




LUIZA IRINI VERGARA KESADA

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2226-7135>

Ethics of Affirmative Collaboration A Case Study of a Cat Community in the Urban Public Space

Этика аффирмативного сотрудничества
Исследование случая кошачьего
сообщества в городском
общественном пространстве

Абстракт

Данная статья представляет собой попытку включить недавнюю институционализацию отношений между человеком и животными в юрисдикции греческого государства, в более широкие системы власти и технологии современного конфликта, которые трансформируют городское общественное пространство Афин. Сосредоточиваясь на трех социальных ритуалах кошачьего сообщества в роце Неа-Филадельфии, автор обращается к этике аффирмативного сотрудничества, не учитываемой в гуманистических классификациях животных-компаньонов или в продвигаемых законом определениях благополучия (закон № 4830/2019). Углубленное внимание к гетерогенному сообществу опекунов и кошек, а также к социальной жизни кошек может способствовать пониманию агентности в отношениях, постгуманистической концептуализации субъектов и определению сообщества животных, которое может повлиять на формирование политики

Ethics of Affirmative Collaboration
A Case Study
of a Cat Community
in the Urban Public Space

Abstract

The present text is an attempt to include the recent institutionalization of human-animal relationships in the domain of the Greek state, in the broader systems of power and the technologies of contemporary war that are restructuring the urban public space of Athens. By focusing on three social rituals of a cat community in the grove of Nea Philadelphia, I look into the ethics of affirmative collaboration that has not been taken into account by the humanist categorizations of companion animals or definitions of welfare promoted by the law 4830/2019. The focus on the heterogeneous assemblage of the carer and the cats, and the social life of cats can contribute to the understanding of relational agency, a post-humanist conceptualization of subjects and the designation of the animal public that can inform policy making and help the formation of new politics beyond binaries and the hierarchization of life forms.

и способствовать выработке новой политики, выходящей за пределы бинарных оппозиций и иерархизации живых существ.

Ключевые слова: кошачье сообщество, мультивидовая автоэтнография, постгуманизм, сообщество животных, аффирмативная этика

Keywords: cat community, multispecies auto-ethnography, post-humanism, animal public, affirmative ethics

Introduction

In recent years we have observed an intensive restructuring of the space in the city of Athens: public works, population displacement due to the increase in rents and gentrification, enclosures and privatizations of the public space, increase of police presence and repression, commodification of every aspect of everyday life into a tourist product. How can we read the developments in human and cat relations in the urban public space that the new law 4830/2019 for the protection of companion animals aspires to bring in the domain of the Greek state alongside all these changes? In other words, what are the bodies and relations that are violently eradicated from the urban public place seen as “matter out of place”?¹

This text draws from the field research which I conducted for my master’s thesis in a cat community in the grove of Nea Philadelphia in Athens. A cat community² refers to the cats that live in the public space and are taken care of by a human, which is a very common sight in the public space of Athens. Larger or smaller groups of cats live in different urban spaces, from large parks to small squares, on the streets around taverns, in abandoned houses of the city center. Most of them are fed and taken care of daily by a human neighbour, usually a woman of old age. Due to the large numbers of free roaming cats, it is not always possible for a person to cover all their nutritional needs, therefore cats look for food in the garbage and if possible they hunt smaller animals. In some neighbourhoods the municipality has put bowls for water and occasionally food, but mostly cats find water from the carers and potholes on the streets. Moreover, due to the high cost of healthcare, the human carers are usually only able to neuter most of female cats and visit the vet in case of an emergency. The day-to-day costs fall mainly on the carers, and in extreme cases they ask for donations *via* the social media. There are also some philozoic

¹ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002).

² The term “cat community” is chosen instead of “cat colony” in order to avoid reproducing the image of stray cats as intruders, and to give prominence to the relational dimension of their existence as an urban multi-species community.

associations³ that support the carers of sick cats, and in rare cases some carers manage to get help from the municipality.

I have decided to look into the everyday life of a cat community that lives in one of the few large green spaces that has not yet been commodified, in order to highlight the “ethics of affirmative collaboration,”⁴ that are part of the urban public space and are not taken into account by the humanist categorizations of companion animals and definitions of welfare of the law 4830/2019. I argue that the way in which the free-roaming cats are to be managed is in line with the gentrification movements in every neighbourhood in Athens, and reproduces the humanist understanding of the public sphere, by defining the human home as the right place for a city cat to be in and by decoding the public space as dangerous. In this way, the existing interspecies relationships of care and interdependence and cat agency are made invisible, and community and individual specific needs are not addressed. This derives from the hierarchization of life forms according to the capitalist, humanist, racist and patriarchal order, which results in the deterritorialization of the animal from the urban public space.

