well as the accompanying anthropocentric ideology, calling for our empathy towards exploited creatures on and beyond the screen.[107]

Fig. 45. Creaturely resourcefulness and vulnerability (*The Plague Dogs* 01:14:45-01:14:52)

At the same time, due to the realistic, at times naturalistic depiction of canine physicality – which closely resembles the style of *Tulip* – *Plague Dogs* can also stimulate disgust and fear in the viewer. Unlike the anthropomorphised dogs familiar from Disney animations, which tend to hide "unflattering" species-specific features, Rowf and Snitter display typically canine and – from a human perspective – unappealing anatomical traits and behaviours: they have visible genitalia and sharp teeth, they forage in the garbage and urinate on objects to mark their

[107] According to Wells, due to its realistic approach, *The Plague Dogs* challenges "expectations of animation and animal narratives" (195), and, as such, proves that cartoons also have the capacity to "interrogate orthodox positions, embedded ideology, and epistemological certainty per se" (5).

territory, and they express their discomfort and fear through scratching, headshaking, barking and growling (Fig. 46). The film also includes scenes that show instinctive canine violence in moments of self-protection and when violence is necessary for survival, for instance, killing of sheep and feeding on cadavers. At one point, it is even implied that the starving dogs resort to consuming human flesh (the corpse of the hunter who fell off a cliff when trying to shoot the dogs), thereby committing yet another physical and symbolic transgression: the animals literally violating the boundaries of the human body and, symbolically, the territory where humans decide which lives are valuable and which ones can be killed and consumed with impunity. In so far as the dogs cease to be singular subjects and become an uncontainable collective threatening the stability of human integrity and power, this moment also evokes the Deleuzian notion of "swarming," which refers to a form of "multiplicity, a becoming, a population" (263), constituted by undifferentiated individuals (for example, a mischief of rats or a colony of bees) that are "ceaselessly transformed, and cannot be divided or transformed without their elements changing in nature" (52). The "swarm" is thus one of Deleuze and Guattari's metaphors – besides "becoming-animal," "the molecular," "rhizomes," and "deterritorialization" – used to counter traditional structures of identity, control, and power: as a fluid, decentralised, collective form, the "swarm" is a figure of resistance. In the film, the dogs transforming into a swarm feeding on the flesh of other animals activates strong immunitary reactions both within and beyond the narrative. In other words, the same naturalistic style that can evoke a sense of interspecies empathy can just as easily elicit a visceral fear of the nonhuman "other" in the viewer: a response that betrays the permeability between the "human" and the "animal" body by enacting a moment of embodied contact vis-à-vis the screen.

Fig. 46. Unflattering and threatening canine bodies (*The Plague Dogs* 00:54:42; 00:40:24)

The dogs' liminal nature – arising from their oscillation between the singular and the common, the contained and the contagious, the fixed and the fluid – also manifests itself in the markedly different characterisation of the two protagonists. Snitter is, after all, a friendly fox terrier, whose appearance and behaviour, as well as his (former) pet and pure-breed status, put him in the archetypal position of "man's best friend." Small in size, with the colour white symbolically dominating his fur, and the hallucinations rendering him unable to survive on his own, the terrier's image is tied up with notions of innocence, gentleness, and vulnerability, and is thus more likely to evoke empathy in the viewer than Rowf. Having had an owner in the past, the little dog has also developed a trusting and submissive attitude towards people, which stands in stark contrast with his companion's stubbornness and misanthropy. Rowf's formidable size, black fur, stray origins and disposition recall the image of the uncontrollable, savage beast, evoking fear in the human characters and viewers. This contrast becomes most conspicuous when Snitter and Rowf wander into the yard of two women and, while the former is perceived as a frightened creature in need of medical care, and is carefully placed in the shed, the latter is accused of killing a wealthy landowner (whose death was in fact inadvertently caused by Snitter), and is chased away. Nevertheless, the woman who decides to deal with the dogs deems that "it might be best not to touch [Snitter either] . . . if there's something catching" (00:55:34) – a reaction which suggests that even within the seemingly innocent body of a little tame dog there is the threat of some "animal" disease jumping over to "the human" body. By portraying the dogs' border-crossing nature and evoking embodied feelings of empathy and aversion in the viewer, *Plague Dogs* thus enacts an inherent intercorporal connection between humans and animals both within and across the diegesis, acting as a zone of indistinction in the sense of bringing us into contact with creaturely corporealities even if this generates a sense of uneasiness. Representing the dogs as simultaneously threatening and vulnerable contributes to questioning taken-for-granted assumptions about whose lives are valuable and whose are not, encouraging a renegotiation of the conceptual and physical boundaries we impose on animals in times of an epidemic crisis.

At the heart of Wes Anderson's *Isle of Dogs* is the same fear of cross-species infection. Set twenty years into the future, the film follows the outbreak of an apocalyptic dog flu threatening the fictional city of Megasaki. To save the human population from the disease, Mayor Kobayashi banishes all canine creatures to the nearby Trash Island, where their lives quickly transform from *bios* to *zoe* – a zone of indistinction par excellence. The portrayal of centralised control over life is further underscored when a serum is produced, but Kobayashi burns the evidence and refuses to lift the dog ban, revealing that he has planned the total

annihilation of the canine population all along, motivated by the Kobayashi Dynasty's fanatical preference for cats over dogs. This narrative trajectory shows that vulnerability is always linked to power and the sovereign state, which constantly creates and recreates the frames for conceiving who is included in and who should be excluded from the moral community (Butler, *Precarious Life* xvi). In the film, the ripple effects of the sovereign's decisions are shown through the majority of Megasaki's residents – portrayed as a faceless audience to the Mayor's speeches – who give their consent to the eradication of their former pets.[108] At the same time, by focusing on how Atari, the film's young human protagonist, loses his beloved canine companion Spots, *Isle of Dogs* also highlights that the biopolitical measures against animals affect private relationships, too.[109]

Atari[110] sets off alone to find Spots, and his search is aided by a pack of newly-found canine friends, all former pets except for a mangy black dog called Chief, who prides himself on being a lifelong stray. Although they only commit to help Atari find his dog, the motley crew of outcasts, effectively becoming the film's canine protagonists and focalisers, end up in the quest to save all the exiled creatures from extermination. Confronting Kobayashi with the evidence of his corruption, and the people of Megasaki with their complicity, Atari and his furry friends finally have the Trash Island decree withdrawn, and all dogs brought back to the mainland to be vaccinated. While *Plague Dogs* only offers a critique of the portrayed biopolitical system and calls for a renegotiation of the human–animal boundary with regard to vulnerability, *Isle of Dogs* thus also provides a practical solution as to how to manage zoonotic diseases more ethically. To begin with, vaccination is based on the principle of human–animal continuity, the fact that the incessant interaction between distinct lifeforms cannot be arrested even if biosecurity regimes set up arbitrary systems distinctions. More importantly, in Anderson's film, the anti-flu injection is eventually given to both humans and animals, which suggests the emergence of what Esposito calls an "affirmative" biopolitical and ethical

[108] The film has been heavily criticised for its racially stereotyping, dehumanising representation of Japanese people, who appear as an unindividuated mass blindly following the amoral propaganda of a dictator. Another problematic aspect, related to this, is the alignment of the American exchange student, Tracy Walker's character with the trope of the "white saviour" as she is the only person in Megasaki intelligent enough to uncover the Mayor's conspiracy, rally her dog-loving peers to rebellion, and effectively contribute to saving the dogs on Trash Island.

[109] As Laura Kipnis notes within the context of contemporary contagion, the perceived threat of contracting a disease "has ripple effects" down to the smallest intersubjective units as people fall into an ontological state of "recoiling from nearness," "an internal *cordon sanitaire*," wherein one starts to feel other people and, even more so, I would add, animals, "more encroaching than they used to" (9).

[110] The rebellious character's name might be an intentional allusion to the German band called Atari Teenage Riot, known for their highly political, left-wing anarchist views.

paradigm, wherein *bios* is construed as a multispecies community, and where all members are entitled to protection in face of danger irrespective of their species identities.[111]

Parallel to exposing the immorality of the existing regime and establishing a new, biocentric paradigm within the narrative, *Isle of Dogs* also devises a "creaturely poetics." Depicting the banished dogs' experiences from a canine-centric perspective, it simultaneously emphasises the shared bodily fragility of all living beings and the dogs' subjectively perceived, unevenly distributed experiences of suffering, while also showing that their interactions with the environment are just as meaningful than ours. However, similarly to *The Plague Dogs*, *Isle of Dogs* not only absorbs and foregrounds the creaturely realities of dogs as a way of countering the portrayed ideology which deems their lives disposable. Utilising the particularly tactile qualities of stop-motion animation, Anderson's film also creates a visceral connection between the canine characters and the viewers, thereby enacting, through its own body, an immanent human–animal contiguity. In addition, due to the excessive visual style, the recurrent images of multiple dogs, and the uncountable canine bodies appearing throughout the film, *Isle of Dogs*, more emphatically than *Plague Dogs*, evokes a sense of "swarming" in the Deleuzian sense, a feeling of the dogs' bodies overflowing the filmic world and then uncontrollably spreading to the experiential reality of the viewer. Implementing a series of technophenomenological exchanges, *Isle of Dogs* thus acts as a very specific interspecies contact zone, a "sensual, and sensible ensemble of materialized capacities" (Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts* 2), created by the dynamic interactions between the filmic body, the canine bodies and the viewers. When these moments of contact coincide with the appearance of vulnerable creatures in the portrayed world, the film (potentially) elicits the viewers' sense of empathy, however, when the characters are depicted as dirty, sick, and/or violent – features which are accentuated by stop-motion's haptic qualities – the dogs' bodies most likely evoke reactions of disgust and/or fear. In my view, both

[111] The title *Isle of Dogs* evokes multiple meanings from the film's material, historical and cultural context, each reinforcing the critique of the biocentric control over life. The title has been inspired by a road sign Anderson spotted while shooting in London, a sign directing to the Isle of Dogs, which is a real place on the opposite bank of the Thames to Greenwich. The name comes from the belief that Queen Elizabeth I kennelled her dogs there in the 16th century, but the area was also known as an unhealthy swamp where sewage from the river would accumulate – a detail that has made its way into the film in the form of Trash Island. Considering that the film openly criticises a corrupt, cruel regime, the title could also refer to the politically provocative play by Thomas Nashe and Ben Jonson titled *Isle of Dogs* (performed only once in 1597). As David Riggs suggests, the reason for its ban might have been that the play offered a satirical portrayal of the queen's councillors as lapdogs (32), which prefigures the portrayal of Megasaki's human citizens blindly supporting Mayor Kobayashi's anti-dog propaganda. However, the clearest point of reference is probably Isle of Dogs as a symbol of neoliberal urban planning at the heart of Thatcher's Docklands project in the 1980s, which transformed the depleted wasteland into a hypermodern financial district.

reactions affirm an inherent intercorporal connection between humans and animals, undermining the portrayed mechanisms of separation.

The film begins with a Prologue that explains why the canine residents of Megasaki are framed as "epidemic villains" by visualising humans' ambivalent feelings towards dogs.[112] Using the characters of Jupiter and Oracle, the bearers of canine knowledge and history, as the diegetic narrators, and animated Japanese woodblock prints for visual representation, it tells the legend of "The Boy Samurai and the Headless Ancestor," which foreshadows the war against the canine population in the fictional present. According to the story, dogs once roamed free, but the cat-loving Kobayashi dynasty wished to extend their dominion and declared war against the strays. By animating an alternative, canine version of domestication, this sequence thus serves as the first instance when the film allows the intrusion of another nonhuman world into its own (insofar as the film is perceived from the perspective of Sobchack and Barker, as a lived albeit nonhuman body), in this case, by incorporating an (imaginary) chapter of canine history into the retelling of the fictional community's past. At the same time, the Prologue also shows how the interconnectedness of humans and animals is overridden by the "immunitary paradigm," in which the dominant community excludes anything that threatens with an "uncontrolled and unstoppable diffusion" throughout the human body, imagined as immune to the "expropriative effects" of community (Esposito, *Bios* 47). Perceived as a "teeming crowd" (Deleuze and Guattari 50), an uncontainable, minatory "swarm" – which is visually reinforced by a triptych of paintings depicting numerous snarling dogs and Jupiter's unsettling, puppet-like face that, while having a rough-textured, realistic quality, also gives off an eerie, preternatural look (Fig. 47) – the dogs are introduced as an abject, infectious, subversive force that needs to be contained or eliminated. This perceived quality is also reinforced by Jupiter's narrative, recounting that despite being "tamed, mastered, scorned," the dog population "survived and multiplied" (00:02:13), posing a continued threat against the power of the fictional ruling elite.

[112] The fictional fear and concomitant violence towards dogs comes with a culture-specific history. Up until the emergence of modern dog ownership, which coincided with the spread of British imperialism in the 19th century, Japan was characterised by what historian Tsukamoto Manabu identified as a "feudal mode of dog ownership" (qtd. in Skabelund 3). In this system, only the ruling elite and their followers were entitled to own dogs, while the vast majority of canines were roaming free in small packs on the streets and outskirts of towns, marking certain areas as their own territories (Skabelund 3). As Aaron Herald Skabelund notes, "because of the difficulty of preventing them from moving and reproducing across social hierarchies," these free-roaming dogs could "easily undermine the actual and symbolic power of this feudal mode of dog ownership" (3). The consumption of dog meat (only of the wild dogs, along with boar, deer, etc.), a form of communion with the animal body, was another thorn in the side of the ruling class until the practice was effectively banned in 675 CE by Emperor Tenmu.

Fig. 47. Canine “swarming” (*Isle of Dogs* 00:01:17)

However, by proceeding to connect the image of contagion with that of humans, the Prologue also implies that the biopolitical measures with which the sovereign state wishes to “protect” life in fact harm life. At the point when Jupiter recounts “the eve of total canine annihilation” (00:01:35), the print in the background portrays a group of frightened dogs looking up at the viewer with sad puppy eyes, at once breaking the fourth wall between the legend and the fictional reality *and* that between the film and the viewer’s reality: the canine gaze pierces through layers of fiction, becoming a metaleptic plea for help (Fig. 48). This is an instance when the film enacts an embodied contact between the canine figures and the viewers, by zooming in on the dogs’ vulnerable state, (potentially) evoking empathy in the spectators, and thus reversing the portrayed mechanism of framing the animals as epidemic rogues.

Fig. 48. A metaleptic plea for help (*Isle of Dogs* 00:01:35)

Then, as the imaginary camera zooms out to reveal that the surviving dogs are surrounded by the human army, the sequence enacts the process through which vulnerable creatures become threatening elements that the human body politic must destroy if it wants to preserve its integrity. To this effect, the image of the surrounded dogs is constructed as a microscopic section where a healthy cell – represented by the canine group – is about to be destroyed by malignant molecules – portrayed by the human warriors, whose swords also recall the hair-like spikes of a virus with which it pricks the membrane, hijacks healthy cells and injects its own DNA into them (Fig. 49). The group of canines condensed into a cell-shaped group is a recurring motif of creaturely vulnerability throughout the film; for instance, it returns on the big screen at Kobayashi's re-election ceremony, showing that on Trash Island the dogs are threatened with annihilation once again. The images resembling molecular hijacking express the film's conviction that the infectious species are not the dogs, but the humans, whose attempts to protect life are destructive in the sense that harming one part of the bio-community harms the whole community.

Fig. 49. Molecular metaphor for human violence (*Isle of Dogs* 00:01:37)

The visual metaphor of the multispecies community threatened by malignant forces also appears when Atari crashes his plane on Trash Island. In the centre of the image is the boy with his plane, encircled by a rusty earth-coloured area, and beyond that, countless pieces of discarded newspaper (Fig. 50). In this case, the sea of paper might specifically refer to how human and nonhuman beings are similarly (if not equally) exposed to the effects of the global neoliberal capitalist system, which largely contributes to the ecological, economic and social crises – including climate change, loss of biodiversity, pollution, poverty, starvation, migration and global conflict – that define the 21st-century conditions of the Anthropocene. As, among

others, Bauman and Nayar have highlighted, the side-effects of capitalist production manifest in the form of waste, both in the sense of "wasted lives" that are jettisoned by the economic system (Bauman, *Wasted Lives* 5)[113] and literal rubbish heaps that "threaten the very life/style that produced them" (Nayar, *Ecoprecarity* 8-9). The "wasting" of lives and the accumulation of debris are central themes of what Nayar calls "ecoprecarious imaginary" – contemporary cultural representations focusing on "the intertwined set of discourses of fragility, vulnerability, [and] power relations across species" (6) – which also emerges through the visual motifs of *Isle of Dogs,* providing a connection with the representation of ecoprecarity in *Los Reyes* and *Stray*.

Fig. 50. "Ecoprecarious" imagery (*Isle of Dogs* 00:14:45)

Jumping to the fictional present, Anderson's film proceeds to show that the dominant community's fear and hatred towards undesirable and dangerous "others" can be easily kindled with the right kind of rhetoric and images. In order to induce panic in his audience, Mayor Kobayashi opens his inauguration speech with the loud, pseudo-anglicised declaration "Crisis-o!," then connects this notion to disease and dogs by evoking the language of epidemiology: "Canine saturation has reached epidemic proportions. An outbreak of snout-fever rips through the city of Megasaki. Blizzards of infected fleas, worms, ticks, and lice menace the citizenship. Dog-flu threatens to cross the species threshold and enter the human disease-pool" (00:04:10-

[113] By "wasted lives," Bauman means "the 'excessive' and 'redundant', that is, the population of those who either could not or were not wished to be recognized or allowed to stay" in the centre of modern life (production, business, finance, etc.). He adds that the presence of jettisoned lives is "an inescapable side-effect of *order-building* (each order casts some parts of the extant population as 'out of place', 'unfit' or 'undesirable') and of *economic progress* (that cannot proceed without degrading and devaluing the previously effective modes of 'making a living' and therefore cannot but deprive their practitioners of their livelihood)" (*Wasted Lives* 5). The jettisoning of "undesirable" lives described by Bauman intersects with the processes of the anthropological machine that continuously works towards excluding and isolating those entities and aspects of life that threaten the borders of the imaginary human community.

00:04:30). While Kobayashi's language conjures up a mental image of an infectious substance saturating the tissues of the human body – which can also be seen as a reflection of how the filmic body is suffused with the creaturely realities of dogs –, the Mayor also projects a series of pictures portraying ill dogs. However, the framing of the subjects as criminals on mug shots suggests that they are the villains rather than the victims of the epidemic outbreak and that, instead of needing protection, they pose a threat that requires the fortification of the conceptual and physical borders around the human community (Fig. 51). The verbal imagery also connects dogs with species traditionally viewed as vermin, which, in turn, evokes the historical events when contagion served as a biopolitical metaphor contributing to the demonisation of certain human groups (for example, of the Jews before and during the Holocaust). As such, the actual epidemic activates a circular process of metaphoric signification, where the disease becomes the metaphor for the metaphor for an existential threat needing biopolitical (re)action.

Fig. 51. Mug shots of "epidemic villains" (*Isle of Dogs* 00:04:18-00:04:20)

Completing the imagery, the last picture in Kobayashi's presentation reveals a snarling dog with one eye oozing with a yellow discharge and the other completely hollow (Fig. 52). This is the canine version of the death's head which, as Bataille explains, combines two major traditions of representing death: the skull is a purified, abstract, symbolic signifier of mortality,

while the festering, abject body is a metonymic reference to death's material reality.[114] This duality is inherently evoked by dogs, who, as it has been mentioned on several accounts, are liminal creatures bearing both admirable and despicable traits. In religious contexts, they have often been endowed with supernatural powers, but their perceived impurity also aligned them with the world of death and or the devil's domain – an antagonism which was probably spurred by the spread of rabies in ancient and medieval societies (Menache, "God's Worst Enemies" 37; McHugh, *Dog* 43). The image of the festering dog head thus also captures the dual nature of canine-borne diseases, which are simultaneously capable of evoking metaphors for the permeable boundaries between the "human" and the "animal" body, *and* the fear of visceral, horrible infection. This is also supported by the fact that dog flu is an existing canine disease, which, despite a low risk of spreading onto humans, holds the potential of viral change that could result in a pandemic. In this sense, the fictional dog flu evokes actual fear, an immunitary reaction which leads to the systemic destruction of animal lives both within the narrative and in real life.

Fig. 52. Canine death's head (*Isle of Dogs* 00:04:30)

[114] Bataille reflects on this phenomenon as a part of his discussion on our ambivalent attitude to corporeality, primarily in *Visions of Excess*. He construes the festering corpse as an epitome of the abject, which is simultaneously treated as a foreign body that needs to be expelled and as "sacred, divine, or marvellous" (94). As he puts it, "a half-decomposed cadaver fleeing through the night in a luminous shroud can be seen as characteristic of this unity" (94). For Bataille, the corpse is therefore a figure of transgression that disrupts idealised notions and representations of the human by reminding us of "the autonomy of matter," of bodily disintegration, decomposition and, eventually, death (Tuomas 246), of that which "refuses to allow itself to be reduced to the great ontological machines resulting from [human] aspirations" (Bataille, *Visions* 51). In this sense, the canine death's head simultaneously reflects the mechanisms through which we attempt to counter our biological reality (e.g. through symbols of immortality such as the skull) and the constant terror caused by the facts of our material existence.

However, by devising its own version of "creaturely cinema," highlighting the canine characters' vulnerabilities while also portraying them as agentic beings who actively interact with their environment, *Isle of Dogs* promotes a posthumanist onto-politics and ethics, which, similarly to the other films discussed in this chapter, puts the emphasis on shared embodiment and the acknowledgement of other subjective realities. One of the reasons why Anderson's film questions the hierarchical relations between humans and animals – a system which is maintained by such zones of indistinction as Trash Island – so effectively is that it presents the banished dogs' experiences through a focalisation of canine *Umwelten*. Filtered through the dogs' perceptions, animate and inanimate objects which (from a human perspective) are regarded as unimportant or disgusting gain new meanings and values – *functional tones,* which ring differently for dogs (Horowitz, *Inside* 24). For example, the film presents trash as a potentially rich source of sustenance, while also highlighting that, as former pets, the dogs comprising Chief's pack have grown to prefer kibble and Doggy Chop. As Rex says, "I don't think I can stomach any more of this garbage," which triggers a wave of complaints from the others (00:11:39). Deprived of their balanced diet, the warmth of their homes, and the company of their owners, the canine protagonists emerge as vulnerable subjects, whose exclusion is cruel and irrational.

At the same time, by using a similar strategy of conveying the dogs' communications as *Plague Dogs*, the film avoids projecting Cartesian associations of animality onto the dogs. Nor does it suggest an illusory sameness between humans and animals. Evoking the self-consciousness of 18th- and 19th-century children's stories about the talking animal device, *Isle of Dogs* reminds the viewers that it can only "translate" canine expressions. As Tess Cosslett highlights, Victorian children's stories displayed a self-consciousness about talking animals, which could be expressed in "an explanatory preface, that reassured child readers that animals could not in fact talk, or only through the presence of an 'editor' or 'translator' or other type of human mediator with special powers of understanding," comedic or metafictional gestures calling attention to the fictional nature of the talking animal, and sometimes the insertion of a story where the human characters could not understand the creature (1). In a similar fashion, *Isle of Dogs* begins with an intertitle informing us that "The humans in this story speak only their native tongue," and that "barks have been rendered into English" (00:02:37). And indeed, while all dogs speak English (or a dubbed equivalent), when human characters speak and there is no interpreter around, non-Japanese speakers will not understand a word. By treating canine communication as the film's main language, this approach destabilises the putative superiority of human speech without fully anthropomorphising the animals, since it emphasises that what

we hear is only a representation of the dogs' expressions. Another significant moment of this self-reflexive anthropomorphism is when Chief's group fights with another pack for a bag of garbage, but before attacking each other, they stop to open the sack and inspect its content with their noses. Instead of depicting the dogs as instinctual scrap-eaters, the scene shows that they have their own meaningful ways of interacting with the world around them. Although the use of human speech anthropomorphises them, the scene points out that their primary means of communication is their sense of smell, and our language can only offer a weak approximation of the rich semiotic exchanges between a dog's nose and their environment.

