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Pets in the City: Managing Surplus Dogs in Syracuse, New York

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ABSTRACT

This thesis contributes to the growing interest in animals in geography. Specifically, it situates pets within the geographic literature and addresses the causes and consequences of pet love in the United States. Using Syracuse, New York as a case study, this thesis illuminates the critical yet understudied existence of pets in the city, paying particular attention to the historical and contemporary foundations, management, and geographies of surplus dogs. Further, it explores major shifts in Americans' attitudes toward pets over the last two centuries, details the necessity for and establishment of animal management in the city, and explains the consequences (namely, euthanasia) of the flawed animal management system in Syracuse. While animal control and welfare have improved since the nineteenth century, Syracuse has not resolved its issues facing animal management for two reasons. First, modern animal control and welfare are rooted in historical practices. Although Americans' attitudes toward animals have changed drastically since the nineteenth century, the way humans manage animals today is much the same as in the past, pointing to larger structural and systemic intractabilities. Second, many organizations are involved in animal management in Syracuse. Tensions among these organizations make for unproductive working conditions and limit the possibility of change.

PETS IN THE CITY: MANAGING SURPLUS DOGS IN SYRACUSE, NEW YORK

by

Kristin Cutler

B.A., University of Mary Washington, 2010

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction: 1-12

Chapter 2: Marking Territory: Claiming Space for Pets in Geography: 13-27

Chapter 3: A Merciful Man is Merciful to His Beast: Animal Control and Welfare in the City, 1860-Present: 28-40

Chapter 4: The Dark Side of Pet Love: Contemporary Animal Management in Syracuse, New York: 41-58

Chapter 5: The Pit Bull Problem: Emotions and America's Most Dangerous Dog: 59-73

Chapter 6: Conclusion: 74-78

Bibliography: 79-88

Curriculum Vitae: 89

A Prayer for Animals

Hear our humble prayer, O God, for our friends the animals, especially for animals who are suffering; for any that are hunted or lost or deserted or frightened or hungry; for all that must be put to death. We entreat for them all Thy mercy and pity, and for those who deal with them we ask a heart of compassion and gentle hands and kindly words. Make us, ourselves, to be true friends to animals and so to share the blessings of the merciful.

- Albert Schweitzer

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

While walking my dog in a public park on a particularly cold February morning in Syracuse, I came across a dog tied to a fence. She was emaciated, filthy, and shaking from the cold. She had no identification tags. Whoever left her there was clearly not coming back. Unsure of whom to contact and unwilling to leave the dog stranded, I untied her leash and walked her to my car. About five miles away was Helping Hounds, a local non-profit dog rescue. I loaded the abandoned dog into my car and drove to the rescue, praying that they would be able to save her. At Helping Hounds, I told the staff of my situation, then waited by my car for help. A moment later, a tall woman in faded blue jeans walked across the parking lot to my car. She introduced herself as Laura while I opened the car door to show her the dog. She sighed and shook her head. “I’ve seen this a thousand times before, but it never gets any easier.” A grey and white knit beanie kept her blonde hair from falling in her face as she bent over to stroke the dog’s head. “I’m sorry, sweet girl,” Laura whispered. Then she turned to me, and, for a moment, she avoided eye contact. I knew what she was going to say before she said it. “We can’t take her.”

Laura suggested I take the dog to the Central New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (CNY SPCA). I got in my car and headed there immediately. On the way, I called to inform the staff I was coming. “We can’t take in strays,” the SPCA agent said. “You’ll have to call Dog Control.” I phoned Dog Control, who told me since the dog was already in my car, I should take her directly to the Dewitt Animal Hospital, the facility responsible for taking in stray and unwanted dogs on behalf of the City of Syracuse. My heart sank as I heard this news. Syracuse has the highest euthanasia rate of any city in Upstate New York. In 2012, the Dewitt Animal Hospital euthanized sixty-three percent of the stray dogs brought in by Dog Control