I focus on three social rituals in order to study the interspecies becomings and the social life of cats, which can contribute to an understanding of relational agency and a post-humanist conceptualization of subjects that “are rather immanent, transversal, heterogeneous and collaborative.”⁵ Moreover, it contributes to the destabilization of the human/animal divide “via the adoption of a perspective that recognizes specific forms of life-sustaining relationality between them wherein the hierarchical meanings ascribed to their presumed as natural difference lose importance, or even disappear entirely, then all social and political uses of ‘the animal’ to shore up violent hierarchies among human animals might lose their grip and become more easily available to critique as political moves rather than designations of natural truths.”⁶ Finally, it can provide insights into the needs of the actual animals and the specificities of each community, which can inform policy-making and help shape new policies beyond binaries and the hierarchization of life forms.

The methodology chosen is multi-species (auto)ethnography with ethological perspectives. This choice has been made because first of all, as Kirskey and

³ Philozoic associations are legal non-profit organizations that mainly handle adoptions of formerly stray cats and dogs and neutering of strays. The new law 4830/2019 promotes their involvement and support of the municipalities for the management of free roaming companion animals.

⁴ Rosi Braidotti, “Affirmative Ethics, New Materialism and the Posthuman Convergence,” in *Bridges to Global Ethics: Geoethics at the Confluence of Humanities and Sciences*, ed. Giuseppe Di Capua and Luiz Oosterbeek (Cham: Springer, 2023), 105.

⁵ Ibidem, 104.

⁶ Alexandra Halkias, “Tracking Love in the Wild: From San Diego to Athens, Greece and Beyond,” *Imaginations*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2019): 167.

Helmreich point out, “multispecies ethnographers are studying contact zones where lines separating nature from culture have broken down, where encounters between *Homo sapiens* and other beings generate mutual ecologies and coproduced niches.”⁷ Contrary to the common belief that “the urban environment is one where nature has been contained and transformed,”⁸ I see cities as cohabited in ways that actively put the nature/culture divide in question. Secondly, autoethnography has been chosen because it is a relational methodology,⁹ which values self-reflection, emotionality, vulnerability, intimacy, care and empathy, and takes into consideration the positionality of the observer. In this specific case, my position as a native person in Athens, and a carer of two cats has played a major role in the process of the research, due to the shared experience of the displacement from the urban public space on the one hand, and the embodied empirical knowledge of human-cat communication on the other. Finally, in order to “get closer to the feline gaze,” “the experiential method” of multispecies autoethnography that “highlights the human side of the encounter” should be “combined with essential animal behavioral data on cat senses,” while “keeping in mind the positivist methodological issues”¹⁰ of the naturalization of other animals.

The field research was conducted from November 2022 to June 2023 with a weekly three-hour visit to the cat community, usually midday to early afternoon. The research involved semi-constructed interviews of the carer(s), without taking notes, as most of the conversations took place while doing work, and conversations with passers-by who were interested in the cat community. Furthermore, the participant observation was done by helping out with basic maintenance work, interacting with the cats that were interested in my presence, and walking around the grove.

The Nea Philadelphia Grove is an artificial green area belonging to the municipality of Nea Philadelphia and Nea Chalkidona, which has been gradually created since 1914 and is spread over 420 acres. During the 1980s and 1990s there was a zoological park in the spot that now belongs to the Zoophilic Association, which was founded in 2005. A few years ago, the municipality, after moving the cat

⁷ Eben S. Kirksey and Stefan Helmreich, “The Emergence Of Multispecies Ethnography,” *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 25, no. 4 (2010): 546.

⁸ Huw Griffiths, Ingrid Poulter, and David Sibley, “Feral Cats in The City,” in *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human-Animal Relations*, eds. Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert (New York: Routledge, 2000), 63.

⁹ “Autoethnographic approaches can be attentive to intimacy, to the knowledge-making that comes from relationship-building, to the geographic contexts in which these relationships unfold, and to the spans of time required to manifest this intimacy.” (From Kathryn Gillespie, “For Multispecies Autoethnography,” *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 5, no. 4 (2022): 2100).

¹⁰ Kara White, “And Say the Cat Responded? Getting Closer to the Feline Gaze,” *Society and Animals*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2013): 102–103.

community from their original place, built a sloppy installation where the sick and very young cats are placed until they are ready to be outside with the rest. Around this installation is the home range of the cat community. Mrs V.¹¹ is the main caregiver for the 70–80 cats, who has been there everyday for the last 20 years. Some days her grandson G. comes to help her and there are some volunteers of the Association that come daily to feed the cats. Apart from the daily feeding, Mrs V. is also responsible for the neutering of the cats and the general monitoring of their health. Currently, the municipality wants to move the cat community to an abandoned space, many acres afar from the grove. This decision is affected by the plans of appropriation of the grove for more profitable activities that will support the new court of AEK, which has been rebuilt just outside of the grove and is supported by the new law 4830/2019 that does not recognize the existence of urban cat communities.