Through its self-reflexive focalisation of the dogs' perceptions, experiences and expressions, the film thus absorbs canine realities but without fully anthropomorphising them. In fact, seemingly it is the dogs whose ways of being in and making sense of the world shape the film's aesthetics, transforming it into a zoomorphic terrain where viewers can encounter at once familiar and unfamiliar canine phenomenologies. The sense of shared creatureliness is reinforced by the portrayal of the human and animal characters as similarly fragile. Among the humans, Professor Watanabe and Atari are the most extreme examples of bodily vulnerability, the former killed with a single drop of poisoned wasabi, the latter suffering a series of minor as well as life-threatening injuries: in the same train crash that killed his parents, Atari lost one of his kidneys; he injures himself during his crash-landing on the island, as a result of which he limps, has a black eye and crimson bruises for the rest of the film; his other kidney fails during an operation, thus making a kidney transplant necessary at the end of the film. But most significant among his injuries is a head wound caused by a rod that wedged into his skull during the plane crash. Even though he pulls out most of the foreign object, a tiny part remains there as a symbolic remainder that the human body is always already in contact with the outside world, and, as such, susceptible to illnesses and injuries.

Atari's head wound is mirrored by the tortured, modified bodies of the island's native canine inhabitants, many of whom have tubes and wires protruding from their skin as a result of enduring experiments at the Kobayashi Canine-Testing Plant (Fig. 53). The latter appears as a further, more entrenched zone of indistinction within Trash Island, where dogs have been subjected to torturous procedures for years. Yet the rest of the dogs are in a rough shape, too, displaying dog-flu symptoms (e.g. weight loss, dizziness, and sneezing) as well as the effects of living on a dumping site where they are condemned to the fate of *animalia sacri* (i.e. matted fur, fleas, ticks, mange, and scabs from fighting).[115] The film thus suggests that while all

[115] The film also highlights the dogs' mental vulnerabilities, for example, by showing that the "savage dogs," who have been accused of cannibalism, are deeply traumatised by the death of their pack members – a pain which they

creatures are vulnerable, in the case of nonhuman animals, "relations of power operate in their exemplary purity (that is, operate with the fewest moral or material obstacles)" (Pick, *Creaturely Poetics* 1). Although the reality of the cruelties inflicted on dogs is somewhat toned down due to the conspicuous artificiality of the film's visual style, at the same time, Anderson's animation is characterised by an excessively meticulous, highly textured, realistic quality, as a consequence of which the dogs' ailments and injuries appear in upsetting detail, likely to evoke the viewers' empathy. This process suggests that, after incorporating them into its own body, the film performs what Barker calls "a fully embodied suffusion" (157), releasing the absorbed canine corporealities back into the viewers' experiential world.

Fig. 53. Analogous bodily ailments (*Isle of Dogs* 00:17:55; 01:08:30)

The technophenomenological exchanges enacted by *Isle of Dogs* are largely facilitated by the film's highly tactile quality, which can create the impression that the portrayed canine bodies extend beyond the screen, appealing directly to the viewers' sense of touch. Inspired by Laura U. Marks' and Vivian Sobchack's arguments that "certain images appeal to a haptic, or tactile, visuality" (Marks 2), and that, consequently, "movies 'move' and 'touch' us bodily"

express through mournful howling. Furthermore, although the qualities of altruism and solidarity are partly anthropomorphic projections, by clarifying that the aboriginal dogs indeed ate one of their brothers but only "as a desperate survival instinct" (01:06:50) and, more importantly, as an act of kindness (the dog was already in coma from starvation), the film stresses that animals are also disposed to practice empathy in their own ways. In fact, devaluing and discarding the unfit is more likely to be a practice in human societies than in nature, where many animals are more disposed towards interspecies help and symbiosis than enmity and exclusion (see, for instance, Branson). As ethological studies have proved, "creaturely thinking" is a cross-species capacity, and we could in fact benefit from looking into the ways other animals practice empathy.

(Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts* 59), Barker describes stop-motion animation as a highly haptic art form, "one that addresses itself first and foremost to the fingertips, provoking our desire to touch, caress, squeeze, and scrape the images before us" (137). As Marina Estela Graca notes, the marked tactility of stop-motion films can be also explained by the fact that the puppets are both hand-made and physically manipulated by the animators; these processes "reintegrate not only the physical senses into filmmaking, for both the maker and the viewer, but cinematic technology all together" (103). In other words, stop-motion is especially capable of creating an opening, a mutual suffusion between cinematic representation and reality, by foregrounding the materialities and movements involved in the making of the films. The hand-crafted nature of the canine characters in *Isle of Dogs* is particularly perceptible given the puppets' real textures (the dogs' fur was created from actual fibres from sheared animals), unique detail (each piece of hair had to be individually punched into the silicone bodies), and solid presence (due to the rigidity of the puppets' armature). These aspects imbue the characters with a sense of realness, solidity and tangibility that cel or computer-generated animation could not have achieved.

Combined with Anderson's style that celebrates "fastidious artificiality" (MacDowell 6), stop-motion's materiality and tactility thus allow the canine bodies to move between the realms of representation and reality and, by doing so, generate bodily reactions in the viewers. In some scenes, the dogs awaken a desire to reach out and touch them, especially when they appear as clean and fluffy, for instance, when Atari, the focaliser of "creaturely ethics" within the film, gives Chief a bath, revealing the soft white fur underneath the black dirt. In most scenes, however, our "tactile eye" is confronted by matted hair, infected wounds, scabby skin and sharp teeth – textures which are emphasised by close-ups, and, instead of inviting "the caressing look that comes with haptic visuality" (Rocha n.pag.), are most likely to generate a feeling of disgust and/or fear in the viewer (Fig. 54). Similarly to *Plague Dogs*, Anderson's film thus also activates our immunitary responses, reinforced by the puppets' uncanny appearance (resulting from the intricate fur textures, visible seams, and rigid movements, which render the figures both realistic and artificial), the excessive visual style, and the "swarming" canine imagery, which give the impression that the animal bodies saturate not only the filmic body but also overflow to the embodied reality of the viewer.

Fig. 54. A haptic form of the canine uncanny (*Isle of Dogs* 00:17:52)

In *Isle of Dogs,* the canine characters thus oscillate between being perceived as fixed and fluid identities, contained and contagious bodies, affirmative and subversive forces. Like in *Plague Dogs*, this liminality also manifests itself in the dual representation of Spots and Chief: while the former is Atari's loyal guard dog and loving companion, embodying the archetypal representation of "man's best friend," whose status of being a tamed pet is also reflected in his white fur, the latter is introduced as a free-roaming, savage stray, his threatening quality mapped onto his dark, mangy fur. However, when washed by Atari, he turns out to be white, too, and, upon closer inspection, both dogs seem to have a light-coloured fur sprinkled with black dots. When these two characters meet, Spots also recognises Chief to be his brother, which invalidates the former's supposed pure-bred status; in fact, both dogs are mongrels, "a short-haired-Oceanic-speckle-ear-sport-hound mix . . . born in a storm-sewer" (01:11:15). Spots and Chief thus represent how "dogs oscillate between emblems of domestic order and perceived threats to it" – an oscillation that is embodied within each individual animal (Young 132). This hybridity is emphatically illustrated in the scene when, fleeing from Kobayashi's army through a sewer, the dogs alternatively appear illuminated by the lights on the tunnel's wall and as dark silhouettes with spiky hair (Fig. 55). This scene recalls the black-and-white photographs in Thomas Roma's book *Plato's Dogs*, discussed in the introduction, which capture the duality of dogs through high-angle shots of canine shadows on the ground. Similarly to Roma's photos, the alternating images of Chief and Spots reflect the dog's simultaneously familiar and foreign quality, as their silhouettes reveal something of their wild nature, blurring the distinction between idealising and vilifying depictions, as well as the canine spectacle and the dog's partly inaccessible, creaturely reality.

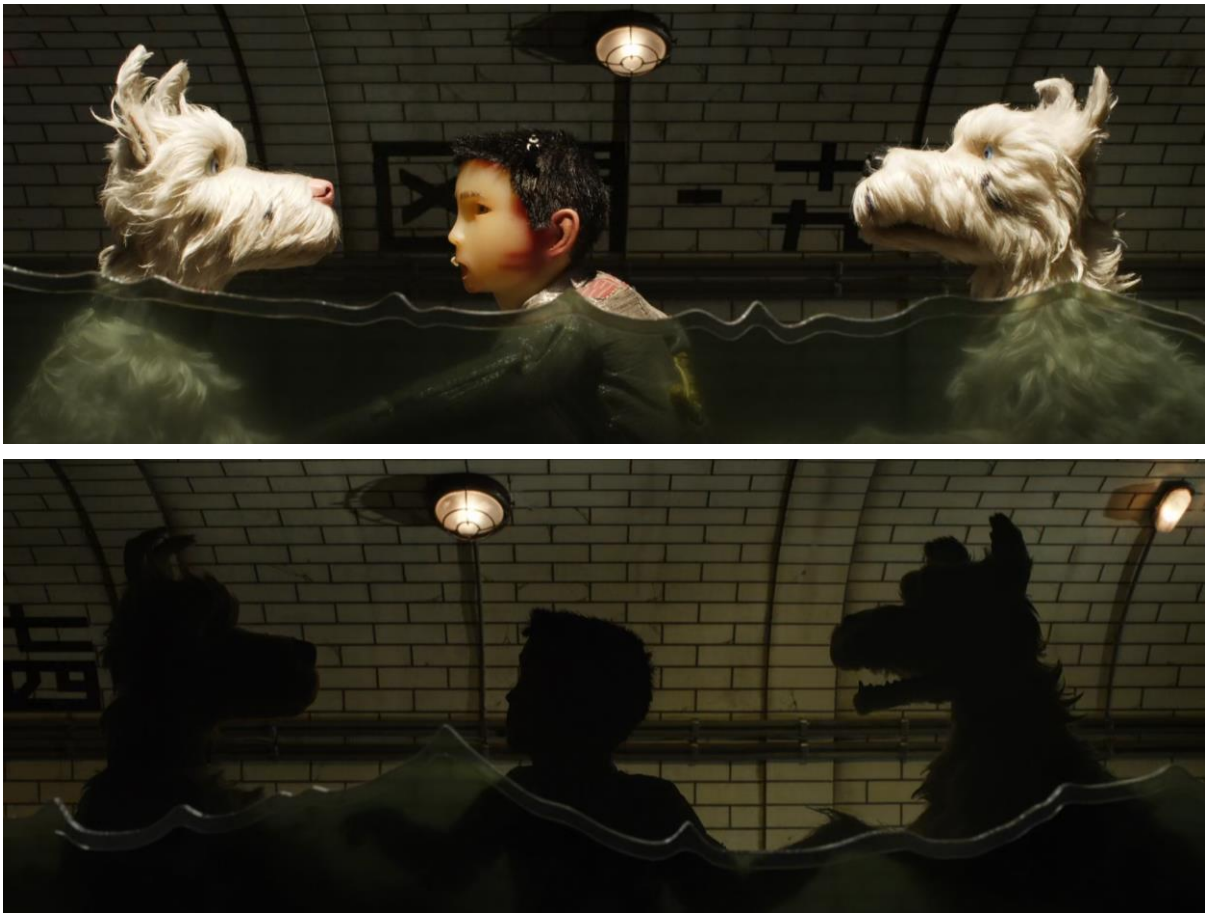

Fig. 55. Oscillation between "man's best friend" and wild beast (*Isle of Dogs* 01:10:13; 01:10:52)

The simultaneous reading of documentaries and animations films in this chapter served to confirm the claim that moving images representing very different styles and genres can enact the "strange kinship" between humans and dogs by bringing us into contact with both shared and species-specific experiences of vulnerability vis-à-vis the screen. Exposing the constructedness of the human–animal divide and the violence of exclusory biopolitical mechanisms both within and across the representation, the distinct "creaturely poetics" of the four films analysed in this chapter therefore converge on projecting a "creaturely ethics," which treats shared bodily vulnerabilities, affects, and ineffable experiences as the basis of forming a political and moral community with others. They show that, like the transgressive forces of human–canine love, the infirmities we share with dogs tend to evoke reactions of fear and violence but may also help us in unexpected ways. Specifically, the representation of creaturely vulnerability in the analysed documentaries and animation films can contribute to imagining alternative systems of co-existence where other animals' lives are regarded just as fragile and valuable as human lives. In this respect, the films in the focus of this chapter convey a similar mindset than the works analysed in the next chapter, which outline a "creaturely ethics" through the representation of interspecies grief.

Chapter 3: Cinematic Paw Prints

"What is under my hands,
That I cannot feel?"
(Philip Larkin: "Going")

"Expecting my dog, I step over an absent hill"
(Emily R. Keller: "Our Bodies: Holders of Unspoken Grief")

"I walk accompanied by ghosts"
(Laurie Anderson: "The Lake")

One of the images widely used to illustrate articles and websites dedicated to the subject of pet loss is a digitally manipulated version of Victorian painter Briton Rivière's *Sympathy* (c. 1878), where the transparent body of a white bull terrier presses itself against that of a forlorn little girl (Fig. 56, left).[116] The image retains the composition of the original (Fig. 56, right), but while in the latter, the dog's presence is concrete, vibrant, and animated, her faded figure in the manipulated version indicates that she is present only in the memory of her little mistress. Still, her absent presence is markedly physical: one can almost feel the pressure of her head, the poking of her nose, her breath brushing the girl's ear – only in a ghostly fashion, once removed from the intimate corporeality shared by human and animal. The fading of the dog's figure through digital means thus allows the manipulated image to evoke the phenomenology of pet loss wherein, as Emily R. Keller poignantly observes, the body of the bereaved vividly remembers the dog (42). In fact, compared to the warm colours that highlight the dog's comforting presence in the original version, the whole image is noticeably dimmed so that it reflects the subjective experience of grief: the russet brown wood panel in the background seems scrubbed of its colour and texture, the mahogany stairs have donned a mourning black, the girl's dress has turned cold blue, and her cheeks have lost their rosiness. The extensive tonal fading suggests that both the grieved and the grieving subject have become spectral in a sense: the latter because she feels that a part of her has died with the dog, the former because a part of her has stayed with the living, her physical traces haunting the perceptual world of the bereaved.

[116] Rivière's painting was so widely admired for its endearing portrayal of the child-dog bond that there was a huge demand for reproductions soon after its exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1878. According to Walter Armstrong, by 1891, the little girl comforted by her canine companion had "found her way into hundreds of homes, both humble and luxurious" (17). Rivière painted several replicas himself, but many copies were made by other hands throughout the nineteenth century, and, with the arrival of the digital age, the image has been widely reproduced and circulated online.

Fig. 56. Absent presence: LissiS, *Ghost Dog* (2007); Briton Rivière, *Sympathy* (c. 1878)

Yet the spectral dog figure not only outlines an actual dog's (ghostly) materiality; it also evokes the allegorical tradition of Victorian visual culture which, as it was mentioned in the introduction, often used the dog as a symbol of fidelity. The original version of *Sympathy* is itself an example of this tradition as it depicts the little girl, probably being banished to the naughty step, accompanied by her faithful companion (Hamlett n. pag.). Rivière's oeuvre is littered with paintings such as *Sympathy*, *Fidelity* (1869) and *His Only Friend* (1871), where the presence of a dog provides the owner consolation in a time of despair, and others, such as *The Long Sleep* (1868) and *Requiescat* (1888), where the dog's loyalty extends beyond the grave. In 19th-century mourning paintings, the death of a young woman was also frequently supplemented by a faithful dog, as in Thomas Jones Barker's *The Bride of Death* (1839). In the light of these traditions, the digitally manipulated version of Rivière's *Sympathy* can be seen as an allegory of fidelity beyond death, which renders the grief over the dog a sort of meta-grief that is focused not only on the deceased but also on what the deceased means. The spectral dog thus shows that visual representations of grieving a canine companion are simultaneously metonymic and metaphoric, as they evoke not only the dog's (absent) material presence, but also the meanings attached to the animal.

At the same time, the spectral quality can also suggest that the dog is still alive, but the fabric of the representation is faded by the owner's awareness that her pet will not always be

there to comfort her. When viewed from this perspective, the girl's face says: 'What will I do when you are no longer here?' In her book *The Last Walk*, Jessica Pierce highlights that, from the moment we bring a companion animal into our lives, we know that we will have to witness their passing (10). This certainty calls forth a phenomenon known as anticipatory grief, when the grieving process and the emotional responses that it entails begin prior to the actual death (Williams and Green 142). While it can be present in interhuman relationships, anticipatory grief emerges much more commonly in our relationships with pets due to the discrepancy between our expected lifespans (Laing and Maylea 233). In other words, since dogs' lives are relatively short, pet ownership always already entails grief work: even while alive, dogs are seen through the filter of their imminent absence. Consequently, our relationships with them are inherently tinted with an element of melancholia, which is also inscribed into representations of the human–canine bond.[117]

Whether depicting a time before or after the dog's actual death, the altered version of Rivière's painting, aptly titled *Ghost Dog*,[118] relies on digital tools, namely Photoshop, in order to express the spectral yet distinctly embodied, simultaneously material and metaphoric, anticipatory nature of grieving a dog. This points to the role of technology in the representation of pet grief: *Ghost Dog* can only work as an expression of pet loss with the help of digital fading and the haptic vision of the viewer, evoking *Jim's Dog*, the photograph taken by Donna Haraway's friend Jim Clifford of a dog-shaped, moss-covered tree stump in the Santa Cruz greenbelt, which could only come alive due to a unique arrangement of multi-species becoming, entangled naturecultural histories, the development of digital cameras, computers and email programs through which Haraway received the image and the special optic-haptic perception – in Hayward's terms, the "fingeryeyes" (580) – with which she could sense the transient materiality of the moss-dog (Haraway, *When Species* 5). The digital reimagining of Rivière's *Sympathy* thus supports the dissertation's underlying claim, formulated in the introduction, that technological tools – including human perception in its broadest sense and diverse external media such as visual art, digital devices, and cinema – are integral to our relationships with dogs, allowing us to relate to and represent them both while alive and after their deaths.

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[117] In the tradition of iconography, the dog also often appeared as an allegory of melancholy. For instance, in his engraving *Melencolia I* (1514), Albrecht Dürer portrays a winged woman in a contemplative and dejected pose with a dog sleeping at her feet. As Kuzniar highlights, the presence of the dog in such images served to reinforce the meaning of "the animalistic heaviness and weariness that beset the humor" (16). Of the four elements, melancholy was associated with the earth – a perceived connection probably rooted in the dog's habit of sniffing at the ground. However, the dog's association with melancholy might also reflect the owner's sadness caused by the animal's imminent passing.

[118] The picture was uploaded by someone with the username LissiS to DesignCrowd.com, an image alteration and contest website formerly known as Worth1000.com (hence the caption in the left image of Fig. 56).

As the last thematic section in the trajectory loosely following the stages of a human–dog relationship, this chapter focuses on two filmic representations of dog grief, *Heart of a Dog* (2015, dir. Laurie Anderson) and *This Darling Life* (2008, dir. Angie Chen), each sharing some features with the digitally manipulated version of Rivière's *Sympathy* while also devising their own visual language in order to express the directors' sense of loss for their dogs. Approaching the same subject from different aesthetic traditions, the filmmakers create uniquely expressive moving images that aim to negotiate the debilitating effects as well as the social perceptions of losing a canine companion, thereby providing two versions of a specifically interspecies poetics and politics of grief. Applying avant-garde techniques, Laurie Anderson's *Heart of a Dog* uses different genres, media, and technologies to compose an audio-visual collage of swirling memories, philosophical musings, and personal artworks that aims to commemorate her relationship with her dog, Lolabelle. The grief for the dog can be said to permeate all aspects of the work from its free-floating narrative (moving from recollections about Lolabelle to reflections on modern surveillance culture to imaginings about the dog's afterlife) and heterogeneous form (combining iPhone and GoPro recordings, archival footage, reenactments, interpoems, drawings and animations) to its complex affective makeup (capturing the mixture of interspecies love, guilt, and gratitude) and abstract imagery. Making no attempt at mimetic realism, Anderson digitally manipulates most of the footage so that sequences recreating daily walks in New York simulate the dog's dichromatic vision, movements of people are slowed down, rewound or warped through distorting effects, and images of Lou Reed and Lolabelle on the beach are rotated and saturated with a brilliant gold. As Violet Lucca argues, by transforming familiar reality into something abstract and artificial, "Anderson puts us in a position to better reflect upon and cope with the great equalizer of death" (17).

While Anderson expresses her grief through a highly abstract form, Hong-Kong based filmmaker Angie Chen's *This Darling Life* offers a particularly sensitive and anthropologically informed portrayal of animal death. The documentary interweaves ten different accounts of Hong Kong dog guardians and their canine companions, including the director's own pet Baby. The film presents an entangled web of reflections on joy, interdependency, and vulnerability – all of which simultaneously characterise the shared lives of the human and canine subjects (F. Law 61). Loss is featured as an inherent aspect of living with dogs, with Chen's experiences of anticipatory and post-mortem grief operating as a focaliser of the presented stories, a force which shapes the narrative and colours the visual fabric of the film. Combining the traditional documentary format of interviews and live action footage with home videos, lyrical intertitles,

and subjective sequences, the narrative that is driven by affects and associations creates a tapestry of interlaced human–animal lives and highlights the common thread of loss.

As outlined above, to varying degrees, both films employ experimental practices in order to commemorate the death of an individual (even though this individual is a nonhuman animal). In this respect, they can be classified as "mourning films," a generic term coined by Richard Armstrong.[119] In order to express the experience of grief, mourning films rely on cinema's visual language – that Armstrong finds "peculiarly apt" to express the ineffable effects of loss (14) –, its unique ability to make the absent present – that coincidentally emulates "the flicker of memory and sorrow in which the mourner lives" (14) – , and, more specifically, the narrative and aesthetic features of modernist cinema, characterised by drifting, subjective storytelling (33-34), "intuitive, pre-rational and pre-linguistic" content (27), and an aesthetics favouring movement, affect, and embodied perception, often resulting in abstract imagery (14). I will argue, however, that, while generally bearing upon themselves the idiosyncratic traits of this genre, *Heart of a Dog* and *This Darling Life* also mould existing representational traditions into a form that is specifically designed to convey the directors' personal grief over their dogs.