(Knauss 2013b). Unfortunately, these statistics are not unique to Syracuse. Rather, Syracuse represents a larger trend of pet overpopulation in the United States. Every year across the country, approximately six to eight million stray and unwanted dogs and cats enter animal shelters. The shelters cannot find homes for all the animals, and, as a result, an estimated three to four million of these dogs and cats—many of them healthy and adoptable—are euthanized, making shelter euthanasia the leading cause of death for both dogs and cats in the United States (Humane Society of the United States 2014a).¹

Generally, pet overpopulation stems from three trends. First, many pet-owners choose to buy dogs and cats from breeders and pet stores rather than adopt from shelters. It is a common myth that pet overpopulation exists because there are not enough homes for all shelter animals. In reality, there are more than enough homes but not enough people choose to adopt. Second, many pet-owners fail to spay and neuter their dogs and cats, who then reproduce and give birth to puppies and kittens, thus creating more unwanted animals. Finally, many pet-owners treat pets as disposable. Some people acquire pets without considering the lifetime commitment that comes with caring for them. When pets become inconvenient or unwanted, owners often choose to dump them at shelters, furthering the pet overpopulation problem (American Humane Association 2013).

In particular, pit bull-type dogs are disproportionately represented in overpopulation and euthanasia statistics. Pit bulls average about thirty-three percent of shelter intakes nationally, and in large cities the numbers are as high as forty to sixty-five percent. Sadly, about seventy-five percent of municipal shelters euthanize pit bulls *immediately* upon intake without any chance of

¹ Most of the statistics represented in this thesis are taken from animal advocacy and welfare organization websites (namely, the American Humane Association, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and the Humane Association of the United States). I recognize that these sources are neither academic nor do they discuss their data collection methods, both of which are problematic. However, these statistics are consistent across sources and are the best data available.

adoption, and of the three to four million dogs and cats euthanized in animal shelters annually, about one million are pit bulls (D'Addio 2011).

I was aware of these statistics as the Dog Control officer removed the abandoned dog from my car and dragged her to the backdoor of the Dewitt Animal Hospital. There was no denying her pedigree. Her frame was solid and wrapped in a short coat the color of a well-worn penny. Her head and chest were broad. Her legs well-boned and muscular. Her pronounced cheek muscles gave her the allusion of a smile. No doubt, she was a pit bull. The term “pit bull,” however, does not denote a single breed of dog. Rather, pit bull can refer to a couple breeds or as many as five, not to mention all the mixes of these breeds. The most narrow and perhaps most accurate definition refers to just two breeds: the American pit bull terrier and the American Staffordshire terrier (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 2014f).

Since the 1990s, pit bulls have received negative publicity and earned a fearsome reputation. Their poor reputation stems from a series of well-publicized attacks by pit bulls on humans and has led to a general dislike of the breed. Ironically, pit bulls—despite being named “The Most Dangerous Dog[s] in America” by *U.S. News and World Report*—are the number one bred dog in the United States (Twining, Arluke, and Patronek 2000). They are also the most difficult to find homes for. Of the estimated three million pit bulls currently living in the United States, only one in six-hundred will successfully find a home (D'Addio 2011).

Like millions of other dogs and cats in the United States, a deeply flawed management system composed of institutional, cultural, and geographic injustices would determine the fate of the dog I found in the park. In the months following my encounter with the abandoned pit bull, I researched this system, naively intent on uncovering some information that might change the entire system for the better. What I uncovered instead was less transformative but significant

nonetheless: contemporary customs in modern, urban animal management are rooted in deep historical practices. Animal management, in its most fundamental sense, has not changed much since its inception in the late-nineteenth century. Americans' attitudes toward animals, however, have changed drastically, causing friction between an archaic system and new cultural conventions.

Animal management, as I use it here, refers to the collection, care, and disposal of stray and unwanted—or, what I call “surplus”—dogs and cats. The management of surplus dogs in Syracuse raises important questions that have significant implications for animal management specifically and animal studies more generally. Who defines which dogs are surplus? How does the city manage surplus dogs? Whose responsibility is such management? What are the geographies of surplus dogs and animal management organizations? By that I mean, where are surplus dogs collected, where are surplus dogs housed, and how did this geography develop? What are the relationships among different organizations involved with the management of surplus dogs: animal control, animal rescues and shelters, and animal advocacy and welfare organizations?