Photo 1. Cats eating on the passage on the side of the installation.

¹¹ For the protection of anonymity I do not use the full names.



Photo 2. Cats are looking at the passerby.

In a broader aspect, this research is placed in the analytical frame of “patchy Anthropocene,” a notion coined by Tsing, Mathews and Bubandt to approach “the multidimensional crises of our times [...] that call for an anthropology [...] that takes landscapes as its starting point and that attunes itself to the structural synchronicities between ecology, capital, and the human and more-than-human his-

tories through which uneven landscapes are made and remade.”¹² To better understand the relationship between bodies, space and power structures, movements and technologies, “in terms of both far broader and far smaller scales than those we are used to due to the ideology of human exceptionalism,”¹³ we can use the tool of “landscape forms” that Tsing, Mathews and Bubandt suggest. More specifically, the main landscape forms, whose histories are entangled, are “modular simplifications” and “feral proliferations.” In this case, the modular simplification is the assemblage of the discourse and effects of the law 4830/2019 and “a qualitatively new form of biopower – security – [that] emerges here to govern life through this interplay of freedom and danger.”¹⁴ This effort is not in complete control of the results, and frequently can provide the right conditions for human and non-human beings living in this landscape to spread in unpredictable ways, which can be seen as feral proliferations, that in this text are the urban cat communities.

The Disciplinary Mechanisms and Biopolitics of the Law 4830/2019

One of the purposes of the law 4830/2019 is “to establish a clear and coherent regulatory framework for the management of stray companion animals and a strategy for drastically reducing their number through adoption programs, with strict adherence to the rules of welfare¹⁵ of animals.”¹⁶ A companion animal is “any animal that is maintained or intended to be preserved by man, mainly in his house, for reasons of zoophilia.”¹⁷ The only other distinction is between the domestic and the stray, which is linked to their relationship with humans, rather than any specific characteristic of each species. This way, cats living permanently or occasionally in the public space are seen as potentially docile animal subjects, and/or as stray populations to be controlled and regularized, and human-cat relations can only take place in the human home.

Apart from the humanist non-consideration of the cats’ needs, the normalization of the human home as the right place for a cat to be also derives from the decoding

¹² Ana L. Tsing, Andrew S. Mathews, and Nils Bubandt, “Patchy Anthropocene: Landscape Structure, Multispecies History, and the Retooling of Anthropology,” *Current Anthropology*, vol. 60, no. 20 (2019): 186.

¹³ Patryk Szaj, “The Time is out of Joint: Anthropocene and Ecocentric Reading of Literary Texts,” *Forum of Poetics*, no. 24 (2021): 18.

¹⁴ Kevin Grove, “Biopolitics,” in *Critical Environmental Politics*, ed. Carl Death (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 25.

¹⁵ Welfare is defined as “the good physical and mental state of the animal in relation to the conditions in which it lives and dies” (law 4830/2019, Article 2, Paragraph 2) and is based on the model of “five freedoms.”

¹⁶ Article 1.

¹⁷ Article 2, Paragraph 3.

of the public space as dangerous for all beings. Curfew has become a commonplace post-covid state strategy to manage any crisis, from extreme weather conditions to conflicting public protests. The constant threat of danger is characteristic of the current form of war, which is a “continuous, distanced event, without geographical limits.”¹⁸ This type of war replaces the “binaried landscapes” of war and peace with “continuous time-spaces dominated by discourses of ‘security,’ which saturate, and militarize, the tiniest details of everyday urban life.”¹⁹

Furthermore, the law obliges the recording of every domestic and stray animal in the National Animal Registry and The Panhellenic Platform for the Adoption of Stray Companion Animals, where information about the animal and the responsible human is registered. The Department of Companion Animal Protection is appointed as the responsible authority for the “supervision of the implementation of the operational programmes of collecting and managing stray companion animals, as well as of preventing the formation of new stray animals, that are executed by the municipalities.”²⁰ Also, the law promotes the National Line of Denunciations that operates by the Department of Animal Protection of the Directorate of General Policing of Greek Police Headquarters, as a means of every citizen to denounce possible non-compliance with the law. According to the newly established Special Secretariat for the Protection of Companion Animals “what we want is the punishment of everyone that breaks the law.”²¹ Breaking the law is not just about animal cruelty, it is also about registration requirements, which can affect cat communities, since most cats are not registered and the high fines that are imposed in case of violation will economically exhaust the carer. Although the law is promoted as a means of protecting the animals from human violence, in reality much of it is concerned with the state control and discipline of human and non-human animals.