Accordingly, although I shall apply a different metaphor to describe the two films' strategies – the kaleidoscope in the case of *Heart of a Dog* and the tapestry in the case of *This Darling Life* –, both will be treated as dog mourning films: paw prints pressed into the matter of cinema. Usually set in clay or the more humble plasticine (Fig. 57), the paw print memorial is a fitting metaphor to describe these works because, like the digitally manipulated version of Rivière's *Sympathy*, it is a type of commemorative art specifically expressing pet loss, materialising both the physical and the metaphysical indentations that dogs leave on the owner's world and also inciting reflection on the flexibility of cinematic modes of expression, which are stretched and shaped by the directors so that their films can address the specific feelings engendered by canine death. Bearing the traces of the commemorated human–canine bonds, while also mediating the relationships beyond the grave by allowing the filmmakers to say goodbye and, in a sense, remain connected to their animals, *Heart of a Dog* and *This Darling*

[119] In *Mourning Films: A Critical Study of Loss and Grieving in Cinema*, Armstrong seeks to construct a generic term for films that revolve around bereavement. According to his definition, the mourning film focuses on the feelings death engenders in the living (as opposed to the horror film, which is concerned with the spectacle of death). Most often featuring a female or a child protagonist, these films follow the main character's emotional journey as they negotiate the incapacitating effects of grief, often using creative storytelling and visual techniques to effectively convey the experiences around loss. The corpus of Armstrong's investigations includes, among many others, *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (dir. Alain Resnais, 1959), *Cries and Whispers* (dir. Ingmar Bergman, 1972), and *Three Colors: Blue* (dir. Krzysztof Kieslowski, 1993).

Life present two specific types of the anthrokynematic assemblage, wherein the film is both shaped by and continues to shape the portrayed human–canine kinships after the dog's death.

Fig. 57. Paw print impressions (*Angel Ashes Pet Cremations & Memorials*, 2025)

In the latter respect, it is important to note that such heartfelt filmic portrayals of pet grief are rare, which points to a larger, socio-cultural bias concerning death and mourning. Drawing on Judith Butler's notion of the "differential allocation of grievability" (Butler, *Precarious Life* xiv), a normative framework that renders some lives grievable and others ungrievable, Kari Weil highlights that "with regard to matters of grief, nonhuman animals belong to *the constitutive outside of the human*" (*Thinking Animals* 113). Redmalm, who conducted a study specifically on the grievability of companion animals, observed that, in this regard, too, dogs are "simultaneously included in and excluded from a human moral community" ("Pet Grief" 21). For, even in the West, where one can witness an ever-expanding pet grief industry including cemeteries, support groups, and interreligious condolences to comfort the bereaved with the idea of a peaceful afterlife, paradoxically, companion animals are seen as nongrievable in various ways.[120] The embarrassment and shame that often accompany interspecies love are also often part of pet grief, indicating that mourning a

[120] In Redmalm's study, pet owners revealed internalised shame about grieving pets, with the subjects describing their own feelings as "childish" and "sentimental" (26); some said they planned to get a new pet as soon as their current one passed away, thus essentially perceiving their animals as replaceable (27); and while some referred to the pet's short life span and the physical deterioration at old age as the worst parts of living with a companion animal, some said that this aspect made their deaths more predictable and manageable (28).

companion animal falls into the category of "disenfranchised bereavement," when a loss cannot be openly acknowledged, socially legitimised, or publicly mourned (Stewart et al. 147).[121]

Nevertheless, empirical evidence shows that pet owners often seek to express their loss in a memorial of some sort (Chur-Hansen et al, 252; Demello xix-xxi). Even if they are contested on a social level, these commemorative acts and objects are "signs of a broader pattern of attachment between human and animal in life and also, by implication, in some kind of afterlife" (Johnston and Probyn-Rapsey xvii). This is why Redmalm argues that – similarly to vulnerability – pet grief can also be a potentially destabilising force, a powerful way of challenging "the differential allocation of grievability and the anthropocentric politics of kin and kind" ("Pet Grief" 33). Tracing the bonds between the directors and their dogs and the affects evoked by the breaking of these bonds, *Heart of a Dog* and *This Darling Life* depict pet death as a severe blow that leaves the guardian's life both physically and socially empty and evokes an intense desire to say goodbye to the animals. In their attempts to translate this grief into cinematic language, Anderson and Chen thus not only designed a specifically interspecies poetics of bereavement, but also inevitably imbued their films with a political and ethical dimension, which challenges the ambiguous status of pets' grievability and, by extension, the entrenched idea of the human–animal divide. *Heart of a Dog* and *This Darling Life* thus ultimately outline a similar "creaturely ethics" that the films analysed in the first chapter present through the portrayal of interspecies love and the films discussed in the second chapter envision through the depiction of trans-species vulnerability.

At the same time, while both films provide their own versions of a specifically interspecies aesthetics and ethics of grief, the highly abstract form of *Heart of a Dog* ultimately reduces the significance of the dog's death both within and beyond the representational space. This is because, although Anderson's relationship with her dog provides one of the film's points of departure, and, in certain aspects, the film effectively interrogates the deep-seated cultural notion that animals are non-grievable, the over-stacked form, with its multiple media, technologies, and themes, means that the grief for the animal becomes less the object of a sustained focus than just one element among many in a broader, personal meditation on life, love and death. The resulting kaleidoscopic imagery foregrounds the subjective overflow of the implied author's consciousness, paradoxically giving the human self centre stage and risking the subsumption of interspecies loss within a wider, and ultimately more anthropocentric, artistic vision. In this sense, while both films present a unique format through which the

[121] On the sense of shame connected to pet loss, see, for example Park et al. 12; Wrobel and Dye 386; Morris 352.

filmmakers aim to express their loss, *This Darling Life* attends more closely to multispecies realities as it carefully registers death not only as an individual experience but also as a shared, relational process. By comparing and contrasting these two films, the chapter develops a twofold argument. First, it shows how cinematic representations of interspecies loss transform existing traditions of memorialisation, stretching the medium's capacities to capture the absent-yet-present trace of the companion dog. Second, it reinforces one of the dissertation's central claims: that cinematic representations of dogs are always marked by hybridity. Even films that attempt to focus on canine presence may revert to anthropocentric frameworks, while seemingly human-centred narratives may nevertheless index creaturely vulnerability.

Recreating Canine Presence and Re-Centring the Human Self in *Heart of a Dog*

While Anderson's film shares the central subject of pet loss with *This Darling Life* and also bears the general formal features characteristic of the visual representation of grieving over dogs, it is also significantly shaped by the subjective qualities of art cinema – an aesthetics that often utilises non-linear storytelling and innovative cinematography to express the author's personal vision[122] – and, specifically, Anderson's avant-garde approach, characterised by multimedial experimentation and technological mediation, thereby outlining its own, Andersonian poetics of interspecies grief. Although most closely associated with independent music (with one improbable radio hit, "O Superman," in 1982), over the past fifty years, starting with her video-inspired performance art in the 1970s, Anderson has created an experimental ethos rooted in the desire to intertwine sound, storytelling, visual imagery and technology, thus challenging conventional classifications of art as well as the comfortable, master-the-form type of creative process. Driven by childlike curiosity and playfulness, she likes to combine, alter, and invent new technologies and forms of representation,[123] creating pieces that are characterised by formal multiplicity, a technologically implemented reconfiguration of the senses, as well as the ability to combine the artist's own perspective with the imagined perspectives of others.[124] As a result of experimenting with different media and techniques, "[t]here is no single-minded vantage point that forms her investigations and leads to linear creation" (Burckhardt 153); Anderson's works are constantly shifting mosaics that "confuse the ordinary system of perception" (Sone n.pag.).

Bearing upon itself the artist's signature multimediality, technological manipulation of form and meaning, and multiplied subjectivity (that is, the ability to embody multiple perspectives), *Heart of a Dog* invokes memories about the director's childhood and her shared life with Lolabelle, reflections on data collection and surveillance culture, and the owner's imaginings of the dog's time in the Buddhist afterlife through a mixture of digitally altered home movie clips and GoPro recordings, cctv footage, subjective and dream sequences, cryptic intertitles, snatches of the artist's favourite philosophical and literary quotations as well as her own animated artworks, meditative voiceover and an originally composed *Heart of a Dog* score.

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[122] For a more detailed discussion of the features of art films, see, for example, Bordwell, "The Art Cinema".

[123] For instance, in her seven-hour-long stage work, *United States*, which creatively deconstructs elements of the collective American Dream, she is singing, dancing, miming, and conversing (with herself), while also playing musical instruments, many of which she had altered or invented herself (Smart n.pag).

[124] For example, to produce her recent album *Amelia* (2024), Anderson intermixed orchestral music with electronic baselines and vocal overtones (singing alternating with voiceover narration), composing a cinematic soundscape that vividly evokes the synesthetic experiences of Amelia Earhart's plane journey around the world through an abstract combination of music, film aesthetics, and technology.

The result is a formally heterogeneous work resembling an experimental video or an abstract art installation, indeed, "a kaleidoscope of images, textures, and music that evoke both human and canine experiences of the world" (Kramer n.pag.). On the one hand, this formally and technologically heterogeneous material bears the traces left by the dog on the artist's life and reflects an urge for the mediated memorialisation of canine experiences. On the other hand, the film is over-stacked with multiple (often arbitrary) impressions, media forms and technologies, resulting in the subsumption of interspecies loss – which significantly shapes both the narrative and the aesthetics of Chen's documentary – within the kaleidoscopic imagery that reflects the implied author's broader, personal visions on various aspects of life. This tension between the aim of recreating the dog's presence and paradoxically re-centring the human self in the process runs through the whole film, showing how attempts at representing interspecies grief through an abstract, avant-garde form may include the trace of the canine companion at the same time as undermining it within an overflowing, anthropocentric meditation. In this sense, *Heart of a Dog* both expands the aesthetic possibilities of mourning beyond anthropocentric conventions and reveals the difficulty of sustaining the animal as a central presence within a human-authored work.

This ambiguity surrounding the representation of pet grief emphatically materialises in the series of small sculptures which were created by pressing Lolabelle's paws into lumps of plasticine and then included in the memory stream about Anderson's life with the dog (Fig. 58). On the one hand, these objects express the traces left by the dog in Anderson's life: the indentations preserved in the memory-material of the paw prints are a perfect way of capturing and then evoking the embodied interactions between human and canine companions as well as the physically felt absence of the dog's body after she is no longer present in reality. Anderson treats the cinematic medium itself as plasticine, in which she records and through which she *re*presents the traces that Lolabelle's life and death have embedded in her skin. The arising artwork can itself be regarded as a huge memory holder made of smaller memory pieces, a sculpture made of different sensorial traces of the human–canine relationship and the material of cinema, which turns into clay in Anderson's experimenting hands. On the other hand, this experimentation with form and the expression of personal visions tend to take over and upstage the film's initial function as a marker of interspecies memory, so that Lolabelle's imprints become absorbed into an abstract artwork that meditates not only on the human–canine bond but also on the human condition. In this sense, the very objects that seem to most directly embody the dog's presence thus exemplify the film's paradox: the gesture of commemorating the life of a significant canine other subsumed within an overflowing, subjective, human vision.

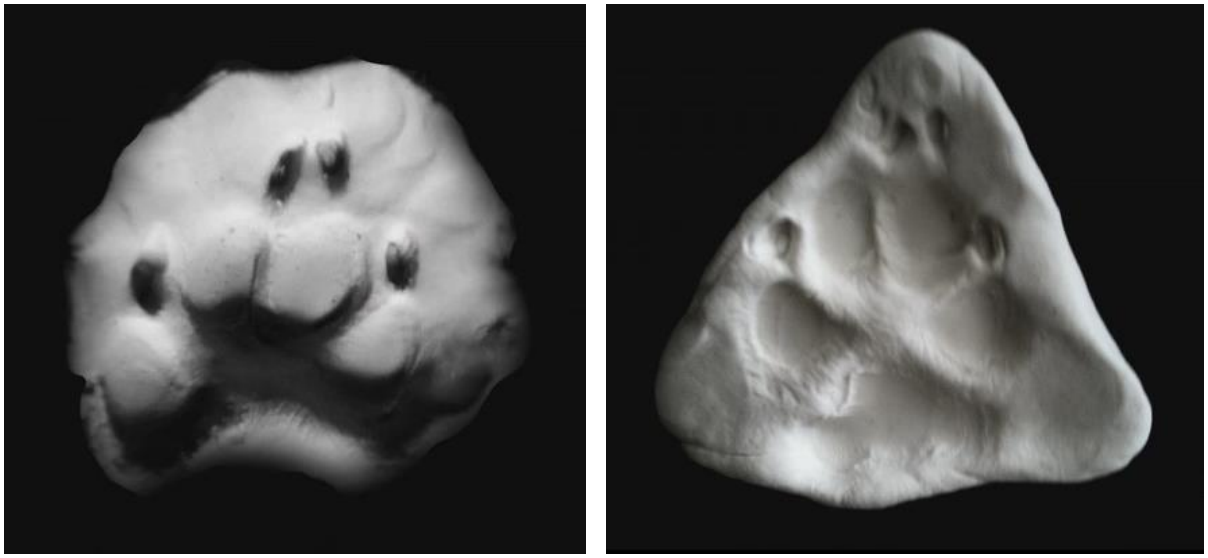

Fig. 58. Synecdochic memory sculptures (*Heart of a Dog* 00:15:50; 00:15:53)

This paradox is already detectable in the film's opening sequence, which conveys the implied author's visions through a digital synchronisation of Anderson's audio and visual artworks. Accompanied by electronic music mixed with violin strains, the visuals begin with a pink surface with scattered black marks, shadings, and scribbled words, many of the latter upside down and vibrating as if charged with electric shocks. As the camera is panning across the page, figures of dogs and people emerge with their limbs outstretched, surrounded by sweeping black lines as if they were caught up in a windstorm (Fig. 59). The combination of sound, agitated camera movements, vibrating visuals, twisted figures and upside-down words, occasionally magnified to the point where they are illegible, evoke the kinaesthetic effects of the dog guardian's grief, namely, the conditions of physical disorientation and inarticulateness caused by the devastating shock of the dog's death. However, we later also learn that these are digitally processed versions of Anderson's drawings, produced after Lolabelle's death as part of imagining her time in the Bardo: a liminal space where, according to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, human and animal souls are battered by fierce storms until their consciousness dissolves only to recongeal in a new lifeform.[125] The opening sequence thus immerses us into the inner world of the implied human author, which is nevertheless entangled with the world of another, now absent being. This interspecies entanglement takes place in a doubly virtual space: first, the artist's imagination, then, the technological dimension of the film, both of which are indispensable to recreate the dog's experiences.

[125] The ink-and-line drawings, together with texts, sculptures, projections, and sound were originally shown in the artist's 2011 exhibition *Forty-Nine Days in the Bardo*, opened at the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia.

Fig. 59. Entangled beyond death (*Heart of a Dog* 00:01:31)

In the next sequence, this technologically evoked interspecies space is complemented by a temporal dimension, where Anderson's dream body has just given birth to her dog. The surreal dream sequence, unfolding through the same wide black strokes on the same pinkish surface, is an explicit reflection of the kinship that Anderson experienced emerging between her and her dog, a creature who had become such an integral part of her everyday life and her personal as well as artistic identity that, from Anderson's perspective, she had crossed the boundaries of kin and kind and had become her child. However, the artist's avatar also makes self-reflexive references to the fact that this relationship is not an actual familial bond but – evoking Merleau-Ponty's notion – a "strange kinship" of co-existing yet separate species, one which additionally involves specific power dynamics that usually put the human into the superior position.[126] Revealing this knowledge and the concomitant shame, the avatar-narrator says that the birth "is *almost* a perfect moment, except that the joy is mixed with quite a lot of guilt" (emphasis added), because, in fact, she "had arranged Lolabelle sewn into [her] stomach" (00:03:02-00:03:20). This feeling is also reflected in the eyes of Anderson's dream-self as one is seemingly blinded by love, while the other is recognisably filled with concern (Fig. 60). The sequence thus not only recreates the subjective experience of a nascent kinship between the artist and her dog but also captures the complex affective landscape of pet loss: an ambiguous

[126] This is why, as it was outlined in the introduction, the dissertation generally takes a *critically* posthumanist view on human–canine relationships, which, as Cudworth argues, should always be seen as a complex combination of affection and dominance (1).

mixture of love, intimacy, and guilt.[127] Evoking Alice Kuzniar's insights about narratives of mourning over dogs, elaborated in her book *Melancholia's Dog*, the sequence self-reflexively comments on how, as a means of coping with these feelings, the bereaved owner creates a fantasy of (re)union (i.e. the dream birth), a "self-consciously fictive space" which "serves against discontinuity" (142) and for regaining the intensity of the relationship through "re*presentation*" (143).[128] Willing the dog (back) to life through fiction fuels not only the opening dream sequence but also the film as a whole, which, in this sense, can be seen as a subjective biopic about Lolabelle seen through the cracks of the guardian's fractured perspective.[129] This structure – following the course of Anderson and Lolabelle's shared life and the subjective flows of the implied author's mind – is an example of how *Heart of a Dog* continually oscillates between recovering canine presence and providing an outlet for expressing the contents of the human self. In this sense, what emerges is less a sustained biography of Lolabelle than a hybridised self-portrait in which the dog's memory remains vital yet repeatedly refracted through the artist's subjective lens.

[127] Of course, all our relations – with animals as well as humans – are complex; as a result, grief is always "uncertain" (Schott 2), and "manifests through a comprehensive affective register" ranging from emotions such as sadness, longing, hopelessness to anger, resentment, and guilt (Køster 125). Yet I share Kuzniar's assumption that the uncertainty of grief is greater in the case of losing a dog, where the lack of verbal communication makes it impossible to share, talk through, and thus mitigate the sense of guilt that accumulates during the pet's time with the owner. This situation is further aggravated by the widespread social suppression of grieving for animals, namely, the fact that in most societies, there are no official arrangements and support systems to "publicly invigilate" (Walter et al. 584) or "contain" the complicated emotional impact of a pet's death (Blauner 378).

[128] The examples mentioned by Kuzniar include (auto)biographical accounts that recount the dog's life as a means of keeping them alive through the narrative (142-143) as well as famous literary and filmic narratives that stage the dog missing – such as the classics *Lassie Come Home* (written by Eric Knight, 1940), *Homeward Bound* (dir. Duwayne Dunham, 1993), and *A Dog's Journey* (dir. Gail Mancuso, 2019) – which are driven by the fear of losing the canine companion, and, by making the dog return, enact her reappearance. As Kuzniar puts it, "they thus repeat the psychological impetus behind writing the dog's life after its death, namely, to enact its coming back to life" (143).

[129] At the same time, the self-reflexive remarks signal an acknowledgment on Anderson's part that "she grasps the sign of what was lost and that the dog and self … acquire a fictional identity, something other than the original, at one remove from it" (Kuzniar 143-144): a recognition implying an acceptance of loss (144). As such, *Heart of a Dog* not only operates on the narrative vector of the "not yet" but also that of the "no longer," which "serves to recognize the actuality and magnitude of the bereavement, rather than deny it" (144).

Fig. 60. Joy and guilt (*Heart of a Dog* 00:03:11)

A specific example of how this hybridity shapes the narrative is the way in which the loss of Lolabelle is associatively connected to the death of human relations, most emphatically, to that of Anderson's mother. The latter's apparent inability to love is then connected to the topics of surveillance culture and the sense of alienation permeating modern American society, which are once again juxtaposed with the intimate bond between human and dog. This chain of associations evoked by Lolabelle's death shows that the owner's feelings for the lost canine companion are both metonymic and metaphoric, significant both in themselves and in relation to inter-human relationships, where they usually stand for the opposite of human detachment. In this film, the mother's inability to love is also specifically contrasted with Lolabelle's empathy, which she allegedly learned when helping her former owner go through his divorce and also transferred to her forever guardians, Anderson and Reed, who "had learned to love Lola as she loved [them], with a tenderness [they] didn't know [they] had" (00:37:59-00:38:09). The film's title could be thus seen as an expression of Anderson's gratitude for the dog's heart, which was – unlike her mother's – full of understanding, attention, and love, and allowed the artist to discover aspects of herself she did not know existed.[130] The film's fragments –

[130] This interpretation is also reinforced through the reference to Mikhail Bulgakov's satirical novella of the same title (although allegedly Anderson did not take the title from Bulgakov, see Klein), which is most often interpreted as a critical reflection on what the author perceived as the degrading moral values of Soviet society. From this perspective, the heart signifies humanity's spiritual essence (see, for example, Gennadyevna et. al). However, when read as a metonymy rather than a metaphor (see, for example, Fudge, "At the Heart of the Home"), the title suggests that Sharikov, the human–canine hybrid created by Preobrazhensky, retained the heart of Sharik, the dog, who remains loyal even after being subjected to the doctor's painful experiment.

connected by Anderson's lilting voice, the musical score, and the overarching subject reflected by the title – thus ultimately make up a narrative that recounts how the filmmaker's sense of self has transformed thanks to her relationship with the dog.[131] In other words, the narrative of *Heart of a Dog* simultaneously expresses a sense of loss for the animal and the anthropocentric preoccupation with the life story of the human individual.

A further example of this hybridity is that, similarly to the film's structure, its aesthetic aspects are also significantly shaped by the affective imprints of Anderson's bond with the dog, which, as the dream birth sequence already suggests, was and continues to be markedly physical. When asked in interviews, the artist evokes the particularly embodied nature of their relationship, and, consequently, of her grief: "When you're very physically attached to something—not so much mentally, but physically, something that is always at your knee, you know—it's very different when they evaporate" ("Interview with Laurie Anderson" n.pag). The trails of embodied entanglements between Anderson and Lolabelle also manifest themselves in the film's visual world. In the first section of the film, which *re*presents Lolabelle's active years, the sequences that most prominently reflect the physical traits of the relationship are the ones that reenact Anderson and Lola's shared uses of space, namely, their hikes in the countryside and their walks on the streets of New York. At the beginning of the sequence which recreates the time when the post-9/11 chaos drove the artist and her dog to the mountains of Northern California, Anderson recalls that her initial plan was to do an experiment to see if she could learn to talk with Lolabelle. The idea of this anthropocentric project, expressing the desire to build complete rapport with the animal through verbal communication, is reinforced by bird's-eye-view shots of the landscape where the only visible figure is the human actor playing Anderson (Fig. 61).

[131] In this sense, the mother's attempts at farewell – "It's been my privilege and my-my honor to be part of this experiment, this-this experience with you and your - and your family… Tell the animals … thank you so much…" (00:05:43-00:06:26) – can be seen as a way of Anderson expressing her gratitude for having had the gift of sharing a life with Lolabelle.

Fig. 61. Hiking with a destination in mind (*Heart of a Dog* 00:09:40)

However, the narrator says that in the process of establishing their morning routine of walking down to the ocean, "beauty got in the way of the experiment" (00:10:17-00:10:26). From this point on, the distant, human-centred shots are replaced by images occupied by the body of the canine actor recreating Lolabelle (Fig. 62.1), shots assuming the dog's point of view and eye level (Fig. 62.2), frames dominated by the dog's nose, which evoke the smell-orientedness of canine *Umwelten* (Fig. 62.3), and compositions presenting a balanced ratio between the air – implying the perspective of Anderson, the self-confessed sky worshipper – and the mass made up of the earth, the grass, and all that is invisible to the human eye but which would be perceptible to a dog at that moment (including odours, vibrations, and temperature) (Fig. 62.4). Taken together, these images evoke the phenomenology of dog walks where, as McHugh observes, the owner gradually transforms into a participant of a posthuman praxis where the human and the canine subject share an embodied, creaturely exhilaration in the same space albeit experienced according to their species-specific sensorial capacities ("Apace" 117). By the same token, Darren O'Brien – inspired by Horowitz's observations – considers dog walks as important zones of "shared human–canine ontology" (25), which offer potentially "new ways of being and becoming human–canine" (Horowitz qtd. in O'Brien 25). As Horowitz puts it, walks allow us to be "part of the same shadow in the stone, appended in motion and space by more than the leash that allegedly holds us together. We are dog-human" (*Our Dogs* 10).