This research looks closely at the historical and contemporary roles of each of the above-mentioned organizations to tell the story of animal management in Syracuse, New York. Animal abuse, neglect, and overpopulation are prevalent today; however, they are not new phenomena. Newspaper articles from the nineteenth century report great abuses to animals, specifically horses, and detail the hardships encountered while trying to regulate stray dogs. The widespread and public abuse of animals in cities prompted the establishment of animal welfare organizations and animal control services beginning in the 1860s, and the legacies of those early institutions have lasted well into the twenty-first century. Specifically, the American Society for the

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (established in 1866) and the Central New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (established in 1883) were among the first animal welfare organizations established in the United States and are still in operation today. These societies emerged in nineteenth-century cities to combat the poor treatment of animals. As a result, they mediated new relationships between humans and animals and altered animal management practices in the city.

Animal control, animal rescues and shelters, and animal advocacy and welfare organizations, both past and present, collectively manage animals in the city. Simply put, animal control *collects* surplus dogs, animal rescues and shelters *house* surplus dogs, and animal advocacy and welfare organizations *campaign* on behalf of surplus dogs. These organizations, while not always separate, ideally work together to manage surplus dog populations. However, each organization has a different mission, making collaboration difficult at best. In the United States, animal control is a government responsibility, and all governments must provide some level of animal control in the interest of community welfare, specifically tending to public health and safety as its primary concern. Thus, while animal control is often confused with animal welfare, their missions are drastically different. According to Nathan Winograd (2009, 101, italics in original), animal control's duty is "to protect people from the *perceived* public health and safety threats caused by animals," whereas animal welfare organizations protect animals and prosecute cruelty. In other words, animal control focuses on *human* health and safety while animal advocacy and welfare organizations focus on *animal* health and safety. Animal rescues and shelters provide a third service, housing and caring for surplus animals, generally with adoption as their desired outcome. This is not to say that each organization's objectives do not overlap. On the contrary, animal control, animal rescues and shelters, and animal advocacy and

welfare organizations are all concerned with animal well-being. However, general objectives, degrees of power, and access to resources vary drastically among these organizations.

Despite many good intentions, euthanasia has become a common “solution” to the surplus pet problem in the United States. Ironically, the existence and euthanasia of surplus pets starkly contrasts western notions of pet-keeping. In modern, western societies, pets are often described as “part of the family” (Fox 2006). Fifty percent of pet-owners in the United States, eighty-three percent in Canada, and eighty-eight percent in Australia consider their pets family members (Power 2008). This is due in part to the phenomenon scholar Heidi Nast (2006) calls “pet love.” Beginning in the 1990s, Americans began to shift their attitudes toward pets, leaving behind prior notions of pets as “a species apart” and instead celebrating pets as “profoundly appropriate objects of human affection and love” (Nast 2006, 894). However, while westerners’ love for pets has grown tremendously throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, pet love has deeper roots than Nast suggests. According to historian Katherine Grier (2006), large-scale pet love first emerged in the nineteenth century.

Thus, what is needed to address this phenomenon is the development of what Nast (2006) calls Critical Pet Studies, where scholars across disciplines can unpack the history of pet love and examine where, why, and how pet love occurs in the twenty-first century. It would also examine the parallel growth of post-industrial service and consumption sectors, with pets featured as both commodities themselves and sites of investment. Such topics, Nast suggests, would be situated under the “new animal geographies” subfield, which has heretofore largely neglected pets.

This thesis contributes to Nast’s Critical Pet Studies by addressing what I call the “dark side” of pet love. I focus on the unintended consequences of pet love, namely, how changes in

Americans' attitudes toward pets have affected surplus dog management in the United States. Americans' love for pets, I argue, is deceiving. On the one hand, pet love has brought awareness to pet overpopulation and shelter euthanasia. Since the 1970s, the annual number of dogs and cats euthanized in animal shelters has decreased from about twelve million to roughly four million (Humane Society of the United States 2014b).² While this is an improvement, current euthanasia rates are still considered high among animal lovers and activists. On the other hand, Americans' love for pets has also helped perpetuate pet overpopulation—and subsequently animal shelter intake and euthanasia—through the widespread commodification of pets. Thus, Americans' love for pets, their desire to keep animals as pets, and their ability to produce and consume pets as commodities helps maintain the current animal management system in the United States.