According to the Special Secretariat, “animals are the only victims (in cases of non-trial abuse) who are not able to defend themselves,”²² an assumption that constructs animals as helpless and naturalizes their dependence on humans for their protection. As Taylor points out, “the language of dependency is a brilliant rhetorical tool, as it is a way for those who use it to sound concerned, compassionate, and caring while continuing to exploit those who they are supposedly concerned about.”²³

¹⁸ Stephen Graham, “Urban Metabolism as Target: Contemporary War as Forced Demodernization,” in *In the Nature of Cities: Urban Political Ecology and the Politics of Urban Metabolism*, eds. Nik Heynen, Maria Kaika and Erik Swyngedouw (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 251.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ Article 3, Paragraph 3.

²¹ Facebook post in the official page of the Secretariat 5.08.2022.

²² Facebook post 29.03.2023.

²³ Sunaura Taylor, “Interdependent Animals: A Feminist Disability Ethic-of-Care,” in *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, eds. Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 147.

The harmonious coexistence of humans and animals in the space of home presupposes a compliance with a series of disciplinary mechanisms such as “techniques of training, taming, breaking and teaching which in a variety of ways (including the offer of reward and affection) make animals more useful to human ends.”²⁴ We can see how the “liberation” of cats from the hazards of the “dangerous” public space comes with the production of docile animal subjects, that “shift decisively from the realm of animality and wildness into the warm embrace of the domestic.”²⁵ Without taking into consideration the definitions and prioritization of each cat’s needs, their confinement in the human home is understood as the only means of care, and the human sovereignty is justified by claiming that cats become members of the family.²⁶ As Halberstam notices, “the framework of human exceptionalism [...], fostered within a decidedly Western context, [...] situates the pet as a substitute for the (white) child and then exercises all manner of paternal oversight on it.”²⁷ The family home can be seen as a “decentralized, self-organizing system whose spontaneous adaptations sustain rather than threaten global political economic order,”²⁸ since it reproduces the humanist, patriarchal and capitalist order of things.

Although the biopolitics of security points towards the domestication of human and other animal subjects, “critical thought cannot stop at the critique of the actual but needs to move on the creative actualization of the virtual.”²⁹ In that notice, we turn our attention to the everyday life of the cat community, and the “ethics of affirmative collaboration,”³⁰ which can point towards an actualization of a future “we are responsible for [...] by constructing a subject assemblage – an embodied and embedded ‘we’ – capable and willing to work on the affirmative aspects of a negative and conflict-ridden present.”³¹

The (In)visible Everyday Life of the Cat Community

The weekly visit to the cat community, even though it always made me anxious, each time turned out to be a very soothing and fulfilling experience. One of the reasons is the very different sensory environment of the grove, compared to the

²⁴ Clare Palmer, “‘Taming the Wild Profusion of Existing Things’: A Study of Foucault, Power, and Human/Animal Relationships,” in *Foucault and Animals*, eds. Matthew Chrulew and Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 125.

²⁵ Jack Halberstam, *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 158.

²⁶ Post on the Secretariat’s facebook page 6.04.2023.

²⁷ Halberstam, *Wild Things*, 158.

²⁸ Graham, *Urban Metabolism as Target*, 251.

²⁹ Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* (Medford, MA: Polity, 2019), 152.

³⁰ Braidotti, *Bridges of Global Ethics*, 105.

³¹ Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 168.

center of Athens where I live. Even though there are avenues close by, on the spot where the cat community lives the sounds of cars are barely audible, and instead you can hear the sounds of birds and insects that occupy the trees of the grove. The air always feels a little cooler and smells a little fresher than the cement-dominated city centre. The pace of the movements of all beings is slower than the one outside of the grove. The presence of the cats on the passages around the installation, due to their number, is always a topic of conversation for the human passer-by. The space around the installation is full of trees and grass, where cats either lie or run around, scratching their nails on the trees or playing with one another. Apart from the cats, there are turtles and magpies that walk around, and sometimes they interact with the cats. Smaller animals, like flies, mosquitos, cicadas and butterflies, fly or hop around the grass and are often playfully chased by the cats. Inside the installation, where the very young, sick or recovering cats are, there is a strong smell of cat and cat urine and the soundscape is filled with grumbling meows.



Photo 3. Outside the installation.



Photo 4. A young turtle approaches to drink water.



Photo 5. A magpie approaches to eat.

According to Braidotti, “affirmative ethics acknowledges the shared desire of all entities to persevere in their collaborative interdependence and to increase it for the common good.”³² By focusing on the three social rituals of the cat community, we will look into the “mutually empowering relationships based on cooperation and the combination of the specific powers of each entity,”³³ which put into question the narrative of the dangerous public space and point towards an understanding of the public, subjects and politics that do not reproduce the human/animal, nature/culture, body/mind binaries. The social rituals of interest are the feeding ritual, which involves the cats and the care giver; the laying ritual, which happens among cats; and the playing ritual, which happens among cats, and sometimes among cats and magpies.