Fig. 62. “Becoming-with” through walking (*Heart of a Dog* 00:09:49; 00:10:20; 00:10:48; 00:10:05)

In *Heart of a Dog*, the images showing a harmonious blend of human and canine perception can be seen as visual imprints of this embodied interspecies becoming. Also, compared to the human-centred high angle shots that, recalling the visuality of surveillance culture, reflect the owner’s initial intention to shift her relationship with Lolabelle in a direction which would supposedly give her more understanding and control over the dog’s life, these images mirror the organic formation of a multispecies unit wherein the members significantly shape each other’s experiential realities: the process Horowitz describes as the mutual attunement of human and canine *Umwelten* (*Inside* 21). At the same time, as Haraway highlighted in connection with *Jim’s Dog*, the photo of a dog-shaped, moss-covered tree stump, such a relational unit can only come about with the help of technology (including human perception in its broadest sense), which can capture and then reproduce the transient moments of interspecies becoming. In this case, the entangled sensorial world of human and dog could not have emerged without, first, Anderson’s attunement to her dog’s perceptions, and second, the cinematographic techniques – for example, the lowering of the camera to foreground the dog’s point of view – and capacities – for instance, the ability of the filmic image to evoke multiple senses – which Anderson employed in this sequence in order to recreate the physical traces of her evolving bond with Lolabelle.

The artist’s reliance on technological tools to re-channel ordinary perception into a shared multispecies perspective is even more apparent in the sequence reenacting Anderson’s

walks with Lolabelle in New York, which offers a typically Andersonian, technologically mediated account of "becoming with" the other (Haraway, *When Species* 16).[132] In order to recreate the canine perceptual field, the artist uses a camera kept close to the ground, which evokes the dog's eye level; a wide-angle lens, which allows her to focus on the objects occupying the centre of the dog's attention while also perceiving movement at the edges of her vision; and the recorded sounds of sniffing, human footsteps, and traffic, which together recreate the shared sonic experience of walking in the West Village. Furthermore, the camera alternately lingers on and is driven by what would interest a dog, such as other dogs, pigeons, plants to urinate on, and garbage bags to sniff at (Fig. 63). When the latter come into view, the filter switches to the dog's dichromatic vision, which is notably combined with their sense of smell, here evoked through the close-up shots on the trash bags lying on the pavement. In this sequence, the owner's attunement to the companion's experiences therefore manifests as a process of visualising not only the human walker's but also the dog's experiential reality through what Amelia Jones refers to as a "technophenomenological body" (17). Without this technologically aided body, Anderson would not have been able to recreate the shared experiences of her countryside and city walks with Lolabelle, which suggests that, while outlining a protean self whose everyday reality is intimately connected with the lifeworld of the companion animal, these two sequences also delineate a prosthetic subject that, in posthumanist terms, is co-constituted not only by other materialities but also "by external archival technologies of various kinds" (Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism* 295).

[132] Like the spaces portrayed by *Turner & Hooch*, *My Dog Tulip*, *Los Reyes* and *Stray*, the mountains and the streets of New York portrayed by Anderson's film essentially emerge as heterogenic sites where human and nonhuman perspectives regularly interact and mutually (trans)form both each other and their environments.

Fig. 63. Prosthetic visualisation of the dog's perspective (*Heart of a Dog* 00:23:17; 00:23:58; 00:23:47; 00:24:23)

Technology – in the double sense of the artist's imagination and her use of digital tools in evoking these imaginations on the screen – also plays an essential role in expressing Anderson's preoccupation with her aging dog's bodily vulnerabilities in the section which recalls the period when Lolabelle developed cancer and became blind.[133] One example that stands out in this regard is the sequence that projects Anderson's empathetic visualisation of Lolabelle's blindness, which she compares to the phenomenon of phosphenes: the colours, shapes, and flashes appearing before our closed eyes, caused by pressure on the eyelid or other mechanical, electrical, or sonic means. Accordingly, the screen is filled with animated permutations of brownish patters, little dots, and blurry lines floating around like the ever-shifting shapes of a screen saver, while the accompanying soundscape evokes the potential stimuli of crackling electricity (Fig. 64). Anderson's voiceover describes the experience as "some kind of eternal, plotless, avant-garde animated movie" (00:14:17-00:14:21), which can be understood as a self-reflexive comment on how this particular sequence, and the film as a whole, rely on digital technologies such as animation and develop a visual language resembling the poetics of modernist cinema in order to create strangely evocative impressions of living with and slowly losing a dog. These impressions are also rooted in Anderson's capacity for what Shapiro terms "kinaesthetic empathy," discussed in detail in the introduction: the

[133] This part of the film evokes the findings of Redmalm's interviews with bereaved pet owners, several of whom recounted a growing sense of physical engagement with their aging animals' bodily vulnerabilities ("Pet Grief" 29).

adjustment of one's sensitivity to the bodily gestures, movements and sensory experiences of the animal ("Defining Kinesthetic Empathy" n.pag.). Through the shifting patterns of the phosphenes, Anderson thus visually translates her effort to inhabit her dog's embodied perspective, suggesting that kinaesthetic empathy, aided by technology, plays an important role in shaping the film's aesthetics.

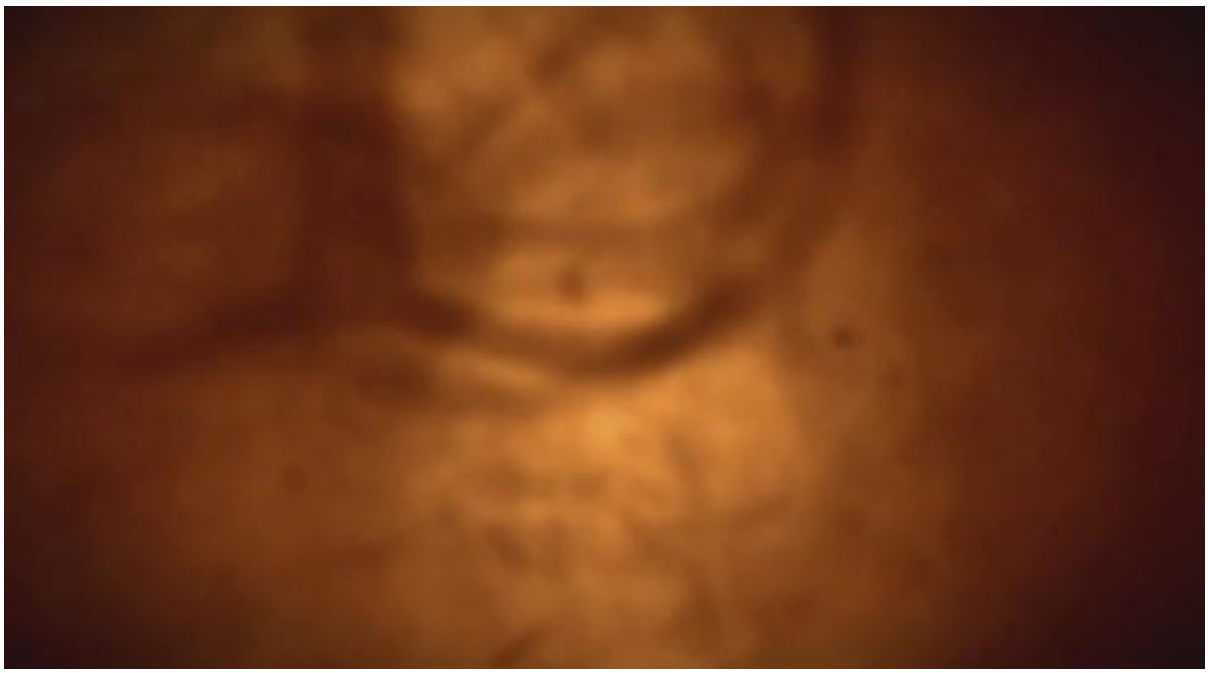

Fig. 64. Imag(in)ing Lolabelle's blindness (*Heart of a Dog* 00:14:14)

Through a transition shot from the phosphene patterns to Lolabelle's cataract-filmed eyes, another sequence begins, facilitating a mediated engagement with the aging dog's conditions. This time, the painful experience of witnessing Lolabelle's physical deterioration is evoked through the deconstruction of the mechanisms of cinema, which – as Mulvey argues in *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* – simultaneously capture the moments of recorded reality and manipulate them by "animat[ing] the inanimate frames of its origin" (15), thereby especially capable of re-presenting past beings, states, and experiences. Starting with a still black-and-white image of Lolabelle suspended in the motion of running on the beach, the sequence indexes the time when the ageing dog became paralysed by blindness, and, as Anderson recounts, "the only place where she would run was on the edge of the ocean, because she knew there would be nothing to run into there" (00:15:00-00:15:16). By following the first still with two other images capturing the subsequent stages of the dog's movement (Fig. 65), the sequence recreates Anderson's imaginings of her blind dog's experience of running on the beach. At the same time, these three images recall Edward Muybridge's photographic studies

of animal locomotion and through them, more broadly, the mechanical origins of cinema, which is based on assembling and then setting into motion images that were originally still. Thus, the beach sequence can be seen as another self-reflexive moment, signalling that Anderson's mourning film also relies on the medium's inherent oscillation between stasis and movement in retracing the tracks of embodied entanglement between human and canine companions. On the whole, the sections recreating Lolabelle's active adult and aging years outline a number of prosthetic relationships: the blind dog's dependence on the owner for support, the owner's reliance on her kinaesthetic empathy and imagination in order to attune to her dog's changing bodily experiences, and – essential to the representation of these relations – the filmmaker's use of cinematic technologies, which allow her to retrace the various ways in which her dog affected her life.

Fig. 65. (De)constructing Lolabelle's movements
(*Heart of a Dog* 00:14:58-00:15:22)

This prosthetic relationship is also detectable in the artworks (arguably) created by Lolabelle, many of which are featured in the film by way of being inserted into the stream of reenactments and imaginings about Lola and her owner's shared experiences. Besides the paw prints mentioned at the beginning of the analysis, these include the dog's abstract paintings which, according to the narrator, Lolabelle would scratch on plastic sheets using static electricity as a way of communicating her thoughts and emotions, but, as the reenactment of this process suggests, her paws would be moved either by Anderson or her trainer, Elisabeth (Fig. 66). These recreated paintings thus seem to be another, in this case, doubly mediated form of the artist keeping contact with her blind dog's experiences; by showing that Lolabelle is trained and guided by humans during the artistic process, Anderson self-reflexively signals how the animal other's inner life can only be accessed through technological mediation that inevitably anthropomorphises the nonhuman being, in this case, by expressing the "dog's thoughts" through the act of painting. In a similarly self-reflexive manner, the film also features "Lolabelle's music", another method suggested by the trainer to help the blind dog remain in touch with her surroundings. Yet, clearly, the home video footage of Lolabelle plunking the keyboard and barking along is another example of how Anderson speaks (or, more precisely, sings) through Lolabelle's body in her *own* attempt to access the dog's inner life. At the same time, recording the "dog's music" also serves as a way for Anderson to pre-emptively preserve Lolabelle's voice and then replay it through the film as an act of remembrance. Rather than providing creative outlets for the dog, these artworks thus serve as consciously anthropomorphising audiovisual channels for the guardian to connect with her pet both before and beyond the latter's death.

Fig. 66. (Re)connecting through art (*Heart of a Dog* 00:15:45)

When the film gets to the point of recounting the last stages of Lolabelle's illness, Anderson plunges her work into the texture, tone, and pre-symbolic contents evoked by the golden void of Goya's *Dog*, another work of art that helps her express her feelings and imaginings connected to Lolabelle. Panning the painting from top to bottom, where a little dog seems to be swimming by herself in a golden ocean, the sequence provides an affective visualisation of how Anderson imagines Lolabelle's current experience as floating on her own in a vast space – an image which also reflects the implied author's immense anxiety, fear, and helplessness.[134] At the same time, the golden background evokes the tradition of icon painting, where gold, as, for example, Pavel Florensky observes, is what incarnates the abstract, the immaterial and the essentially unrepresentable divine; unlike other colours, gold is "pure light," transcending the dimension of figurative representation (141). In a similar way, gold is often used as a decorative element that reflects the sanctity of Buddhist artworks, a colour expressing the Buddha's spiritual radiance and his inner purity. Through indirectly invoking these visual traditions, the inclusion of Goya's *Dog* thus suggests that Anderson developed a spiritual connection with Lolabelle which veers towards veneration and, as such, can only be evoked – rather than represented – through a non-narrative and non-figurative visual language. This idea is also supported by Robert Hughes' interpretation of Goya's painting, according to which the image "moves us at a level below narrative" (382). The spiritually and affectively charged visuality also dominates in the next images: a solid golden surface resounding with Lolabelle's desperate barking, and a gold-tinted photograph of the dog lying in hospital (Fig. 67), which confirms the connection between the perceived state of the dog in Goya's painting and that of the dying Lolabelle. Like in the previous example, the colour-, texture-, and tone-based images provide essential help in expressing the implied author's otherwise inexpressible feelings for the dog.

[134] In this sense, Anderson rewrites traditional interpretations of Goya's painting, for example, that of McHugh (also referenced in the previous chapter), who reads the little dog's figure as a metaphoric representation of "the Everyman in despair" (*Dog* 132). In *Heart of a Dog*, the image simultaneously captures the helplessness Anderson feels in the presence of her ailing dog and the latter's metonymic suffering.

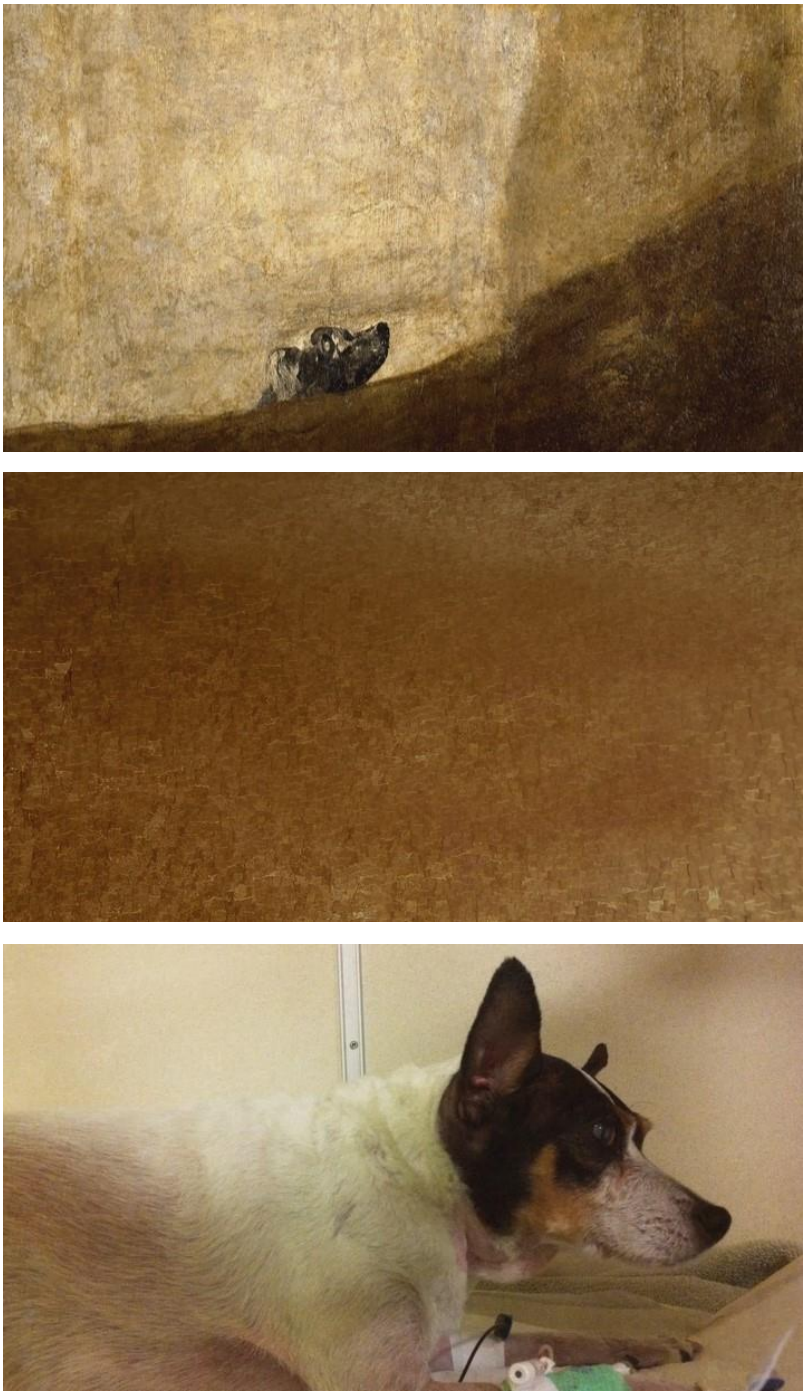

Fig. 67. Gold leaves from Lolabelle's final journey
(*Heart of a Dog* 00:35:54; 00:36:03; 00:36:07)

When arriving to the reenactment of the terminal stage of Lolabelle's illness, Anderson reaches back to the elemental building block of cinematic language, the still image, which, as Mulvey observes, can inscribe unrepeatable and unrepresentable moments into the film's moving plain of representation (Mulvey 9).[135] Displaying the last three days of Lolabelle's life through four upsetting yet peaceful photographs (Fig. 68), the film's texture preserves, like those pillows on which the dog rested in her final hours, the imprints of death on the subjective world of the bereaved. More specifically, the photos index the animal's last moments before death, which, as Clinton Sanders points out, are seldom an aesthetically pleasing sight (201), leaving indelibly painful marks on the owner, and are here further preserved through the double mediation of the photos and the film. Through these still images, Anderson thus shows how, in the griever's mind, the unrepeatable moment of the pet's death is put on repeat, continuously haunting her perceptual field together with the daily reminders of the dog's absent presence; as Barbara Creed observes, "film has the power not only to capture the moment of death, but also to replay that moment continuously" (15), to integrate – in Sobchack's terms – the invisible into the field of the visible and the momentary into the field of movement, thus also being capable of emulating the experiences of grief, where "the dead are constantly present to memory" (Armstrong 31), and where the griever continues to pursue everyday activities while also being stuck in the moment of death. Simultaneously, the inserted photos demonstrate that, similarly to how our ideas and imaginings of the dog's lifeworld always come through some sort of mediation, capturing then recreating the pet's death as well as the traces that she left on the owner's world essentially depend on technology.

[135] Specifically in connection with depicting (animal) death on the screen, Sobchack argues that such images signify "a ferocious reality" which "ruptures and interrogates the boundaries . . . of fictional representation" (*Carnal Thoughts* 247): "Whereas being can be visibly represented in its inscription of intentional behavior (the "having of being" animated concretely in action that is articulated in a visible world), nonbeing is not visible. It lies over the threshold of visibility and representation" (233).

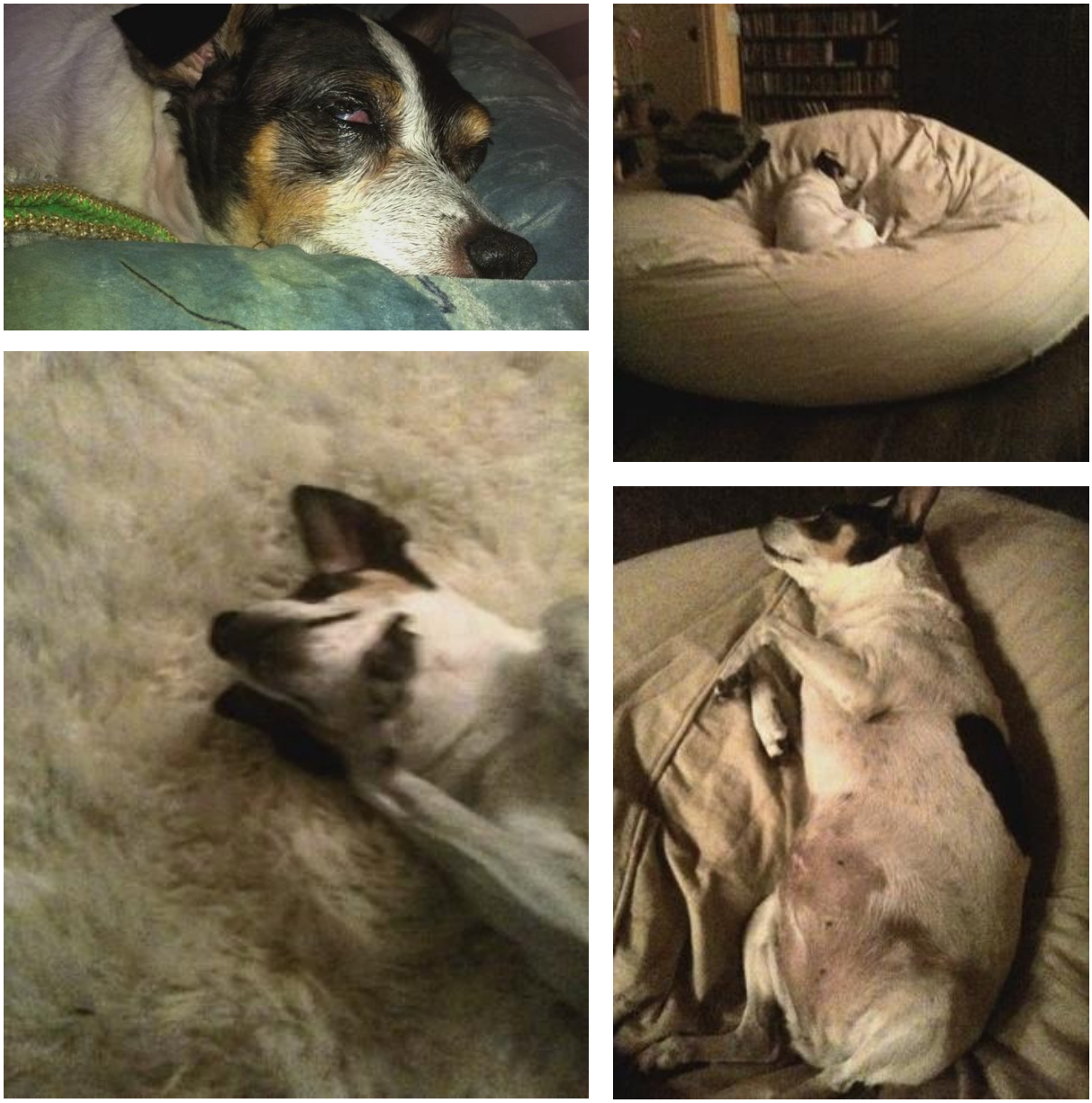

Fig. 68. Photographic indexes of Lolabelle's last moments (*Heart of a Dog* 00:37:52-00:38:09)

The photos of the dying Lolabelle are also important from two different yet related political aspects. First, by portraying the dog's death as the departure of an actual, material being which deeply affects the lives of those who have formed an intimate relationship with her, the images render *Heart of a Dog* radically different from mainstream representations, where the dog usually dies for dramatic effect or for the sake of an entertaining plot twist. As Calum Marsh notes, "[i]t seems an axiom of every genre that if a pet appears, a callous death awaits it, like some rebarbative spin on Chekhov's Gun" (n.pag.). Appearing to be an almost inevitable plot element, the loyal pups of modern melodramas die of injuries or illnesses with heart-breaking grace (e.g. *Marley & Me*, 2008, dir. David Frankel), the slapstick-dogs of comedies are slain accidentally by the hapless hero (e.g. *The Fish Called Wanda*, 1988, dir.