³² Braidotti, *Bridges to Global Ethics*, 104.

³³ Braidotti, *Bridges to Global Ethics*, 104.

I have decided to analyse the feeding ritual due to its everyday occurrence, and because the territorialization of a cat community depends to a large extent on the existence of a human carer who provides regular feeding. In this case, the cat community originated with a few cats that Mrs. V. started feeding in the enclosed space of the small zoo. As a result of the regular feeding, more and more cats began to approach the site and human neighbours began to leave unwanted cats. Although the law 4830/2019 predicts a certain fund for the needs of the municipalities regarding the free-roaming animals, the provided food is not enough and is not distributed according to the needs. Therefore, the costs mainly burden Mrs V. and the volunteers.



Photo 6. Early instances of the feeding ritual.

When the time of feeding is near, there is intense movement around the installation. The cats start arriving and place themselves facing the door of the installation, waiting for Mrs V. to come out with their trays to feed them. As Mrs. V. starts the serving, the space is filled with demanding meows and the most impatient cats approach the trays and start eating. The first minutes of this ritual are the only time that some mild aggression takes place between the most fierce and the most timid cats. Mrs V. always takes her time to observe the cats' behavior during this time, which is a necessary practice to monitor their health and to make changes to the serving process in a way that facilitates all cats and ensures peace and quiet during feeding. Some cats have certain demands regarding their serving, and most of them are very eager to communicate them. The recognition of desires and wills in interspecies relations "involves embodied practice [that] draws on the full panoply of senses"³⁴ and the "affect-laden, but not necessarily irrational or noncognitive, attunement" that constitutes "the primary bio-discourse of social creatures."³⁵ In order for the carer to take the necessary actions for the well-being of the cat community, the refinement of this embodied practice is needed, which demands their careful attention. As Grieve and Muzzatti point out, the engagement in the "ethics of care, promotes reflexivity to compare, contrast, extrapolate, and develop that sense of responsibility to, and solidarity with, nonhuman animals, which in turn can manifest in action."³⁶

The wide variety of behaviours we find in city cats, and the meanings that they attribute to them have not been adequately studied ethnographically, as it is commonly considered for animals to act on an instinctive basis, and is mainly researched using ethodological approaches.³⁷ As stated by Barua and Sinha, "in shared environments [...] skills, knowledge and expertise may cut across porous bodies and human-non-human divides."³⁸ Observations on the different ways in which cats demand either food or pets from humans, reveal a form of strategy that presupposes the observation and interpretation of human behaviour towards them, and the ability to keep them in their memory. A decisive factor that affects the observable behaviour of cats is the level of trust between the participants of the encounter. During the time of the fieldwork I was able to experience the slow pro-

³⁴ Jamie Lorimer, "Non-human charisma," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25, no. 5 (2007): 918.

³⁵ Cynthia Willett, *Interspecies Ethics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 12, 92.

³⁶ Kirsten Grieve and Stephen Muzzatti, "Trap, Snip, Repeat: Cat Overpopulation and Gendered Labour in a Feral Sterilisation Programme," *Zoophilologica*, special iss. (2023): 12.

³⁷ For example: Stephen Spotte, *Free-Ranging Cats: Behavior, Ecology, Management* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014).

³⁸ Maan Barua and Anindya Sinha, "Animating the Urban: An Ethological and Geographical Conversation," *Social & Cultural Geography*, vol. 20, no. 8 (2019): 7.

cess of gaining trust of different cats and observe the community's understandings and categorizations of familiars and strangers, friendly and hostile persons, which are judged by personal experience, but also by observing the behaviour of the other members of the community. A good example is the very different approach that the cats had towards me when I was close to the installation, talking with Mrs V. or G. They were more curious to come near me and smell me, and very eager to rub themselves against me. A very significant point in my relationship with the cats was the time that I had the chance to be the food provider. After this moment, I had the privilege to be greeted by most of the cats every time I arrived at their place.

As Tsing states, "staying alive – for every species – requires livable collaborations, [and] collaboration means working across difference, which leads to contamination."³⁹ Sharing a life together always involves risks, and taking care of the other and being taken care of takes a great part of everyday life, even though it usually remains unnoticed. Caring relations demand a very different perception of time than the one constructed by the social production of capital and "involves aligning ourselves with an ever-increasing array of emerging habits"⁴⁰ which creates an obligation. In contrast with the state notion of obligation, "it is not normativity that makes caring obligation possible, but rather the ongoing reentering into co-transformation that further obliges the interdependent web."⁴¹ Mrs V's everyday presence in the grove for the past twenty years is an example of this obligation. Mrs V. and the cats can be seen as an "heterogeneous assemblage" that is connected by "the capacity to affect others and be affected in mutual interdependence."⁴²

In this context, there are moments where speciesist hierarchies are ruptured, due to the strong will and resistance of cats, and the appropriate attitude of Mrs V. to show respect to them. One very small example is the case of Leka, an old male cat of the community, who, according to Mrs V., has never let her touch him and has not allowed her to capture him in order to be sterilized. Although he keeps his distance from human touch, when the community had to be moved from their original place, Mrs V. called Leka to follow her to the new place and he obediently followed her "like a dog."⁴³ As Braidotti states, "what binds us together over and above contractual interests and the limiting constraints of humanism is a common propensity to persevere in our existence and increase our relational

³⁹ Anna L. Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 28.

⁴⁰ Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 62.

⁴¹ Maria Puig De La Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 156.

⁴² Braidotti, *Bridges to Global Ethics*, 103.

⁴³ As quoted by Mrs. V., April 2023.

capacities.”⁴⁴ The conscious effort to give more space to the self-determination of the cats, and to familiarize with their world, that is, their times, habits, values and things that matter to them, can unsettle the domination of the human and give us the opportunity to get to know the animal.



Photo 7. Cats laying on the wall of the enclosure.

In that notice, we will direct our attention to the laying ritual, which makes up the vast majority of feline daily life and refers to the habit of cats to find a place, preferably in the sun, to lay down or sit, eyes closed or open, by themselves or with company, in order to make apparent the existence of “animal public.” The invisibilization of animality in the formation of the public is promoted by the view that “public formations emerge in special places designated for political purposes and [...] by virtue of the specialized human capacity for language” and obscures the fact that “all publics are carnal, affective, embodied, and situated – made up of animal relations from the outset.”⁴⁵ For this particular cat community, there are many places where the cats decide to pass their time, which they choose depending on the time

⁴⁴ Braidotti, *Bridges to Global Ethics*, 104.

⁴⁵ Gwedolyn Blue and Melanie Rock, “Animal Publics: Accounting for Heterogeneity in Political Life,” *Society and Animals*, vol. 22, no. 5 (Summer 2014): 512, 516.

of the day, the need for intimacy, and personal preferences. Older, more sick and more phobic towards strangers cats spend their time close to the installation, on the various seats that Mrs V. has made for them. Some younger cats, who are usually chased by the more dominant cats, prefer to sit on the wall or on the roof of the installation, in order to get their privacy and be able to watch from a distance. The grass, close to the pavement where there are passers-by, is the preferred place for the most human-friendly cats, but also for larger groups of cats who like to lie down together. It seems that it is more important for these cats “to hone in on a location they associate with safety, [and] they do not have an innate program to carve out and defend a territory.”⁴⁶ Personal space seems to be of great importance, and cats seem to be able to respect each other’s need of it, but are more than happy to share it with their friends. According to Alger and Alger; “friendship [...] contributes to self-awareness by helping to locate the individual in the community [and] it is a small structure within the whole.”⁴⁷

Lastly, the playing ritual is a very important social practice between animals of the same or different species, one that “provides a training ground for a concretely situated reciprocity that binds selves-in-communities.”⁴⁸ In the cat community of the grove it is a common sight for the cats to be chasing each other and to choose the same partners every time. It is also very common to see the cats play with magpies, who very often come close to eat the dry food or drink water. Sometimes it is very obvious that the cats see them as prey and they try to catch them, so the magpies keep their distance and fly away when they see the cats approaching threateningly. Nevertheless, it is not unusual to get involved in a consensual hunting game. The qualitative differences between play and actual hunting are small, but very explicit. They can be discerned in the distance they keep from each other, the tension of the movement and the playful mood. According to Willett, “the two key features of play praxis – role reversal and self-handicapping – exercise social equality by leveling playing fields and building camaraderie”.⁴⁹ Moreover, “play’s purposeless purposefulness” compensates with an embodied, participatory and creative way the consequences of power relations, or those of predator–prey, without the need of “the determinate character assumed by deontological (Kantian) interpretations of the golden rule” and “exhibits an egalitarian element that goes beyond law’s abstract equality.”⁵⁰

According to Massey, “the spatial is political [...], and thinking the spatial in a particular way can shake up the manner in which certain political questions are

⁴⁶ Janet Alger and Steven Alger, *Cat Culture: The Social World of a Cat Shelter* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 133.

⁴⁷ Alger and Alger, *Cat Culture*, 137.

⁴⁸ Willett, *Interspecies Ethics*, 75.

⁴⁹ Willett, *Interspecies Ethics*, 75.