Charles Crichton), while the canine beasts of horror, embodying our fear of the non-human Other, are destroyed with a gratifying cruelty (e.g. *Cujo*, mentioned in the previous chapter).[136] It is also a common script choice to kill a dog in order to indicate the vulnerability of human life without actually taking human life (e.g. *Moonrise Kingdom*, 2012, dir. Wes Anderson; *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*, 2016, dir. Taika Waititi), which ultimately renders the dog's death a narrative sacrifice that implies the superior status of the human over the animal. Even in films seemingly dealing with pet loss, the dog's death is predominantly used as a narrative light that illuminates the human protagonist's condition.[137] Films thus often reinforce the perception of animal death as less important than human death, at worst, a depersonalised, trivial matter.

Representing canine death as a loss leaving deep marks not only on the life of the guardian but also on the poetic features of the film itself, *Heart of a Dog* eschews the mainstream representational practices of animal death. At the same time, it also disproves the traditional views on film animals, represented by Berger and Lippit, which construe cinema as an object that – by transforming real animals into symbols, metaphors and spectacles – reflects the loss of people's genuine encounters with animals in historical modernity. In particular, Lippit sees cinema as a salvaging apparatus that, even more completely than the linguistic metaphor, preserves or encrypts vanishing "animal traits as a gesture of mourning" (*Electric* 196). Rather than cinematic crypts that dislocate the animal from its own materiality, the four photographs in *Heart of a Dog* are visual records of a once lively animal subject, whose final departure is just as meaningful as the death of the guardian's human relations.

The images of the dog dying at home surrounded by her loved ones also suggest that Anderson was conscious about the meaningfulness of animal death; informed by the Buddhist belief that animals go through the process of dying like human beings and by the ethical admonition that "you don't have the right to take that from them" (00:36:54-00:37:06), the artist refused to have her dog euthanized, and took Lolabelle home from the hospital. Practicing a

[136] The transgeneric phenomenon of dog death is so extensive that it even gave rise to its own technical term, *Hundtodkino* (Queenan n.pag.), and there is even a specific website, called Does the Dog Die?, which allows viewers to screen films for animal abuse. The problem with such representations is that they encourage the audience to attend to the dog's death as something inconsequential, the likes of which compel Malamud to argue that cinema shows a proclivity to harm animals, answering to and, in turn, fuelling the proclivity of viewers to see animals harmed (71).

[137] Examples of this tendency include the 2019 Canadian docufiction *Murmur* (dir. Heather Young), which focuses on a lonely alcoholic woman adopting an older dog and finding a new purpose (or new addiction) in her life, and the 2024 film *All That We Love* (dir. Yen Tan), where the loss of her beloved dog similarly compels a woman to re-examine her life and renew broken bonds with others. In these instances, the death of the dog therefore serves as an instrument to talk about the protagonist's isolation, depression, and – triggered by the dog's passing – the need to remedy strained relationships, which suggests that the pet was just a substitute for 'real' – human – contact.

personal, spiritual form of posthumanist ethics, which – as discussed in the introduction – recognises that nonhuman lives are also "real, singular and connective, uniquely emergent [and expiring] without predictable development" (MacCormack 4), she stayed with Lolabelle as her breathing slowed down and then stopped, allowing the dog's death to be both her own uniquely evolving experience and a collective ritual preparing not only for the passing of the individual but also that of the relationship.[138] The images that record Lola's last moments are therefore charged with a posthumanist ethics and politics, challenging not only the dominant cinematic tradition that represents dog death as an insignificant matter, but also the culturally expected notions and practices around pet death, which is often considered as something predictable and manageable in the socio-cultural milieu portrayed by the film. The persistence of such perceptions is indicated by the reenacted dialogues between Anderson and Lolabelle's vet, who, as the narrator says, insisted on giving the speech about euthanasia despite the owner's clear and repeated indications that they will not choose that option. The photos of Lolabelle's last moments thus project Anderson's personal version of an interspecies politics of grief, which negotiates the dominant thanato-onto-political notions and practices around pet death in the West.

However, as suggested before, the portrayal of canine death and interspecies loss in *Heart of a Dog* is not free from anthropocentric representational and cultural tendencies. For example, albeit not for the sake of creating a dramatic effect or a shocking plot twist, the death of Lolabelle is spectacularised through the photos, while Anderson's dead human relations – most importantly, her mother, Mary Louise Anderson, and her husband, Lou Reed – do not appear directly in the film: while the former is presented through her final, enigmatic words ("Tell all the animals…") and the artist's retrospective reflections on their relationship, Reed is only glimpsed once, in a digitally manipulated, gold-soaked, 360-degree shot with Anderson and Lolabelle on the beach, and his relationship with the artist remains completely unaddressed. These details suggest that Lolabelle's death not only stands for itself but also for the deaths of Mary Louise Anderson and Lou Reed, and that it may even serve as a spectacle that substitutes the more emotionally upsetting, less easily representable cases of human grief. In her review, Lucca goes as far as to suggest that Reed's sudden, momentary appearance about three-quarters into the film may, in fact, function as a twist: "she's been thinking about Lou the entire time"

[138] This decision is also informed by the Buddhist belief that "only the dog's owner, not a hired priest, can do the ritual job . . . It is a question of calling in a person of the proper status, but it is also a question of intimacy: the dog does not know the priest and will not listen to him. The dog wants to hear his master's voice" (Tomodokoro qtd. in Kenney 55-56).

(17), but was unable to show him directly on the screen, using the dog instead as an emotional surrogate. The simultaneously metonymic and metaphoric representation of Lolabelle's passing reflects the ambiguous cultural perceptions around animal death in Western societies like the US, where the death of companion animals is often granted visibility precisely because it can mediate more difficult reckonings with human mortality, and where, while certain animal subjects (i.e. pets) are occasionally elevated to the level of grievability (often on the grounds of anthropomorphic perceptions), broader structures of neglect and indifference towards others remain systematically ignored.

As the analysis has revealed, *Heart of a Dog* is not only a cinematic paw print that bears the material traces of the canine companion, but is also significantly shaped by a markedly Western, specifically American, white, intellectual attitude towards pet keeping and pet grief. In certain aspects, the implied author's attitude challenges deep-seated cultural notions about the mortality of nonhuman creatures, while the elevation of the pet's death points to the presence of an affective economy where other-than-companion animals are still considered non-valuable – an issue which is left unexplored by the film. Furthermore, while Anderson's kaleidoscopic aesthetic expands the possibilities of memorialising a dog's life by weaving Lolabelle's presence into a wide-ranging meditation on love, mortality, and art, this very overflow of subjectivity risks recentring the human self. The film therefore exemplifies both the possibilities and limitations of an avant-garde memorialisation of canine death: it demonstrates how non-mimetic, experimental cinema can stretch the medium's capacities to register interspecies loss, while also revealing how easily such loss may be subsumed within anthropocentric frameworks.

Traces of Interspecies Loss in *This Darling Life*

In contrast to Anderson's film, Angie Chen's *This Darling Life* offers an anthropologically informed and, on the whole, more sensitive representation of canine death, approached from the direction of the documentary tradition.[139] As is typical of her recent films, Chen "decided to focus on something [or rather someone] close to her" (A. Willis 162): her dog, Baby. "He was 16 or 17 and I was wondering, 'Why am I so attached to him?'" Chen said in an interview, adding that "He was sick and I was emotional and I wondered why" (qtd. in Kerr n.pag.). She initially wanted to investigate the affective aspects of this "peculiar relationship," marked by the increasing urge to accept the fact that Baby was nearing the end of his life. However, the finished product interweaves Chen's own account with nine other real-life stories of dogs and their human guardians living in contemporary Hong Kong. The subjects come from diverse backgrounds, including a homeless man who lives under a bridge with his canine companion, a socially outcast woman called Christine, who is looking after both her cancer-ridden partner and her 17-year-old dog Momo, and a private animal shelter owner called May, who is desperately trying to keep her establishment afloat, singlehandedly taking care of over a hundred dogs. This emphasis on ethnographic sensitivity stands in marked contrast to Laurie Anderson's *Heart of a Dog*, whose experimental collage privileges the artist's subjective consciousness over anthropological observation and cultural context.

Chen's film attentively maps how, while caring for their canine charges, the portrayed human subjects are also burdened with their own illnesses, the deaths of family members, and their strained relationships with other people. In this, the film is similar to *Los Reyes* and *Stray*, recording the parallel vulnerabilities of human and animal lives in the portrayed urban environment. At the same time, the narratives in *This Darling Life* are interspersed with moments of joy: humans and animals mutually helping each other (as one can see in the story of Winnie, who was, similarly to the director, neglected by her mother, but her dog Patsy's love restored her trust in others and inspired her to become an animal welfare activist), miraculous recoveries and reunions (for example, the story of the puppy called Buena, who had been

[139] Over the years, the Hong Kong director has navigated her career from making feature films to commercials to documentaries. During the 1980s, the period now widely labelled as the Hong Kong 'new wave' – when a young generation of filmmakers "trained in the west and in television, less tied to Mainland traditions than older hands" came to the fore (Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong* 4) – Chen worked on fiction features such as *Maybe It's Love* (1984), *My Name Ain't Suzie* (1985), and *Chaos by Design* (1988). However, the poor reception of the latter made her move into the field of creating advertising campaigns (A. Willis 153). Although she established herself as an award-winning director of television commercials, this time she grew frustrated because making commissioned work for others left her feeling a lack of control over her projects, which prompted her to create a series of personal documentaries: *This Darling Life* (2008), *One Tree, Three Lives* (2012) and *I've Got the Blues* (2017).

tortured and left to die by a creek but was nursed back to strength by a group of volunteers, vets, and foster parents), and rewarding, mundane interactions such as walks, play sessions, cuddles and feeding, which provide comfort either to the human, the dog, or both. These diverse stories also recall the everyday exchanges between people and dogs in the previously analysed documentaries. However, in this case, we also witness how the guardians cope with their animals' aging and eventual death, how they say farewell to them at Buddhist funeral ceremonies, and how they recall happy memories of their pets through photos, home videos, and conversations with the director, whose recollections are also presented among those of others. What started as an auto-biographical mourning film dedicated to expressing Chen's grief for Baby thus ended up as a colourful anthrozoological collage, a tapestry of human–animal stories outlining the common experiences of shared vulnerability, reciprocal care, abandonment and belonging, illness and recovery, aging and death (F. Law 61) – all of which are part of living with a dog and thus have a place in Chen's design that displays the various different components of dog guardianship. While *Los Reyes* and *Stray* also portray human–canine co-existence, due to its focus on personal relationships, which are markedly characterised by the sense of the animal's inevitable passing, *This Darling Life* extends the image of a shared life with dogs to the issue of death and grief more emphatically than the other documentaries. The film's title could be seen as a reflection of this complexity: a life made more joyous yet also more painful by the presence and imminent absence of a canine companion.

Composed of stills from the featured accounts, the poster of *This Darling Life* is another paratextual element that reflects the variety of aspects of living with a dog portrayed by the film (Fig. 69). Including images of times together and times apart, bonding and parting, "becoming-with" and becoming "undone" (Weil, *Thinking Animals* 114)[140] – for example, those of Christine walking her dog in a pram, a daily ritual which contributes to creating their shared world, and those where she administers the euthanasia injection to Momo, marking the end of their conjoined lives – placed side by side on a white canvas, it displays how the documentary creates a collage or, indeed, a tapestry, where the different human–canine portraits do not blend into a homogeneous whole but are visibly sewn together into lateral patterns, creating an affectively heterogeneous picture. The white contours of a dog overlaying the snapshots can be

[140] While the notion of "becoming-with," as it was discussed in the introduction, refers to how companion dogs come to constitute an integral part of the owner's sense of self through a process of mutually (trans)formative interspecies bonding or, in Haraway's words, "relating" (Haraway, *When Species* 244; *Companion Species* 12), becoming "undone," as Weil explains, refers to how this co-constituted self is destroyed by the death of a pet dog, without whom the subject no longer feels complete. As Weil succinctly puts it, "[t]hose of us who have lived with animals are 'undone' by the animals we have lost" (114).

seen as the lines along which the documentary's constitutive parts are joined together, namely, the marks of loss and gain that the dogs leave on their guardians' lives, printed, in turn, into the matter of the film. While these outlines seem to be holding the composition together, they are also cutting the collage into further pieces, suggesting that while the presence of dogs is a staple in the human lives portrayed in the film, their absence rips the guardians' worlds apart, making the recorded stories, like the subjects who tell them, fractured and fragmented.[141] In short, the poster already suggests how loss, featured as an inherent aspect of living with a dog, simultaneously binds and destabilises the film's structure, the fragmentary nature of which is also echoed in the dancing, disintegrating letters of the title.

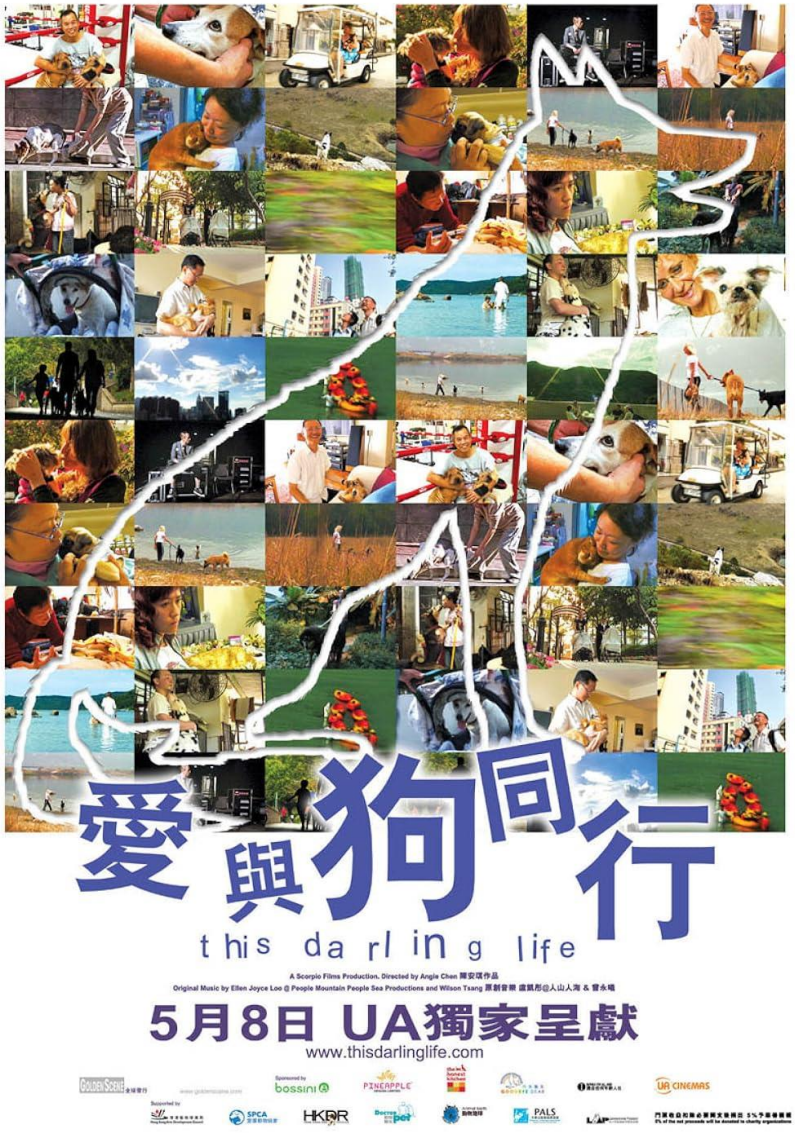

Fig. 69. A tapestry of love and loss (*This Darling Life* film poster)

[141] In this sense, it might be symbolically significant that, in both stills where Christine gives Momo the final shot, the white line separates the human and canine subject who formerly constituted a unit.

The granular texture of the film is not only a result of recording various owners' realities, but also of the fact that Chen combines the traditional documentary format of interviews and live action footage with 8 mm home videos of her own dog at various stages of his life, subjective sequences that express her current experiences related to Baby's (impending) death, as well as lyrical intertitles and slowed down, abstract images that provide affective or associative transitions from one account to the next, usually based on some thought or emotion evoked by the process of losing her dog. In these aspects, *This Darling Life* recalls the heterogeneous form and associative narrative of *Heart of a Dog*, which likewise employs multiple types of shots connected by the implied author's personal meditation that moves fluidly between the grief for the dog and reflections on, among other themes, parental loss. Here, too, towards the beginning of the film, images of the sick, aging Baby transition into a poetic intertitle expressing how the dog's dying reminds Chen of her mother's death, with the words "The slow pain, the slow death…" transposed onto a slow-motion footage of whirling water, which might be itself a reference to the filmmaker's stream of consciousness, or, more specifically, her tumultuous feelings about her parents (Fig. 70). As Andy Willis observes, in such moments, the film transforms into a "thoughtful, introspective reflection on the filmmaker herself" (162), with a specific investment in how she comes to terms with the death of her mother, who blamed her for her own unhappiness, and that of the father, who deserted the family when Chen was little. Not unlike in Anderson's film, the experiences of abandonment and the long-lasting impacts of parental neglect such as a lack of trust and loneliness are juxtaposed with the unconditional love, loyalty, and company that the dogs provide.

Fig. 70. Stream of consciousness evoked by the dog's death (*This Darling Life* 00:04:24)

The sequences of togetherness with one's pet are, however, tinged with a sense of melancholia over the dog's imminent passing. This particularly interspecies affect is salient in the way the home video footage foregrounds Chen and Baby's soon-to-be-over bodily interactions, how the images are often encased in a black frame of grief, how most of the recordings, even the exterior shots filmed on the streets, seem dark, confined, and depressing, and how the portrayed dogs appear either in mediated images or blurred, distant shots, behind bars, hurt, dying or already absent and only recalled by the guardians' memories. The documentary view on sharing one's life with dogs is thus eclipsed by the spectralising effects of Chen's anticipatory loss – an affect that was described in the introduction of this chapter as a particular feature of pet grief. Taking these latter aspects into consideration, I argue that *This Darling Life*'s structurally heterogeneous, ethnographically informed representation of dog guardianship nevertheless retains a subjective perspective shared with *Heart of a Dog*, since Chen's experiences of grief over Baby seem to focalise the recorded stories, (dis)organise the narrative, and saturate the visual fabric of the film, which is, consequently, much darker than the poster. In this interpretation, this film's title could also be seen as an expression of gratitude for the dog's love; the intensity of these affects makes the title feel almost like an exclamation. *This Darling Life*, while providing a colourful anthrozoological tapestry of pet ownership, thus also serves as a personal memorial to Baby's passing, a paw print pressed into the fabric of the documentary, with its narrative structure and visual form shaped by the marks Baby left on the director's world through his life, death, and afterlife.

In stringing together the film's fragments, Chen is led by the currents of her mind rather than the rules of linear continuity, demonstrating – similarly to Anderson's work – how the narrative of mourning films tends to follow the mental stream of the grieving subject, evoking the drifting, inner-directed narratives of modernist cinema (Armstrong 33-34). Yet while in *Heart of a Dog*, this mental stream is driven by the implied author's philosophical reflections and artistic mediations on diverse phenomena, the accounts in Chen's film are linked through the affects and associations specifically accompanying pet loss, such as the experience of interdependency, the dog's vulnerability, and the owner's sense of responsibility for the animal. These feelings are introduced by the parable which is first told during the opening credits and is repeated at the end of the film, thereby lending the narrative a circular logic that – contrary to a teleological story – is driven by psychological processes and thus has a tendency to contain loops, repetitions, and overlaps. According to the tale, whose affective content permeates the entire film, a dog, who was raised to be eaten, repeatedly responds to his owner's call despite being hurt, thus ultimately succumbing to being killed by the man. Illustrating dogs' extreme

exposure to their owners' impulses, intensified in the cultural context portrayed by the film, where pet keeping exists besides the dog meat trade, the parable also reflects on the dog's unwavering trust in humans even in the face of maltreatment. This quality, as Kuzniar observes, gives rise to an immense sense of responsibility for these animals,[142] and an "inescapable sense of guilt experienced at their demise" (138), contributing to the complex affective makeup of pet grief, also present in Anderson's film (specifically, the dream-birth sequence). According to Kuzniar, tales about dogs mourning and waiting for their masters – including Homer's Argos, Greyfriar's Bobby, and Hachikō – might be even seen as "the inverse expression of self-reproachful guilt vis-à-vis the dog" (139), which is also detectable in the frame story of Chen's film, where the dog's unwavering trust can be construed as the metaphoric reflection of the director's overwhelming sense of gratitude and responsibility for Baby. In this regard, the parable also demonstrates how representations of dog death tend to evoke meta-grief, which is directed not only at the deceased animal but also the notions and sentiments attached to them. The ambiguous mixture of gratitude and guilt evoked by Baby's death is further reinforced by the animation that accompanies the parable: black and colourful lines running through empty spaces, converging, intersecting, and forming entangled webs on the screen (Fig. 71), which can also be seen, more generally, as yet another self-reflexive element illustrating how Chen interconnects her own story with nine other accounts, not through a linear plot line but the crisscrossing cords of positive interspecies grief affects such as gratefulness – symbolised by the colourful threads – and negative emotions such as regret – symbolised by the black threads. These lines together form a rhizomatic structure that, in addition, perfectly reflects the entangled human and canine lives portrayed by the film.

[142] According to Kuzniar, caretaking – which constitutes a significant part of our daily interactions – is one of the aspects that make our attachment to dogs inadvertently close and the final separation especially devastating (138). Grief in general, as Butler points it out, has an ethical component because it reminds us of our responsibility to others (*Precarious Life* 30). However, as Weil highlights, this responsibility "is especially significant with regard to others whose vulnerability is greater than ours" (114), or, as Kuzniar notes with regard to dogs, "[w]e cannot feel responsible enough for these creatures who are beholden to us" (139). Therefore, Kuzniar observes that accounts of pet grief often reflect an immense sense of responsibility, guilt, and the need to be as faithful to the dog in death as she was to the owner in life (10).

Fig. 71. Threads of grief and gratitude (*This Darling Life* 00:00:26)

As Fiona Law highlights, the presented human–animal stories "share a consciousness of abandonment, guilt, and a heavy sense of responsibility that relates closely to [the portrayed] people's personal backgrounds and family histories" (69). This insight not only supports the argument that the diverse accounts are linked through the shared affects of pet grief but also suggests that Chen's tapestry includes human-human stories as well, tracing their connections to the tales of interspecies love and loss. Following the thematic threads of canine trust and the corresponding sense of human responsibility evoked by the frame story, the film effectively opens with two montage sequences of home videos showing the evolution of Chen and Baby's relationship. The unfolding interspecies intimacy is then juxtaposed with the emotional distance of Chen's parents, revealed in a conversation between the filmmaker and her brother. The contrast between Chen's companionship with her dogs[143] and her relationship with her parents is also reinforced visually, as the home videos of Baby are tinted with a rosy colour evoking a sense of affection, the dog's gestures implying the presence of the significant other even in those shots where Chen is outside the frames, while the unfiltered documentary shots of the siblings flipping through the family album in their lap only show black and white photos of their unsmiling mother, who gives the impression of being aloof and alone even when she is with her loved ones. The photos rekindle Chen's emotional trauma caused by the mother's tendency to blame her and the father's estrangement, which is subsequently contrasted with the affection, comfort, and care dogs and people can provide each other, expressed through a fade

[143] At the time of shooting the film, Chen had two Pomeranians, Baby and Jessie, but *This Darling Life* revolves around her relationship with and loss of the former.

in – accompanied by Buddhist chanting and chiming – to the funeral rite of Patsy, Winnie's long-term companion.