⁵⁰ Willett, *Interspecies Ethics*, 76.

formulated, [which] can contribute to political arguments already under way, and most deeply can be an essential element in the imaginative structure which enables in the first place an opening up to the very sphere of the political.”⁵¹ The recognition that the urban space is not constituted only by human individual actors or institutions expands the sphere of the political and highlights the indissoluble relationship between space and political subjects. Politics does not refer to institutions, but to the politics of the everyday, which “can also mean contestation, the fight not to nullify but to assert disagreement, the struggle to be heard rather than silenced, to uncover the vision of unity and harmony as what seeks to silence, to show it up as somebody else’s ideal.”⁵² The possible uprooting of the community from their familial space is legitimized by the humanist and capitalist norms that restrict the use of the public space to certain bodies and activities, silencing all relations that constitute this animal public. Apart from the loss of all cross-species communal bonds and a better quality of life that living in a grove can provide for the cats, and the fact that the rest of the animals that are supported by the carer will be abandoned or killed, moving the community to a less visible or accessible place will add to the exhaustion that the carer already experiences. Finally, the segregation of the cat community limits the possible encounters between humans and other animals that could lead to creative alliances based on the similar way in which some bodies are considered “abjects”⁵³ and displaced, and the recognition of our common needs, such as the need for freedom of movement and expression in the public space, the free choice of our encounters and relationships in it, the need for a dignified life that is not based on antagonism and individuality.

Conclusions

The recent institutionalization of human-animal relationships in the domain of the Greek state fails to recognize the existence of “animal publics,” and is part of the biopolitics of security that characterizes the reconstruction of urban public spaces and seeks to create docile domesticated subjects. The ethics of affirmative collaboration of the cat community points to a different understanding of subjects and their relation to the public space that goes beyond the humanist binaries. Moreover, taking into consideration the relational aspect of human and more than human agency and the relations of trust and care that are necessary for the interspecies commu-

⁵¹ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), 9.

⁵² Langbauer, “Review of *Cultural Studies and the Politics of the Everyday*,” 48.

⁵³ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

nication can provide more specific knowledge about the well-being of a cat community, which involves more than the welfare approach of five freedoms. According to Bellacasa, “this mode of attention to a more than human life-sustaining web hopefully contributes to efforts in critical posthumanist thought to decenter anthropocentric ethics without discharging humans from specific and situated ethico-political response-abilities (Haraway 2007; Wolfe 2010) required to transform the exploitative relations of anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism.”⁵⁴ Finally, the recognition of the existence of the cat communities in the urban public space as an animal public can broaden the sphere of the political, which can contribute to the critical analysis of the normalization of the displacement of certain bodies and relations as matter out of place and the militarization of urban everyday life.

Bibliography

- Alger, Janet and Steven Alger. *Cat Culture: The Social World of a Cat Shelter*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003.
- Barua, Maan and Anindya Sinha. “Animating the Urban: An Ethological and Geographical Conversation.” *Social & Cultural Geography*, vol. 20, no. 8 (2019): 1160–1180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2017.1409908>.
- Blattner, Charlotte E., Sue Donaldson, and Ryan Wilcox. “Animal Agency in Community: A Political Multi-Species Ethnography of VINE Sanctuary.” *Politics & Animals*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2020): 1–22.
- Blue, Gwendolyn, and Melanie Rock. “Animal Publics: Accounting for Heterogeneity in Political Life.” *Society and Animals*, vol. 22, no. 5 (Summer 2014): 503–519. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685306-12341350>.
- Braidotti, Rosi. “Affirmative Ethics, New Materialism and the Posthuman Convergence.” In *Bridges to Global Ethics: Geoethics at the Confluence of Humanities and Sciences*, edited by Giuseppe Di Capua and Luiz Oosterbeek, 93–108. Cham: Springer, 2023.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *Posthuman Knowledge*. Medford, MA: Polity, 2019.
- De La Bellacasa, Maria Puig. *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. London: Continuum, 2012.
- Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger*. Routledge Classics. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978–1979*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

⁵⁴ De la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 217.