Patsy's farewell ceremony, interspersed with her owner's recollections, gives way to a stream of interconnected accounts about the human–canine bond, which can also be seen as an expression of Chen's gratitude to her dying dog, counterpointing the resentment she initially felt towards her parents. A recurrent theme that links the stories is how, as a consequence of abandonment by other humans and a contrasting, unconditional support from dogs, the interviewed subjects developed a caring attitude towards others – a thread which can also be found in Anderson's film. Here, Winnie talks about how the experience of being rejected by her mother led her to become a devoted dog parent and animal welfare activist, whilst Christine, who is targeted by double social contempt because of living with a married man and a dog, tells that she feels responsible for taking care of both. These owners, like Chen herself, give account of an immense sense of gratefulness to their dogs because the latter, as they say, provided them with unconditional love and comfort (Chen, 00:40:34), and allowed them to discover aspects of themselves they did not know had existed (Winnie, 00:11:15), such as compassion and forgiveness (Chen, 00:40:11-00:40:58; 01:13:22-01:14:11) – qualities also mentioned by the narrator in *Heart of a Dog*.

Chen's gratitude for the lesson she learned from Baby – that "love can be unconditional" (00:40:58) – is expressed through a transition to three interrelated accounts focusing on rescuers and shelter owners who dedicate their lives to helping dogs. The first sequence shows how British expat Sally, founder of HK Dog Rescue, provides care even for animals whose painful medical conditions make them aggressive; the second gives glimpses into the day-to-day struggles of May, who, despite the lack of financial funding and social support, continues taking in abandoned dogs;[144] while the third focuses on another private shelter owner, Yim, who admits that he does not like dogs but he "respects and treasures their lives" (00:47:17). These accounts outline an affective-ethical order based on the unconditional recognition of, respect and care for animal lives, which, largely inspired by Buddhist philosophy, also informs the pet funerals portrayed in the film.[145] This extended narrative trail is accordingly bookended by the

[144] May's interdependence with the shelter's canine residents is symbolised by the bamboo plants – known for their rhizomatic root systems – in the background of her interviews, while her persistence is reflected by the plant's hardiness and the subjective, slowed down shots of the long stairs leading to the shelter – a journey she makes at least twice every day.

[145] According to Theerawat Saehan, who organises Buddhist pet funerals in Bangkok, "We believe in the next life, so this ceremony is to help with reincarnation, to give them what they need," namely, the progress of their souls to the spiritual realm (Ellis-Petersen n. pag.). Although it is debated whether animals can reach Nirvana, many Buddhists agree that it is their responsibility to ensure that their deceased pets – who, like them, share the cycle of birth and rebirth – are memorialised in a manner that aids their journey beyond death (Collier 5).

funeral rite of Christine's dog Momo, immediately followed by an archival footage sequence capturing the last days of Chen's father, with the director's voiceover expressing that, having learned forgiveness from her dogs, she no longer blames him. The interlaced human–canine stories thus draw zigzagging lines from neglectful human parents to caring dog guardians and from unconditionally loving dogs to forgiving children, mapping the mutually influential connections between interhuman and interspecies relationships, while also helping the director express the sense of gratefulness accompanying the loss of her pet – an affect that arises as a narrative link between the accounts ending with deaths and farewells (namely, those of Winnie, Christine, and Chen).

These tales of interspecies loss are also connected through a sense of guilt, which stems from the feeling of not having done enough for or the regret for being too harsh on the pet (Chen, 00:40:19), and is aggravated by the fact that, despite their guardians' shortcomings, the dogs never seem to harbour any grudge against their owners. Placed associatively after the story of Buena, the puppy who continues to trust people even after suffering extreme cruelty, the director's reflections about Baby's forgiving nature recall the frame story about the unwavering trust of dogs as well as Kuzniar's insights on how this unbreakable loyalty leads to the owner's "inescapable sense of guilt" (138). In Chen's case, this feeling already emerges before Baby's actual death, pointing to the prominence of anticipatory grief and its accompanying affects such as regret in shaping the film's narrative. Reading *This Darling Life* as not only an objective documentary on living with dogs in contemporary Hong Kong, but also as an expression of Chen's personal grief, one could even see the other interviewees' tales about their pets' unconditional love as "the inverse expression of self-reproachful guilt" (139), where the dogs' recounted loyalty reflects the director's sense of failing her own pet.

As it is discernible in the linking of Buena's story and Chen's reflections on her dog's unbreakable trust, the film's narrative fragments are connected not only by common interspecies grief affects – that may or may not be the expressions of the director's own feelings – but also by personal associations specifically engendered by the process of losing Baby, which renders the narrative of this documentary similar to that of Anderson's avant-garde film. One of the most significant associations that contribute to shaping the film's narrative is the parallel between coping with the dog's and the parents' respective deaths. In fact, the few critics who have written about *This Darling Life* suggest that the feelings evoked in Chen by Baby's death mirror the loss of her parents and help her come to terms with it. As Maggie Lee argues, "the project underlines [the director's] quest to find the capacity in herself to forgive her father through witnessing unconditional love from Baby" (n. pag.). As discussed above, the

documentary indeed traces the connections between interhuman and interspecies loss. However, in one of the conversations on camera, Chen also suggests that losing Baby was a more devastating experience than the death of either of her parents – a feeling that she attributes to the particularly close relationship with her dog: "We've had fifteen years together. It's a long time. In all my personal relationships, I've never been with anyone that long, not with our father, mother, or you [referring to her brother sat across from her]" (00:03:31-00:03:47). As Chen points out in the film, evoking Kuzniar's arguments (137),[146] we often spend more time with our dogs than with friends or family members, establishing routines and rituals, unique ways of communication, and a continuous, often humbling contact with their bodies – elements which render the human–canine bond more intimate than most of our human relationships.

The trauma of losing Baby is also underscored by the structure of Chen's film, which, rather than starting with an interview or a subjective sequence focusing on the director's relationship with her parents, effectively begins with showing the development of Chen and Baby's bond, thereby assigning this relationship a primary place among the filmmaker's personal connections. The opening sequences documenting Chen and Baby's life outline how the dog had become an integral part of the director's reality, foregrounding the pet's (mostly embodied) daily interactions with his owner. After giving a panoramic view of how people from different backgrounds deal with the loss of their canine charges, Chen's camera returns to record Baby's last days: an upsetting sequence of the director's attempts to make the ailing dog comfortable and to say goodbye to him, followed by a poetic transition that marks the dog's passing. Toward the end of the film, one month after Baby's death, the camera once again returns to Chen's apartment, panning through the rooms and lingering on the dog's – now deserted – favourite places. Beginning with images of his integral presence in Chen's life and ending with the images of his deeply felt absence, the structure of the film thus mirrors the formulation and eventual fracturing of the co-constitutive bond between the director and her dog.

The viewer can also witness the feeling of not being able to let the dog go recur at different points in the film. For example, the interview where May shares her worries about dying before her canine charges – an event that would lead to the dogs' demise – is followed by a video diary entry in which Chen, hugging Baby's frail body to her chest, talks about the

[146] Kuzniar's main argument about pet grief is that the death of a dog is often "more unbearable than that of a beloved human" (137). While not wanting to suggest any kind of hierarchy between the loss of humans and dogs, I share Kuzniar's general assumption that the death of a canine companion is particularly disorientating because, as Weil puts it, "they transcend boundaries of kin and kind by becoming integral to [our] lives" (*Thinking Animals* 115).

difficulty of coming to terms with the dog's impending death: "We've had a long long relationship together, haven't we? Fifteen years, that's a long time. Still not prepared to let you go" (00:54:19-00:54:52). These two successive records – connected by a poetic transition shot of a foliage-framed view of the sky, spinning to emulate the vertiginous experience of a significant other's death – both express distress about a loss, in the sense of "they need me" as well as in that of "I need him," thereby outlining a micro-narrative of human–canine interdependence. Chen's diary entry specifically resonates with Kuzniar's observation that representations of pet grief are often driven by the temporal vector of the "not yet" (142), recounting the dog's life as a means of keeping them alive in a self-consciously created fictive space (i.e. the narrative) as a way of coping with the pet's untimely death. This can also serve as an explanation as to why the footage recording Baby's last days is preceded by rose-tinted home videos: like the opening dream-birth sequence in Anderson's film, these can be seen as projections of the owner's nostalgically replaying memories about the dog, or, in other words, *re*presenting Baby as a way of fending off his impending death. For the same reason, the almost hour-long documentary section comprised of other people's accounts seemingly serves to prepare for or postpone facing Baby's departure. Among other associations and affects, the film's narrative is thus shaped by Chen's inability to let the dog go, which is also signalled by the repeated references to the fifteen years they spent together, a bond longer and closer than any of the director's human relationships and – in the fictive dimension signified by the first hour of the documentary – not yet over.

The inability to cope with Baby's loss is particularly salient in the interview excerpt in which Chen shares her guilt over occasionally punishing her pet and her gratitude for the dog's unbreakable trust. Giving a controlled, rational, verbal expression to her feelings about the dog's approaching death proves increasingly difficult, which becomes evident in the way she picks up her other dog Jessie for comfort, in the nervous fidgeting with the pet's ears, how she is shifting back and forth from English to Chinese as if not finding the proper terms in either of these languages, and how her confident declarations about the unconditional love of dogs are followed by unfinished sentences and deep silences (00:40:22-00:40:44), where the brother has to step in to salvage the conversation with some logically fitting remark. Apparently, for Chen, the thought of Baby's impending death is too devastating, the affects evoked by it are too complex to be expressed through verbal means; one also feels that the repeated comebacks to the topic of dogs' unconditional love are somewhat of a deflection from the actual, inexpressible affects in her mind. Language breaks down, and in the paralysis-like state of inarticulateness,

images and poetic intertitles rush in to help Chen express her fractured perspective, evoking Armstrong's discussion of how mourning films tend to *picture* grief rather than *tell* of it (17).

For instance, in the sequence portraying the period when Baby became very sick, the camera turns away from the dog's fragile body and towards the open sky outside the director's apartment. The pain of letting Baby go is implied through an intertitle transposed on a subjective point-of-view shot of the sky (Fig. 72), which – similarly to the other celestial shot that introduced the sequence of the dog's last days – is slowed down, rotated, and is swinging left and right to imitate the physically disorientating experience of loss. A similar effect is produced in the following sequence, visualising the immediate aftermath of the dog's death, where Chen's subjective camera pans through the apartment with unsteady movements, the images blurred and the light blinding, performing the embodied aspects of the director's loss. Moreover, this sequence calls attention to the breakdown of language as an inherent experience of the pet owner's grief, with the intertitle only showing the repetition of the word "pain," which eventually also falls apart on the screen (Fig. 73). At the same time, the disintegrating letters – a recurring motif usually projected on images whose meaning or place in the narrative needs clarification – can also be seen as a self-reflexive gesture indicating how grief will always be a subversive force in the film, working against even the most creative attempts at being explained or, for that matter, represented.

Fig. 72. The disorientating effect of pet loss (*This Darling Life* 01:05:56)

Fig. 73. The breakdown of language (*This Darling Life* 01:06:11)

The inexpressibility of loss is also visible in the lyrical sequence where Philip Larkin's poem, "Going" – exploring the themes of mortality and the breaking of bonds through metaphors such as the loss of the tree which once "locked Earth to the sky" (Larkin 21) – is accompanied by shaky images that assume the point of view of someone looking out of a car window in rain (Fig. 74). This sequence suggests that Chen's film not only oscillates between what Bill Nichols calls a "participatory" documentary – in which the filmmaker "steps down from a fly-on-the-wall perch, and becomes a social actor (almost) like any other" (116) – and a "performative" documentary – which foregrounds "the filmmaker's own engagement with the subject" (34) – but also taps into the "poetic mode," which eschews mimetic representation in favour of mood, tone, and visual association, thus bearing a "close proximity to personal, or avant-garde filmmaking" (33), to the aesthetics of films like Anderson's. However, while the poetry-infused shots may be better suited to evoke the mood of mourning than direct depiction, using metaphors results in a somewhat clichéd construction recalling the hackneyed images used in obituary poems. This failure reinforces the assumption that grief remains an unrepresentable affect in the film, always slipping away between factual and figurative modes of expression.[147]

[147] In the quoted poem otherwise consistently using metaphors to talk about loss, for example, the motifs of an approaching evening and a felled tree, by the end of the third stanza, "What is under my hands, // That I cannot feel?," the meaningful imagery is replaced by empty metaphors, namely, the pronouns "what" and "that," as if the speaker was suddenly hit by aphasia and lost their ability for poetic expression, only finding fitting signifiers to refer to the general idea of mortality, but when arriving to the point where they should describe the lost beloved, they could only stutter, ask a perplexed question ("What is under my hands"?), and describe the absence of the deceased through negation ([something] "That I cannot feel"). Only referring to but not specifying what is gone,

Fig. 74. Slipping away from poetic figuration (*This Darling Life* 01:07:53)

In this sense, even though Chen employs subjective shots and poetic intertitles to express her grief for Baby, the best she can do with these techniques is to *indicate* the approach ("The slow pain"), the arrival ("The inevitable"), and the aftermath ("The pain, the pain") of the dog's death, and to *evoke* the mood, tone, and physical feel of Baby's absence through camera movement, colour, and an expressive use of *mise-en-scéne* (for example, the spinning point-of-view shots and the dark, rain-dappled windscreen). In other words, rather than capturing or clarifying what the bereaved feels, these images and captions only point out the significant other's absence, the presence of grief and, by way of unconscious failure (the mawkish metaphors of darkness and rain) and conscious allusion (the disintegrating words), the unrepresentability of this condition. As previously mentioned, the destabilising force of Chen's grief could also be seen to affect the structure of the whole film, the fragments of which are not connected by an overarching (teleo)logical narrative but the ebb and flow of the director's mind. Nor are the individual narrative instances necessarily explained; the recorded stories may contain gaps even despite the addition of commentary captions. One of the best examples for this kind of fragmented and punctured storytelling is the account of the unnamed homeless man, who does not talk to other people, so his story needs to be pieced together from the speculations of residents frequently seeing him in the city, Chen's documentary footage that records his daily interactions with his dog from a respectful distance, as well as the viewer's deductive skills, which are also necessary to notice certain details, for instance, the fact that the dog is pregnant. The latter is confirmed by the appearance of puppies and the addition of the word "Puppies" to

these lines thus illustrate the lack of precise language to name the lost love object, underlining the poetic sequence's failure to represent grief – something which Armstrong identifies as a recurring theme in mourning films (7).

the caption “Homeless + Dog” – an equation which is, however, gradually reduced to the word “Homeless”, signalling the disappearance of the mother dog and then the puppies. Although words are added for the sake of clarification, we do not know what happened: the story remains as fractured, uncertain, and unexplainable as the contents of the grieving mind that shape the film’s narrative.

The story of the homeless man is followed by that of Sally, which focuses on the mysterious disappearance of her pet, Ching Ching. The connection between these instances also suggests that the film’s fragments are connected through affects and associations, usually expressed through a poetic transition, in this case, snapshots of crossing the rivers of Hong Kong in different ways (Fig. 75.1, 75.2). The latter, also included in the film’s poster, can be seen as symbolic references to the assumption that the homeless man’s dogs have crossed into the spiritual realm while they also highlight their role of sewing different narrative pieces together. The same duality applies to the abstract animation connecting Paul, the rock singer’s story about his dog’s death and the miraculous survival of Buena, the abused puppy: the colourful, glowing lines running through a black space (Fig. 75.3), similar to the animation in the opening credits, self-reflexively show how Chen interlaces different stories, while they also evoke the specific idea of reincarnation, reinforced by the images of a gate, a road, and some kind of fence that might refer to the passage between death and life (Fig. 75.4, 75.5, 75.6). A similar notion is evoked by the transition between Baby’s death and the miraculous return of Ching Ching. The implied idea of Baby continuing his existence in what could be seen as another dog’s second life is an example of how Chen weaves elements of the film together by following the stream of her own consciousness, which, at the same time, also serves as a means of coping with her dog’s death. Therefore the individual human–animal stories in Chen’s tapestry are connected by the intuitive, pre-linguistic contents that emerged in the director during the process of losing Baby, and which render her documentary, otherwise recording the realities of living with dogs in contemporary Hong Kong, a personal mourning film bearing a resemblance to Anderson’s avant-garde work.

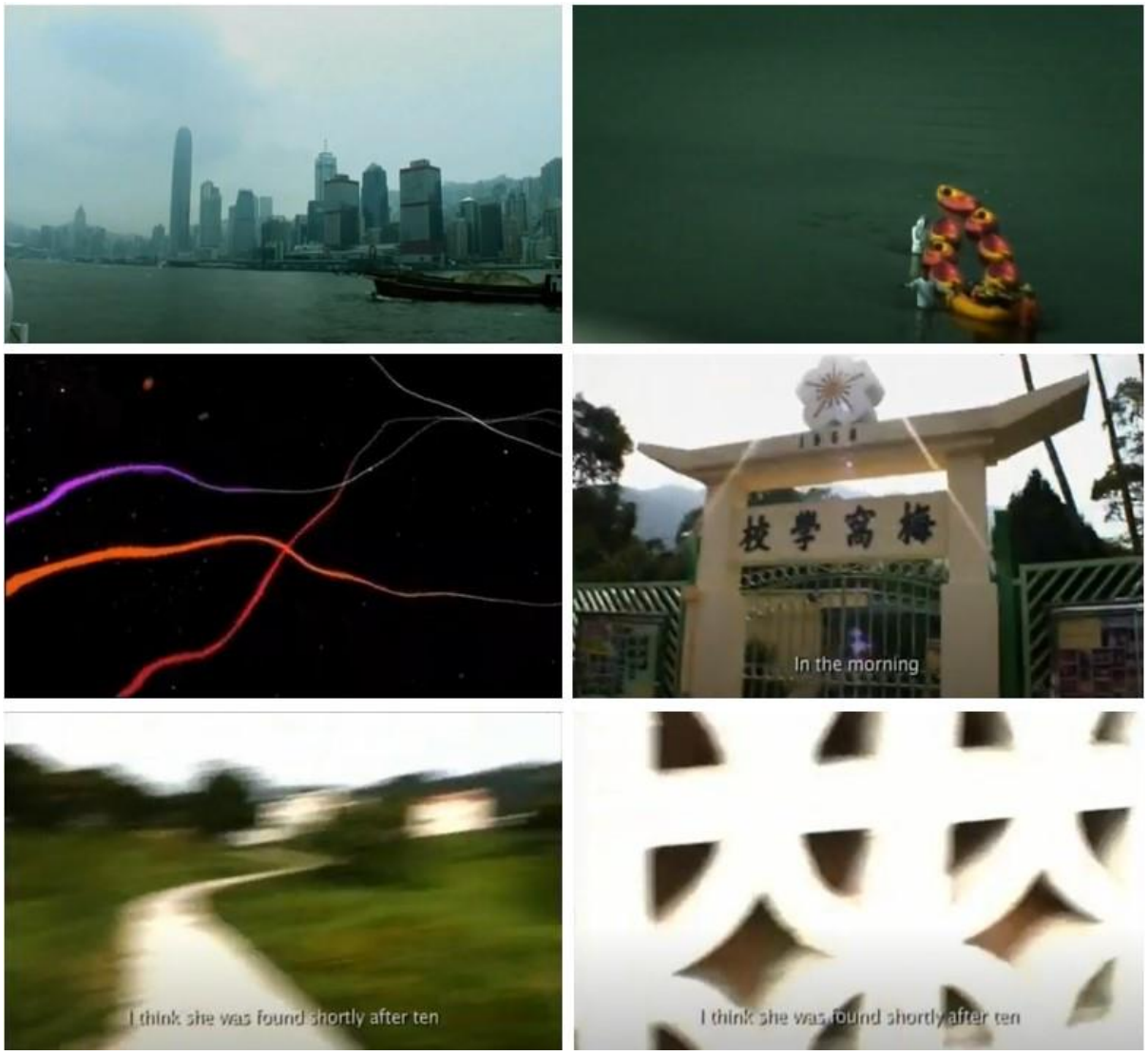

Fig. 75. Threads of loss (*This Darling Life* 01:01:18; 01:01:22; 00:36:17; 00:35:59; 00:36:00; 00:36:01)

Grief also saturates the visual fabric of Chen's documentary, manifesting itself, for instance, in the above-discussed subjective sequences that evoke the affects, thoughts, and physical experiences of the director's loss. Yet while these features would apply to mourning films in general, the aesthetics of *This Darling Life* also bears the specific marks of grieving a dog – a process that may begin as early as the moment of adoption and is enhanced in moments of witnessing increased vulnerability, for instance, when the dog is sick, injured or is getting old.[148] These conditions also induce a growing awareness of the owner's physical attachment to the pet: of those everyday bodily interactions that compose the undercurrents of our shared

[148] As pet grief specialist Dr. Erica Dickie explains, "anticipatory grief commonly occurs when faced with the news of a serious illness, terminal diagnosis, or the realisation that [one's] pet is in significant decline," but it may be already experienced at the first signs of aging: "As pets age, the changes in activities of daily living represent endings. They remind us that our pet's end of life is drawing nearer" (n. pag.)

life but usually remain unnoticed until sickness, injury, or aging reminds us of the animal's inevitable passing and with that the loss of not only an emotional bond but a unique physical intimacy.[149] The anticipation of loss and the concomitant strengthening of physical attachment is visible in how the footage featuring Baby foregrounds his bodily contact with the director, reflecting the latter's increasing anxiety over losing this special physical relationship.

For instance, the opening montage sequence, which reanimates Baby's active years, is predominantly composed of images capturing the bodily interactions between the director and her dog, including shared gazes, kisses, and cuddles (Fig. 76, top images). Reflecting Baby's physical embeddedness in Chen's reality, the sequence also identifies the dog's favourite places within the filmmaker's apartment while also marking their shared uses of space within the flat as well as on the street during daily walks (Fig. 76, first two images in the bottom row). Besides the rose-coloured filter, the black frames can also be seen as a visual manifestation of Chen's anticipatory grief, as a result of which Baby appears, in a sense, already lost and mourned. This notion is supported by the closing image of the opening sequence: a freeze frame of Baby's face as he looks up at Chen after being praised, which resembles the photographs displayed at funeral services (Fig. 76, last image in the bottom row). The funeral photos of Patsy and Momo (Fig. 77), appearing later in the film, closely echo this picture, further suggesting that the opening sequence – and, by extension, the film itself – serves as a cinematic memorial for Baby: anticipating the dog's death, Chen freezes their most intimate physical interactions in the form of photos, home videos, and, as a larger commemorative piece containing a selection of these smaller memory-pieces, the documentary. In this respect, Chen's freeze-frame of Baby also parallels Anderson's sequence of still images capturing Lolabelle running on the beach, which likewise suspends the dog in motion in order to preserve the embodied aspects of their bond.

[149] Andrea Corso calls attention to how anticipatory grief often deepens the human–animal bond, as "[p]et owners dedicate more time and energy to caring for their pets, tending to them physically, as well as spending more time with them in anticipation of their death" (n. pag.)

Fig. 76. Physical entanglement (*This Darling Life* 00:00:55-00:01:55)

Fig. 77. Funeral photos of Momo and Patsy (*This Darling Life* 01:12:29; 00:10:58)

Chen's physical attachment to her dog is intensified in the next home video sequence depicting the dog's senior years, where the pink filter disappears, the frame widens, and fills up with a close-up shot of Baby's grizzled fur and cataract-filmed eyes, followed by recordings of his shaky, disoriented movements through the director's apartment. These visual changes suggest that Baby's impending death is becoming a reality and that Chen is increasingly preoccupied with her ailing dog's physical conditions. As in *Heart of a Dog*, where Anderson's attunement to the blind dog's experiences manifested itself in recreated artworks and technologically aided imaginary sequences, "kinaesthetic empathy" is also a significant shaping force of the poetics of Chen's film, determining what the camera captures, how it records the subject, and how the images appear on the screen. Foregrounding the dog's bodily states, movements, and interactions with the owner, the visual world of Chen's film can be described

through the term kin-aesthetic empathy: a phenomenological representation that not only reflects but also reinforces the guardian's growing sense of somatic sympathy towards the dog. Since it specifically highlights Chen's attunement to the dog's physical vulnerabilities as a result of her increasing sense of losing the intimate relationship with Baby, the film's visual world could be even more precisely described as a kin-aesthetic representation of grief, that is, a kind of aesthetics which bears the marks of the director's (anticipatory) loss of her uniquely close bodily attachment to her dog.

The anticipation of losing this especially intimate relationship and the consequent intensification of physical attachment to the pet reaches its apex in the last home video sequence that captures the dog alive, which starts with a shot of Chen stroking Baby's head (Fig. 78.1). This short sequence gives the impression of a mutually comforting routine interaction, however, Baby's aged features and the vehemence of Chen's pats – coupled with the facts that this footage is preceded by Sally's message that she misses Ching Ching and wants her back, and is quickly followed by a symbolic shot of parting clouds on a night sky (Fig. 78.2) – suggest that this is probably one of the last, increasingly cherished and sought after times when Chen could scratch her pet's ears and that she was already missing and mourning the loss of such bodily interactions. The owner's preoccupation with the dog's deteriorating health is evident in the subjective shots focused on Baby's resting body (Fig. 78.3), which seem to emulate the perspective of the worried owner, and in the images of Chen holding Baby in her arms (Fig. 78.4), which gradually zoom in on the dog's body, reflecting the director's growing sense of loss and the concomitant urge to hold on to the little creature as tight and long as possible. The sequence's last close-up produces a memory-image that preserves the feel of the little dog's warm body in Chen's arms: a haptic equivalent of the opening sequence's closing frame that similarly captured an intimate physical interaction and froze it as a way of cinematically memorialising the moment, similarly to how Anderson froze the moments of Lolabelle running on the beach in her film.

Fig. 78. Kin-aesthetic representation of anticipatory grief (*This Darling Life* 01:04:27; 01:04:30; 01:04:44; 01:05:09)

The sequence toward the end of Chen's documentary, where the embodied camera returns to the apartment after the dog's death and retraces Baby's favourite spots, also recalls the beach sequence in *Heart of a Dog*, albeit for a different reason. Here, similarly to Anderson, Chen draws on cinema's dual nature as both an indexical sign that bears the mark of "the moment at which the image is registered" (Mulvey 9), and a medium that manipulates reality by animating what is, originally, inanimate (15). As in Anderson's film, this duality imbues cinema with a spectral quality which, according to Armstrong, renders the medium particularly capable of evoking the experience of grief, when stillness and movement, presence and absence, life and death similarly enfold on each other (32). Tracking the empty spaces that Baby left behind and intermixing these shots with ones recorded before the dog's death (Fig. 79), the post-mortem sequence in Chen's film relies on this spectralising ability to recreate the phenomenological experience of pet loss, when the body of the bereaved still vividly remembers the dog. This sequence suggests that pet loss is a markedly embodied experience, which is also detectable in the sequences featuring the other interviewees' relationships with their dogs. Throughout the film, Chen's camera highlights the physical traces the dogs left on their guardians' lives, so that images of interspecies bodily contact such as sharing kisses or picking up litter (Fig. 80, top row), captured while the animals were living, and images evoking the ghostly presence of the dogs after their death, including close-up shots of dog hair on a wheelchair, interviewees outlining absent canine bodies and images showing empty spaces once occupied by dogs abound in the film (Fig. 80, bottom row). The kin-aesthetic representation of grief thus extends to the whole film's visual world.

Fig. 79. Spectral canine presence (*This Darling Life* 01:07:01; 01:07:13)

Fig. 80. Embodied traces (*This Darling Life* 01:02:26; 00:48:26; 00:14:02; 00:08:51; 00:34:38; 01:12:23)

Since the anxiety of losing the (physical) relationship with the dog already emerges before the pet's actual death, the images in Chen's film are not only markedly embodied, but also tinted with a sense of melancholia over the dog's imminent death, resulting in a predominantly dark colour scheme. The majority of the footage, including outdoor scenes filmed on the streets of Hong Kong, has a sombre and depressing tone, at once confining due to the lack of open vistas and drifting due to the fleeting vehicles and crowds. This visuality is most prominent in the sequences that portray the homeless man and his canine companion, whose shared life on a traffic island can only be captured through the screen of passing cars, the bars that prevent passage, and the frames of the bridge's concrete blocks (Fig. 81.1-3). The sense of alienation that characterises these sequences pervades the visual world of the entire film, dominated by images framed by high-rise buildings and closed interiors; the perspective only opens up when Sally, the founder of HK Dog Rescue, goes hiking with her dogs to the seaside (Fig. 81.4). Besides the oppressive urban spaces, the dark tones and restricted view characterising the rest of the footage may reflect the sense of looming loneliness caused by the

departure of the canine companion – a feeling enhanced by the frequent appearance of black frames. Although the presence of anticipatory grief stems from the fact that Chen's subjective experiences seem to affect the narrative and visual fabric of the whole film, one can argue that the other guardians' accounts are also imbued with the spectralising effects of Chen's grief over Baby's impending loss. In other words, the director's anticipatory grief seems to saturate the representation of dogs in the entire film, resulting in mediated images (photos and home videos), where the animal is removed from the owner's recorded reality; distant, dark or blurred shots, where one can only make out a dog-shaped silhouette; and shots where the dogs appear behind bars, hurt, dying or already dead and only *re*presented by the interviewees' anecdotes (Fig. 81. 5-8). The documentary depiction of dog guardianship is therefore overshadowed by the subjective, liminalising experience of Chen's anticipatory grief, as a consequence of which the dogs are visualised as simultaneously present and absent even while they are still alive.

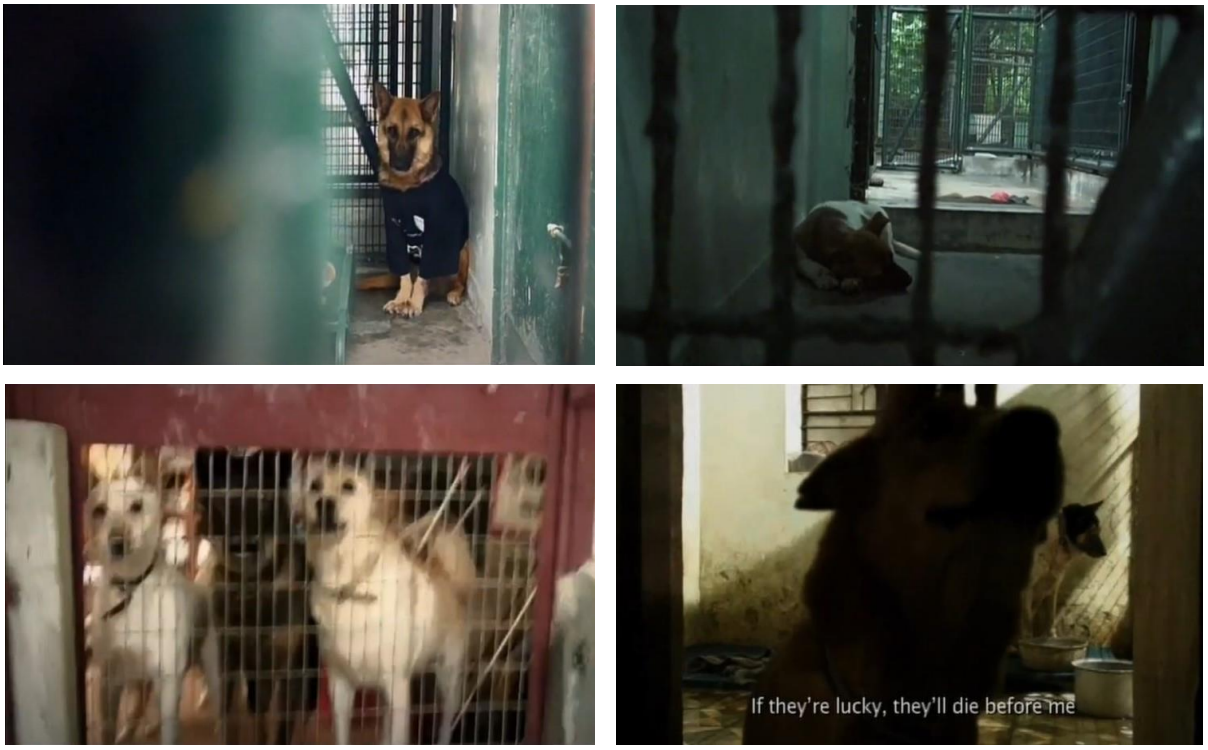

Fig. 81. Saturated with grief (*This Darling Life* 00:13:39; 00:12:55; 00:12:52; 00:43:36; 00:42:26; 00:42:37; 00:44:37; 00:53:50)

The director's personal grief might be also the reason why the film is preoccupied with the theme of mortality: although the anthrozoological tapestry portrays a wide range of aspects of living with dogs in contemporary Hong Kong, the most frequently recorded or recounted subjects include how the human guardians cope with their dogs' approaching deaths, how they say farewell to them in the public space of pet funerals and within the walls of their homes, and how they are haunted by the memories of their lost companions. As Law also observes, the film presents "an entangling network of interviews and personal reflections of the human interviewees about [their dogs'] terminal situations" (68). It is true that Chen also captures stories of new life (for example, the homeless man's dog giving birth to a litter of puppies), miraculous recoveries (for example, the healing of Buena or the return of Ching Ching), and extreme resilience (witnessed from the shelter dogs and the people who take care of them), but these accounts are always accompanied by the lingering presence of death: the puppies' birth is followed by the disappearance of their mother; Buena and Ching Ching could have both easily died, and their respective survivals are presented in a manner suggesting that they are the reincarnations of other dogs' spirits; and it is repeatedly implied that the delicate systems of rescue and care maintained by the shelter owners could come crashing down, causing the demise of all animals, if something happened to the humans. Like vulnerability, loss is featured as an inescapable companion of life with dogs.

Reflecting the Buddhist beliefs that are prevalent in the portrayed cultural context and have noticeably influenced Chen's views, death is also portrayed as a stage in the cycle of existence – a notion represented by the featured pet funerals, the symbolic transition shots suggesting the possibility of reincarnation, as well as the circular structure of the film. This structure might itself reflect the continuous journey through life, death, and rebirth. Driven by the conviction that animals also participate in this cycle and the accompanying ethical principle that the owner should help the pet in their journey beyond death, at the end of the film, Chen's grieving mind returns to the story about dogs' unconditional trust in humans, which, at this point, evokes a feeling of responsibility for taking care of Baby in the afterlife, or, as Kuzniar would argue, a need "to be as faithful to the pet as [he] was to her in life" (10). In the light of these aspects, the film could be seen as a commemorative act similar to the portrayed funerary rituals: a cinematically mediated form of mourning that not only helps the director cope with the death of her pet but, mirroring Buddhist beliefs, also serves to aid the progress of Baby's spirit into the next life.

Since a dominant thread in the narrative is how the guardians cope with the approaching demise of their canine charges, how they help their journey in the afterlife, and how they are dealing with the dogs' absence, while the documentary itself can be interpreted as a personal dog mourning film, *This Darling Life*, similarly to *Heart of a Dog*, is automatically complemented by a political dimension where the death of dogs is perceived as a significant loss: a severe blow that, as Chen's account suggests, is more unbearable than the death of human relations, leaves an aching gap in the guardians' physical, emotional, and social lives, and consequently necessitates acts of memorialisation. In other words, pet loss extends beyond the narrative and aesthetic world of the film and presents an interspecies politics of grief that undermines the insignificance of animal death and the deeply entrenched idea of the human–animal divide. The featured pet funerals, the transitions suggesting that one dog's spirit revives in another one's body, and the frame story carrying connotations of responsibility for taking care of pets after their death outline a biocentric notion of afterlife, according to which animals also cross over to a spiritual realm and which also includes the ethical principle that the owner should help the dead pet's journey through the mortuary ritual (Kenney 55).

The above ideas posit a challenge to prevalent thanato-onto-politics and ethics, originating in and reinforced by Western humanist thinking and Christian views, where the only being who possesses an eternal soul, is capable of crossing into a spiritual realm, and therefore deserves a complex farewell ritual is the human being. These ideas most conspicuously emerge in Heidegger's philosophy, who connects the capacity of death to the conditions of

consciousness and language, which animals supposedly lack: only humans can name their deaths, live their lives with the knowledge of their finitude, and can thus "properly" die: "To die means to be capable of death as death. Only man dies. The animal perishes. It has death neither ahead of itself nor behind it" (178). In Heideggerian philosophy, the capacity for dying is thus reserved for the human-Dasein or "being-in-the-word"; nonhuman animals are perceived as essentially *undying*.[150] Besides language and consciousness, death is therefore added to those indiscriminately constructed concepts – the cogs in Agamben's anthropological machine – that are used to differentiate humans from other animals. In traditional Christian views, the criterion that divides humans and animals in terms of death is the notion of the immortal soul that only humans are believed to possess, granting them the privilege of passing into the next world (Magliocco 40) – a moment marked by the funeral ceremony. Even though pet funerals are becoming increasingly widespread, and the anthropocentric view of afterlife is contested by the commonly accepted trope of the Rainbow Bridge, the idea of heaven for pets,[151] the persistent experiences of embarrassment and shame around mourning companion animals as well as the ongoing scarcity of official arrangements and support systems for grieving pet owners suggest that the ideologies we inherited from humanist paradigms continue to maintain a conceptual division between humans and animals on the basis of the above outlined arbitrary notions of "proper" and "improper" death, or, the (human) being who possesses language, consciousness, is capable of dying and thus needs to be mourned, and the (nonhuman) being who lacks these qualities, is therefore incapable of dying and its death does not require mourning.

In contrast, including animals in the cycle of reincarnation and requiring pet owners to ensure that their deceased companions safely pass into the next realm signal a recognition of human–animal similarity and connection, namely, that animals also have a consciousness, can "properly" die and, since their spirits can cross to the next world and their earthly lives were closely entangled with other lives, their death entails a need for mourning. In this sense, while

[150] Following a similar logic, Bataille states that "[w]hat marks us [humans] so severely is the *knowledge* of death, which animals fear but do not *know*" (*The Accursed* 82). According to this logic, language "brings consciousness and with it, the consciousness of consciousness and its absence, or death. In this light, to have language is to have death" (Lippit, "The Death of an Animal" 11). Discussing the Heideggerian view, Lippit observes that "[s]ince animals are denied access to the faculties of language, they remain incapable of reflection, which is bound by finitude and carries with it an awareness of death. Undying animals simply expire, transpire, shift their *animus* to other animal bodies" ("From Wild Technology" 125).

[151] According to the Rainbow Bridge myth, when pets die, they go to a meadow where they are restored to perfect health and will be waiting for their owners to rejoin them so that they can cross the bridge together into Heaven. The myth started as a poem written by Scottish artist Edna Clyne-Rekhy in 1959, when she was just a teenager, to mourn the death of her dog Major (Nuwer n.pag.). Since then, it has become a staple formula of comforting bereaved pet parents, and although it is based on the Christian notion of Heaven, it is now found not only in the West, but also in many Asian countries including Buddhist ones like Japan (DeMello xxiii).

pet grief might be a common thread that connects the diverse stories in Chen's documentary, the featured instances of interspecies loss also carry a destabilising force that extends beyond the film's boundaries: a transformative power that challenges "the differential allocation of grievability and the anthropocentric politics of kin and kind" (Redmalm, "Pet Grief" 33), by presenting animals as *dying* and grievable beings.[152] As Justina Kolberg succinctly puts it, "[t]he mourning of their death is the recognition of the finitude and singularity of these animals" (18). The subversive force of pet grief is also relevant in the specific cultural milieu in which the film was shot: despite the prevalence of Buddhist funerary rites and the growing popularity of pet keeping, which has become "en vogue and a sign of economic prosperity" in recent years (F. Law 59), dogs are subject to an ambiguous social perception in Hong Kong, where a large part of the population still thinks of dogs as lowly, undeserving creatures, and – although illegal – animal cruelty and selling dog meat are also common. The culturally embedded form of animal cruelty is reflected in the film's frame story that centres on a dog who was raised to be eaten, while the tentativeness of collective warming towards the practice of pet keeping and its collateral practices is visible in how dogs are forbidden to be kept in residential buildings and to enter parks – the reason why Christine takes Momo for his walks in a pram. The recorded mortuary rites, personal recollections, and manifestations of the owners' pain over their dogs' deaths thus not only work against the ideologies of the *undying* and the nongrievable animal but also negotiate the culturally specific perceptions and practices connected to animal death.

In different ways – Chen through a documentary that weaves a tapestry of human–canine lives and highlights the common thread of loss, Anderson through a kaleidoscope of technologically mediated musings about her shared life and afterlife connection with Lolabelle –, both filmmakers devise a visual form that preserves the traces their dogs left in their worlds, thereby projecting a specifically interspecies aesthetics of grief. In other words, *This Darling Life* and *Heart of a Dog* are two unique cinematic paw prints, visual marks of the attachments that did not cease but became increasingly, achingly felt when the directors' daily interactions with their dogs were disrupted by death. Embodying the traces of co-constitutive human–canine relationships that continue in the afterlife, the films also outline an interspecies politics of grief that challenges both the widespread idea of the human–animal divide and culturally specific thanato-political views and practices connected to animal death: in Chen's film, the Buddhist

[152] In this sense, the film's political implications resonate with Derrida's critique of Western humanist, and, specifically, Heideggerian configurations of the animal, whose approach calls for recognising the singularity, nonsubstitutability, and irrefutable finitude of each nonhuman being. For a detailed discussion of metaphysical anthropocentrism and its Derridean critique through the lens of animal death, see Kolberg.

mortuary rites, personal recollections, and manifestations of the guardians' loss negotiate the perception of dogs as lowly creatures in a cultural environment that has not dispensed with the practice of selling dog meat; in Anderson's film, the owner's rejection of euthanasia contests the routinely offered procedure that, though driven by a moral imperative to mitigate the animal's suffering, still subjugates the dog's death to the owner's decision, and reinforces the persistent notion that the pet's passing is something predictable and manageable. These two dog mourning films are therefore not only shaped by the commemorated human–canine bonds, but, as active elements of the anthrokynematic assemblage, also contribute to shaping them, both in the sense of providing closure and continued connection to the human guardians, and in that of potentially changing the ways people in the portrayed realities think about animal death.

At the same time, the differences between *Heart of a Dog* and *This Darling Life* point to the tensions inherent in any cinematic attempt to give form to interspecies grief. Specifically, Anderson's experimental approach demonstrates how avant-garde techniques can create a multisensory space in which the human–dog relationship is elevated to the level of philosophical meditation, yet in doing so it risks recentring the human perspective and dispersing the specificity of canine loss into a broader aestheticised self-portrait. Chen's film, by contrast, focuses on the lived realities of both humans and dogs, thereby foregrounding the relational and social dimensions of mourning and drawing attention to the precarious cultural status of animals as grievable subjects, while also giving expression to the director's personal feelings of loss, which shape the narrative and paint the film's tapestry in the colours of grief. Taken together, these two works thus illustrate the double bind of anthrokynematic mourning: while cinema can capture the traces of multispecies entanglements and thereby challenge dominant assumptions about animal death, it can never fully escape anthropocentric tendencies. This ambivalence resonates with the dissertation's broader claim that cinematic engagements with dogs are always marked by hybridity, simultaneously revealing and obscuring creaturely presence, and shaping filmic spaces where interspecies intimacy and tension remain entwined.

Coda: Phantosomatic Encounters

"At the price of a becoming-animal, a becoming-flower or rock, and beyond that a strange becoming-imperceptible, a becoming-hard now one with loving."
(Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: A Thousand Plateaus)

Through the representation of interspecies love, vulnerability, and grief, the films analysed in the dissertation demonstrate that cinema not only reflects but – depending on the style, genre, cultural context, the employed shooting practices and representational strategies – also reinforces the complexities of our strange, constantly evolving kinships with dogs. The traces of our intimate yet ambiguous relationships were detected in the aesthetic, affective, and textural layers of the discussed films: *Turner & Hooch* and *My Dog Tulip*, analysed in the first chapter, revealed the transgressive energy flows and physical intensities connecting human and canine companions while also conveying a sense of the uncanny due to the dog's unpredictably emerging otherness; *Los Reyes* and *Stray*, *The Plague Dogs* and *Isle of Dogs*, analysed in the second chapter, laid bare the creaturely vulnerabilities that serve as the basis of harmonious multispecies communities in shared urban spaces (portrayed by the two documentaries), but can also evoke fear and violence when the animals' closeness conjures up an uneasy or repulsive association, threatening firm ego boundaries (problematised by the two animation films); while *This Darling Life* and *Heart of a Dog* showed that the emotional and embodied ties between humans and dogs continue after the animal's death, imprinting themselves into the visual and narrative compositions of the two mourning films.

The transformations that the films facilitate in the human–canine bond were sometimes identified as aesthetic, as in the case of *Tulip*, where the Fierlingers' playful, doodle-like, metamorphic animation, filled with outlandish camp fantasies, intensifies the constantly shifting, relational dynamics between human and dog, in *Isle of Dogs*, where the tactile quality of the dirty, scabby, eerie-looking puppets strengthens the uncanny feeling accompanying our everyday, otherwise cosy interactions, or, in *Heart of a Dog*, where Anderson's technologically aided embodied imaginings extend the human–canine bond beyond the animal's death while also, paradoxically, recentring the human self through the film's highly abstract, heterogeneous form. Yet in most cases, the films' transformative forces seem to transcend the representational space and also steer our relations with dogs, other animals, and our own, repressed animal selves into new ontological, political and ethical dimensions. For example, the representations of the transgressive love affairs in *Turner & Hooch* and *My Dog Tulip* are complemented by a queer

politics, which simultaneously challenges the human–animal divide and the hierarchical categorisations of love, such as "lowly" physical desire and "noble" spiritual devotion, or "proper" and "improper" forms of love. At the same time, the nuanced portrayals of the canine characters – even in such a "traditional" genre film as *Turner & Hooch* – question the validity of strictly binary representational paradigms that categorise dog characters either into the group of unconditional love dispensers or that of despicable beasts. By representing Hooch and Tulip as both loving *and* wild, uncontrollable, unfathomable creatures, the films in the focus of the first chapter thus complicate both former categorisations of canine characters and the norms and expectations surrounding the human–canine bond – ideas that significantly impact the lives of real-life animals.