- Foucault, Michel. "Society Must Be Defended." *Lectures at the College de France, 1975–1976*. New York: Picador, 2003.
- Gillespie, Kathryn. "For Multispecies Autoethnography." *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 5, no. 4 (2022): 2098–2111. <https://doi.org/10.1177/25148486211052872>.
- Graham, Stephen. "Urban Metabolism as Target: Contemporary War as Forced Demodernization." In *In the Nature of Cities: Urban Political Ecology and the Politics of Urban Metabolism*, edited by Nik Heynen, Maria Kaika and Erik Swyngedouw, 234–254. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Grieve, Kirsten and Stephen Muzzatti. "Trap, Snip, Repeat: Cat Overpopulation and Gendered Labour in a Feral Sterilisation Programme." *Zoophilologica*, special iss. (2023): 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.31261/ZOOPHILOLOGICA.2023.S.07>.
- Griffiths, Huw, Ingrid Poulter, and David Sibley. "Feral Cats in The City." In *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human–Animal Relations*, edited by Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert, 59–72. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Grove, Kevin. "Biopolitics." In *Critical Environmental Politics*, edited by Carl Death, 22–30. London and New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Grove, Kevin. "Rethinking the Nature of Urban Environmental Politics: Security, Subjectivity, and the Non-human." *Geoforum*, vol. 40, no. 2 (2009): 207–216. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2008.09.005>.
- Halberstam, Jack. *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020.
- Halkias, Alexandra. "Tracking Love in the Wild: From San Diego to Athens, Greece and Beyond." *Imaginations*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2019): 147–180. <https://doi.org/10.17742/IMAGE.CR.10.1.6>.
- Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Hinchliffe, Steve and Sarah Whatmore. "Living cities: Towards a Politics of Conviviality." *Science as Culture*, vol. 15, no. 2 (2006): 123–138.
- Kirksey, S. Eben and Stefan Helmreich. "The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography." *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 25, no. 4 (2010): 545–576. <https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1548-1360.2010.01069.X>.
- Kohn, Eduardo. *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Langbauer, Laurie. "Review of *Cultural Studies and the Politics of the Everyday*, by Patrick Brantlinger, Henri Lefebvre, and Philip Wander." *Diacritics*, vol. 22, no. 1 (1992): 47–65. <https://doi.org/10.2307/465237>.
- Lorimer, Jamie. "Non-human Charisma." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25, no. 5 (2007): 911–932.
- Massey, Doreen. *For Space*. London: Sage, 2005.

- Palmer, Clare. "Taming the Wild Profusion of Existing Things? A Study of Foucault, Power, and Human/Animal Relationships." In *Foucault and Animals*, edited by Matthew Chrulew and Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel, 105–131. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016.
- Szaj, Patryk. "The Time is out of Joint: Anthropocene and Ecocentric Reading of Literary Texts." *Forum of Poetics*, no. 24 (2021): 6–25. <https://doi.org/10.14746/fp.2021.24.30229>.
- Taylor, Sunaura. "Interdependent Animals: A Feminist Disability Ethic-of-Care." In *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, edited by Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014.
- Tsing, Anna L. *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.
- Tsing, Anna L., Andrew S. Mathews, and Nils Bubandt. "Patchy Anthropocene: Landscape Structure, Multispecies History, and the Retooling of Anthropology." *Current Anthropology*, vol. 60, no. 20 (2019): 186–197. <https://doi.org/10.1086/703391>.
- White, Kara. "And Say the Cat Responded? Getting Closer to the Feline Gaze." *Society and Animals*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2013): 93–104.
- Willett, Cynthia. *Interspecies Ethics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

Luiza Irini Vergara Kesada lives in Athens, Greece. They obtained their Bachelor's Degree from the Department of Social Anthropology in Panteion University and they have recently finished their Master's Degree in "Animals: Welfare, Ethics and the Law" in National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. They have written one article in co-authorship with Santiago Espinosa García and María Patricia Domínguez Echeverría, titled "Huichol Shamanism and Christian Syncretism in Wirikuta, Mexico: A Cross-Cultural Study," published in *ISARS* journal *Shaman*. Their current research interests include multi-species autoethnography, post-humanist and intersectional feminist political theory and practice, urban political ecology, critical animal studies, inter-species communication and the ethics and politics of care. E-mail: luiza_4564@hotmail.com.

Luiza Irini Vergara Kesada mieszka w Atenach w Grecji. Uzyskało tytuł licencjata na Wydziale Antropologii Społecznej na Uniwersytecie Panteion, a niedawno ukończyło studia magisterskie na kierunku „Zwierzęta: dobrostan, etyka i prawo” na Uniwersytecie Narodowym Kapodistriasa w Atenach. Jest autorx jednego artykułu, którego współautorami są Santiago Espinosa García i María Patricia Domínguez Echeverría, pod tytułem *Huichol Shamanism and Christian Syncretism in Wirikuta, Mexico: A Cross-Cultural Study*, który został opublikowany w czasopiśmie „ISARS Shaman Journal”. Obecnie jenu zainteresowania badawcze obejmują autoetnografię wielogatunkową, posthumanistyczną i przekrojową teorię feministyczną i praktykę polityczną, ekologię polityczną miast, krytyczne badania nad zwierzętami, komunikację międzygatunkową oraz etykę i politykę opieki. E-mail: luiza_4564@hotmail.com.