Using their specifically adjusted capacities of "creaturely cinema," with which films can, as Pick highlighted, evoke both shared and species-specific experiences of bodily exposure and finitude, the two documentaries (*Los Reyes and Stray*) and two animation films (*The Plague Dogs* and *Isle of Dogs*) analysed in the second chapter picture the lives of dogs as distinctly yet undoubtedly vulnerable while also criticising the violent mechanisms of excluding animal subjects from the social-legal-moral community under the pretext of protecting said community. By revealing the vulnerabilities that connect human and canine lives, highlighting the dogs' lively, intelligent interactions with their environments, and exposing the violence with which the sovereign state transforms valuable lives into disposable lives, the four films – through different aspects and aesthetic approaches – jointly outline the need for a posthumanist (in Pick's terms, "creaturely, in Esposito's, "affirmative") biopolitics and ethics "that puts caring at the heart of the search of everyday struggles for hopeful flourishing of *all* beings, of *bios* understood as a more than human community" (Bellacasa 22). Furthermore, by portraying the canine subjects as both intelligent and vulnerable creatures, *Stray*, *Los Reyes*, *The Plague Dogs* and *Isle of Dogs* also negotiate the degrading perceptions perpetuated by popular (e.g. horror) films and cartoons that, as Wells observed, often depict dogs as dumb and/or invincible.

In their (ardent albeit inevitably failed) attempts to express their deep sense of loss for their dogs, the mourning films analysed in the last thematic chapter not only mould existing film formats into unique cinematic paw prints that embody the specific physical and metaphysical indentations their dogs left on the directors' lives, but also contribute to shaping deeply entrenched trans-cultural and culture-specific notions about pet death, namely, the idea of the *undying* and nongrievable animal (perpetuated by Western humanist philosophy), the conviction that animals, including dogs, shall be bred for consumption (fervently contested but still existing in Hong Kong and other Asian countries), and the perception that the death of the

pet is something to be controlled by the owner (common in the United States and Europe). By showing how Anderson allows Lolabelle to die on her own terms and how she stays connected to what she conceptualised as the dog's spirit through art, imagination, and her film, how Chen had grieved Baby's passing already before his death, and how the other portrayed guardians take care of their canine charges both in this life and the next by giving them a proper funeral, *Heart of a Dog* and *This Darling Life* extend the notion of posthumanist ethics to the matters of dying, death, and the afterlife. Moreover, similarly to the films analysed in the first two chapters, Chen's and Anderson's works also challenge dominant representational practices, in this case, ones that reinforce the notion of the *undying* animal by depicting dog death as either a symbolic or trivial event. In their own ways, all films analysed in the dissertation thus intervene in shaping our inherently ambiguous, multidimensional, fluid relations with dogs.

In most of the cases studied here, the cinematic transformations are connected to highlighting the complexities of the human–canine relationship, rooted in the dog's particularly hybrid status between a personified, familiar, unconditionally loving and a wild, unfamiliar, unpredictable creature. Intentionally or unintentionally, to a greater or lesser extent, the analysed films all enact this compelling combination of intimacy and alterity by presenting dogs as simultaneously affected by anthro-cultural projections and living in their own phenomenological realities. Maybe this is why, although the discussed films represent distinct traditions, crystallised generic categories seem to have been loosened and liquefied throughout the analyses, together with the sharp separation between fiction and reality. Since, exposed to the gaze of the director, the filming apparatus, and the spectator, even the dogs captured by the documentaries (*Los Reyes*, *Stray*, *This Darling Life*) have been revealed to be constructed in certain aspects, while the canine characters of the fiction films (*Turner & Hooch*, *My Dog Tulip*, *The Plague Dogs*, *Isle of Dogs*) seem to retain their inscrutable inner lives and uncontrollable energies, constantly slipping away from the anthropomorphising, allegorising, or otherwise constraining mechanisms of cinema. Nevertheless, one could also see an emerging pattern where contemporary, and especially documentary depictions seem to have reacted to an ongoing process of sensitisation towards animal life and human–animal relations, resulting in increasingly nuanced and ethical ways of representing dogs and human–canine relationships. Specifically, the directors of such documentaries as *The Truffle Hunters* (analysed in the introduction), *Los Reyes* and *Stray* strive to give more representational space to the subjective perceptions, experiences and intentions of dogs as a corrective practice to the simplification of animal lifeworlds and the promotion of unbalanced looking relations in cinema. As reflected in the dissertation, contemporary documentary filmmaking presents itself as a site for

experimenting with more creature-conscious ways of rendering animal lives on the screen. This socially informed aesthetic reformation is particularly relevant to reshaping how we perceive and treat dogs, whose subjective experiences, expressions and intentions are often overlooked precisely because of their unparalleled integration into human life.[153]

As the analyses of *Los Reyes* and *Stray* showed, two strategies contemporary creature-centred documentaries often employ together are foregrounding the embodied realities of the canine subjects while also ensuring that their species-specific experiences remain inaccessible to and uncontrollable by the human viewer, thereby creating what I will here refer to as phantosomatic encounters through the screen. Such encounters occur when the films bring us into contact with the animals' – from a human perspective – obscure actions and inner lives (for example, when *Loy Reyes* projects a two-minute long sequence of some insects trying to climb across a yellow plastic tape, or when the camera in *Stray* focuses on Zeytin's features but does not provide a reverse shot to clarify what she is looking at). These sequences project emphatically embodied images that are nevertheless only partially visible: the creaturely corporealities become part of the film's visual world but remain elusive, distant, blurry and dark mis-shots, fleeting, mysterious, inscrutable. As Daniel Zheng puts it, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's concept, such instances enact a process of *becoming-imperceptible* (187): "even as they are filtered through a recorded sequence, [the animals] seem to always be galloping away, maneuvering an escape from the necessity of the camera's ensnarement" (2). In this sense, the phantosomatic encounters facilitated by contemporary documentaries refute traditional conceptualisations of "the spectral animal," a concept most elaborately discussed by Lippit, who argues that cinema contributes to transforming the real animal into a "phantasm," the body into an image, the "living voice" into "a technical echo" (*Electric* 21). Rather than reflecting the erasure of actual animals and their corporealities in cinema, the phantosomatic presences in

[153] This recent sensitivity to canine subjectivity can be also observed outside cinema, for instance, in the popular trend of using so-called talking buttons (soundboards programmed with pre-recorded words) that allow dogs to communicate "their" needs, wants, and thoughts to their owners by pressing specific buttons. While the scientific validity of these experiments is still debated, as a cultural phenomenon, they signal a growing desire to recognise dogs as intentional beings with communicative agency and they also highlight the role of technological tools in such endeavours, since they enable humans to open toward, relate to, and engage in mutually transformative becomings with nonhuman animals. In fact, similarly to how cinema has become part of the shared history of the human–canine bond, not only reflecting but also facilitating the generative forces between our species, talking buttons may be seen as the next chapter in the story of human–canine coevolution, as they mediate an (arguably) more intimate and effective communication between companion dogs and their guardians than before. At the same time, these devices can be also said to reinforce the narcissistic fantasy of perfect communication and the anthropomorphising tendencies that already strongly govern the lives of companion dogs, who are now also trained to use human voice to play out, essentially, what their owners want to hear them "say" and do. The technologies employed by contemporary creature-conscious cinema aim to resist precisely such anthropomorphising practices, even if this results in less easily accessible or enjoyable film products.

films like *Los Reyes* and *Stray* attest precisely to the inerasability of creaturely realities in film as well as the power of these realities to haunt the human viewers' sense of visual mastery.

Phantosomatic canine (dis)appearances play a special role in *Space Dogs*, a 2019 documentary directed by Elsa Kremser and Levin Peter, which redirects the viewers' attention from the symbolic images attached to one of the most famous canine figures, Laika, to the concrete corporeal experiences of stray dogs in general and of the Soviet space dogs in particular.[154] For this reason, Kremser and Peter's film combines two temporal dimensions, alternating archival recordings of the physical agonies that the canine test subjects endured in the Soviet space program with contemporary documentary sequences foregrounding the subjective sensory and spatiotemporal experiences of stray dogs in present-day Moscow. While the former show how the dogs were treated as passive objects of the anthropologocentric gaze of historical documentation, the contemporary sequences bring the strays' lives into our field of vision but retain the dogs' mysteriousness, subjectivity, and agency, thereby countering the unbalanced relations created by the archival recordings with more respectful ways of looking at animals via the film image.

The first phantosomatic encounter occurs right after the film's speculative introduction into Laika's last experiences as a living being. The bright white light from the opening sequence is replaced by a dark documentary shot which portrays a stray dog waking up in an unlit back street of Moscow (Fig. 82). According to the legend recounted at the beginning of the film, Laika, the first living being to be sent into orbit, perished in her capsule and drifted lifelessly through space until Earth, unable to surrender her, drew her back, only for her body to burn up upon reentry, and Laika transformed into a ghost. From this perspective, the stray dog in the first documentary shot can be seen as Laika's spirit reincarnated in a new body. This reading is reinforced by the fact that the initially motionless, seemingly lifeless dog suddenly stirs and lifts his head. At the same time, it is obvious that what moves him is not Laika's stirring soul, but his own sensations, feelings, thoughts and motivations that essentially elude our perception. In other words, as soon as the dog appears on the screen, constructed by an allegorical narrative

[154] Laika could be considered as the epitome of the (post)modern spectralisation process as her figure was repeatedly used as a symbol for the advancement of humanity or as a metaphor for heroism, sacrifice, and other notions important to our species. A filmic example is Lasse Halström's *My Life as a Dog* (1985), focusing on the coming-of-age narrative of a boy named Ingemar, who copes with being sent away from his sick mother and his beloved dog, Sickan by comparing his situation to that of Laika: the film uses the first space dog as a metaphor for loss, helplessness as well as resilience, all of which reflect the plight of the *human* protagonist.

and the viewer's objectifying gaze, he disappears into his own spectral *Umwelt*, leaving behind a hermeneutically unclear cinematic image.[155]

Moving like shadows across the screen, the strays continue to haunt, elude and disturb our usually secured sense of visual mastery over nonhuman subjects. After a cut, the camera is following (probably) the same dog as he is going about his business in the dark city streets (Fig. 83). At one point, he turns his head towards the filming device as if he was letting the crew know at the moment of shooting and letting us know at the moment of viewing that he is aware of being watched, evoking Derrida's argument – discussed in the introduction – that animals can also look at us as full-fledged subjects with their own, inscrutable perspectives. According to Diane Leblond, this experience alone can become "the very locus from which a new form of thinking might emerge" (2), one which challenges human logocentric dominion over nonhuman animals. Furthermore, although the images resemble the night vision footage often used in wildlife documentaries to capture what is believed to be moments of a much more active and authentic – thus more captivating – wild life than in the light of day, that is, recordings that, according to Malamud, intrude into animals' lives and render them "too easily present" (78), the unexpected brush of the dog's gaze breaks the illusion of easy accessibility and causes a sense of unease in the viewer. The uncanny feeling is heightened by the fact that we cannot see the dog's eyes, only know that he is looking at the camera based on the direction of his head, his dark silhouette, and his reflection in the puddle (Fig. 83). In contrast to night vision shots where the viewer occupies the position of the voyeur, here we are confronted with the doubled gaze of a subject whom we cannot properly see, which challenges our usual ocularcentric, objectifying approach to screen animals. As Leblond argues, "[s]uch moments demand that spectators let themselves be troubled, as visual beings, by the existence of entirely different ways of seeing: that they agree to be possessed by the animal gaze, haunted by the existence of viewpoints that they cannot phenomenologically inhabit, and could not possibly comprehend" (5).

[155] A significant technical detail contributing to the disorientating effects of *Space Dogs* is that the filmmakers did not use lighting other than the ones provided by street lamps present on location. This results in a consistent use of dark shots that makes it difficult for the viewers to discern the dogs' actions from an ocularlogocentric perspective. In other words, the documentary shots' literal darkness contributes to evoking an epistemological darkness in the viewer that shields the dogs from the controlling human gaze.

Fig. 82. (Dis)appearance (*Space Dogs* 00:06:26)

The above scene also emphatically evokes Horowitz's observation that dogs attune to human lives not only through smell, but also by watching us, following our gazes and gestures. Intrigued by the dogs' curious glances, Kremser and Peter – similarly to Elizabeth Lo, the director of *Stray* – decided that they would let the dogs lead them through the city instead of trying to place them in artificially set up spaces and situations. In an interview, they said:

> we often felt observed and scrutinised by [the dogs]. Little by little we realised that we knew these animals only as part of our world; we didn't know ourselves as part of theirs. That's why we made street dogs the protagonists of our film. They take the place normally reserved in cinema for humans. We wanted to create a cinematic experience in which dogs lead us through the city. (Kremser and Peter n. pag.)

By letting the dogs watch, direct and guide them, then including such moments in the finished work, the filmmakers allowed the dogs' ways of seeing, moving and interacting with the environment to be the organising principle of the filmic universe, therefore warranting that the viewers encounter wholly other phenomenal realities which continuously trouble the anthropologocentric gaze.

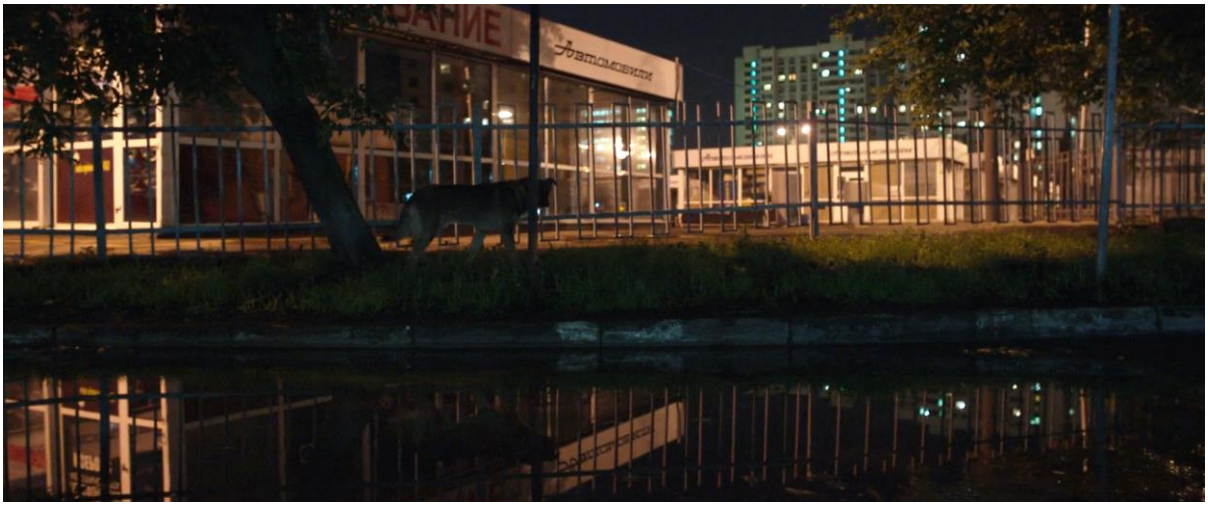

Fig. 83. Haunted by the animal gaze (*Space Dogs* 00:07:03)

Similarly to *Stray* and *Los Reyes*, *Space Dogs* aims to trace the specifically canine spatial experiences within the portrayed environment. As a result, the camera often follows the dogs through dark alleys, abandoned construction sites, and other places within Moscow which usually remain unexplored by humans. As Yunus Roy Imer, the film's director of photography said in an interview, "I would not have been in an industrial part of the city for such a long time, walking between the housing blocks, or walking through the night in Moscow. The dogs were taking us to places you only go if a local is showing you around" (qtd. in Turnbull and Searle 6). Yet, even though Imer developed a stabilisation system – similar to the one used in *Stray* – that allowed him to follow the movements of the pack through the city at hip level, he occasionally found it difficult to keep up with the dogs or to follow them to places he could not enter. Thus, lowering the camera to the dogs' level and trying to map their geographies does not enable either the filmmakers or the viewers to be completely immersed into the dogs' *Umwelten*: these filming methods bring the strays' subjective spatial experiences to our attention but also emphasise their inaccessibility from a human position.

Just as in the case of *Los Reyes* and *Stray*, the crew also tried to adjust their filming strategies to attune to the rhythm of the dogs' lives. As Kremser said, "[i]n the beginning we were always afraid we'd miss everything. We felt being too slow, we were never there at the right moment. Finally we grasped their itineraries. It was clear that it's at night that the more interesting things occur" (qtd. in Schiefer n. pag.) However, the filmmakers realised that even after switching to filming at night, they would only capture events that are exciting for the dogs, but not necessarily for a human audience. The lengthy daytime sequences of the dogs sleeping and sitting around, alternating with the night sequences of the strays roaming the streets, engaging in – from a human point of view – uninteresting or absurd actions create a sense of

slowness, boredom, or even bafflement in the viewer. To put it differently, the filmmakers' attunement to the strays' routines does not guarantee full accessibility to the dogs' lifeworlds: it only provides a partially visible and enjoyable view of the events "inside".

By recording the obscure rituals and impenetrable inner lives of street dogs, some of the footages markedly undermine our privileged position from which we see and know nonhuman animals. The first sequence to be highlighted in this regard is when the leader of the dog pack guides the human crew to a car park where he is apparently trying to eat the tires and coachwork of a vehicle for reasons that are not clarified. Even if the viewer is familiar with some possible explanations as to why dogs tend to chew objects (including the soothing of pain caused by teething in puppies, relieving anxiety and boredom, investigating surroundings, as well as entertainment), most of these causes apply to companion dogs. Due to their distance from the human private and scientific spheres, the strays' actions do not lend themselves as easily to our analysis, and, when appearing on the screen, they can cause a sense of epistemological uncertainty in the viewer, who, in this particular case, can only make guesses as to why the dog is chewing on the car. In other words, the sequence evokes a phantosomatic encounter, whereby canine phenomenal motivation is visible but remains incomprehensible to the human viewer, and thus troubles the process of anthropologocentric interpretation.

The most haunting moment in the film, however, is when the dogs stumble upon an unsuspecting cat, brutally kill it and then play with its corpse for nearly five minutes – all of which was recorded by Kremser and Peter's camera with an unflinching eye and included in the finished product in real time. Eugenio Renzi describes the long shot as an initially serene morning stroll that quickly "turns into a brutal hunting scene leaving the spectator in a traumatic state of wondering, similar to the experience of a peeping tom suddenly witnessing a murderer" (n. pag.). Although the captured canine violence indeed makes us conscious of occupying a voyeuristic position in relation to the animals, I believe the scene is puzzling not because it depicts the dogs as wild predators, which would project the essentialist image of the Cartesian beast onto the strays, but because – like the moment when Strongheart lunges after a cat in *The Return of Boston Blackie* or like the photographs in *Plato's Dogs* – it offers a glimpse into the dogs' exuberant, to us elusive, at times disturbing lifeworld. In short, the scene summons extremely visceral yet unfathomable images of canine violence, which seriously unsettle our sense of familiarity with and control over canine lives. Using technology as a creative and critical tool, the contemporary sequences in *Space Dogs* thus bring us into contact with the haunting presence of wholly other, yet similarly meaningful ways of inhabiting and interacting with the world, thereby inviting us to look respectfully at animals, or, in Haraway's words: "[t]o

hold in regard, to respond, to look back reciprocally, to notice, to pay attention, to have courteous regard for" since "all of this is tied to polite greeting, to constituting the polis, where and when species meet" (*When Species* 19).

And still, despite foregrounding the dogs' subjective corporealities, like the other films analysed in the dissertation, *Space Dogs* is not exempt from abstraction and anthropomorphisation either. As the filmmakers said, "We wondered how street dogs perceive the city from their eye level. What kind of world is it, this one that goes unnoticed by us? And at the same time we were looking for an abstraction, a metaphor that reflected this" (qtd. in Schiefer n. pag.). This metaphor becomes Laika's spirit, and the film assigns two possible meanings to it. According to the first one, which has been suggested by the filmmakers in interviews as well as the official press sheets, all the portrayed strays in present-day Moscow, irrespective of their type, breed, age and sex, are Laika's reincarnations, and the film's focus on their lives serves to disperse the medium's obsessive focus on the symbolic meanings attached to the first space dog. Recordings of Laika are not even included in the film. As Kremser explained, the absence of her images aims to encourage viewers to speculate that "a part of Laika can be found in all of [the portrayed strays]" (qtd. in Turnbull and Searle 8). At the same time, both the narrative and the opening documentary shot imply that Laika was reborn in the body of one particular dog: the male stray who is lying in the dark alley as if he had just fallen from the sky, and whose perceptions and actions take centre stage in the rest of the film.

Although he does not have a name, the male stray is gradually established as the film's main character,[156] and his actions are sequenced into a rudimentary narrative resembling the stories of classical Hollywood cinema: a conflict vaguely emerges between the protagonist dog and his older, smaller, battered partner in mischief when the two of them fight over the cat's corpse, the main character repeatedly "defeats" other dogs who question his dominance, and, towards the end of the film, we see him gain his reward as he trots along an abandoned railroad track to meet his "sweetheart" in a beautiful summer meadow beyond the city. After a cut, we also see a group of puppies emerging from the trees and exploring the area around their den, which, with its huge, broken concrete blocks, resembles a fortified castle in the middle of an

[156] In fact, the dog was intentionally selected for the "leading" role through a process Kremser likened to a casting. As she said, "we wanted dogs who would be real protagonists, that is, strong of character and sufficiently sociable with us, yet also actually wild" (qtd. in Schiefer n. pag.). This, on the one hand, eerily resembles the way the Soviet space dogs were picked on the basis of certain physical and behavioural criteria (for instance, they had to be small enough to fit in the capsules, have a distinctive appearance to guarantee media effectiveness, and be docile to make the scientists' job easier), suggesting that Kremser and Peter's film shapes the depiction of street dogs according to human expectations and intentions. On the other hand, a dog protagonist with a characteristic appearance, a friendly disposition, yet an often baffling behaviour also allows the viewers to meet a representative of a different species in his own terms, whose actions are at once relatable and alienating for the human spectator.

enchanted forest. Although we cannot see their parents, we are encouraged to imagine that the puppies belong to the protagonist and his mate, who thus effectively become the king and queen of the film's projected fairy tale. This structure, however, is interspersed with the previously analysed scenes that serve no other purpose than that of disclosing the strays' bizarre actions and lives, and the fictional narrative is disrupted by reality when the narrator informs us that "[u]nder the cover of night, a human had come to this place and placed poisoned meat here, in front of the puppies' den" (01:24:57-01:25:08). The closing image shows the only surviving puppy, implying that they are Laika's latest reincarnation, but also inscribing a plane of reality into the allegorical representation, where human violence continues to endanger animal lives with no legal consequence. *Space Dogs* thus effectively demonstrates the dissertation's main arguments, as it shows how actual human–animal interactions leave their traces in cinema, where dogs thus emerge as "bodies and words, stories and worlds" (Haraway, *Companion Species* 20), inextricably intertwined with human bodies, stories, and worlds. At the same time, it also shows how cinema can potentially transform our relations to animals since, by facilitating phantosomatic encounters where we are confronted with the dogs' elusive corporealities, it encourages more attentive and respectful ways of engaging with other-than-human lives both vis-à-vis and beyond the screen.

Filmography

A Dog's Purpose. Directed by Lasse Hallström, Universal Pictures, 2017.

Air Bud. Directed by Charles Martin Smith, Buena Vista Pictures Distribution, Walt Disney Pictures, Malofilm (Canada), 1997.

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