Syracuse, New York is a compelling site to study these phenomena. Its animal welfare legacy dates back to 1883 with the establishment of the CNY SPCA, one of the country's oldest animal welfare organizations still in operation today. Unfortunately, the need for animal management in Syracuse is as critical today as it was in the nineteenth century. In 2012, the city's dog control department picked up 910 dogs. Of those, 573 (sixty-three percent) were euthanized, rendering surplus dogs collected in Syracuse more likely to be euthanized than surplus dogs collected in other cities in Upstate New York (Knauss 2013a). Syracuse, however, has similar euthanasia statistics to other cities in the United States and represents a larger trend of dog overpopulation nationwide.³ Yet, while geographers have begun to research pets as objects of affection (Fox 2006; Nast 2006; Power 2008; Tuan 2004), they have largely neglected the

² Some estimates for animal shelter euthanasia in the 1970s are as high as 20 million (Humane Society of the United States 2014b).

³ About fifty percent of surplus pets in animal shelters across the United States are euthanized annually (Humane Society of the United States 2014a).

opposite trend of surplus pets. This thesis illuminates the critical yet understudied existence of surplus pets in the city and examines the historical and contemporary foundations, management, and geography of surplus dogs in Syracuse, New York.

Broadly, this research is important for three reasons. First, it illuminates a significant gap in the literature. Geographers have long studied the relationship between humans and nature; yet animals, which constitute a substantial part of nature, are largely absent in geography. The past twenty-five years, however, have seen advancements in animal studies and, alongside the animal rights movement, a new animal geography emerged in the 1990s. Still, animals are often described as nature that is “out there,”—separate from humans’ day-to-day lives—as evidenced by a focus on animals in rural and wild spaces (Wolch and Emel 1998). For a majority of modern western societies, pet keeping remains the closest form of human-animal interaction, but animals—pets, in particular—are neglected in the geographic literature.

Second, this research speaks to broader themes in geography of space, place, and scale. Surplus dogs, like other roaming animals, move independently across space, transgressing city, county, and state boundaries (Wilson 2012). They also move between places (i.e. streets, shelters, and homes) and are deemed either “in place” or “out of place” depending on their ownership and mobility. Owned dogs are accepted on public streets, provided they are leashed, while surplus dogs are considered unacceptable. The independent and unpredictable movement of surplus dogs also complicates their collection and transportation across space and between places. Once collected, surplus dogs travel from point of pickup to place of delivery where they move through shelter systems, waiting to be returned to their owners, transferred to foster homes, adopted, or euthanized. Many shelters also participate in local and regional transfers, where one

shelter transports dogs otherwise destined for euthanasia to other shelters with higher adoption rates.

Finally, this research is valuable for animal management organizations in Syracuse and other American cities and should be used to reevaluate the current animal management system in the United States. This thesis provides a concise yet critical analysis of historical and contemporary animal management practices, which, ideally, will spark communication and cooperation among animal management organizations. My biggest hope is to inspire animal management organizations to work together to combat pet overpopulation and save animal lives.

This lack of cooperation among animal management organizations in Syracuse was particularly obvious when trying to find a safe place for the abandoned pit bull I found in the park. I initially brought her to Helping Hounds, who referred me to the CNY SPCA, who directed me to Dog Control, who finally sent me to the Dewitt Animal Hospital. Despite finding the dog a “safe” place to stay, I was told she would most likely be euthanized at the end of the required five-day holding period. This news broke my heart. The dog was friendly, healthy, young, small, and unique looking—qualities that are attractive to potential adopters—but she was a pit bull. The chances of finding her a home were slim, made slimmer by the fact that she was already the ninth pit bull brought in by Dog Control that week. After several sleepless nights and many hysterical phone calls home, I convinced my mom to adopt the pit bull. Heidi (we named her) now has a happy home—but she is among the lucky few.

Methods

I spent the summer of 2013 doing field research in Syracuse. I was inspired by three broad questions: What are the causes of dog overpopulation in Syracuse? How does the city manage

surplus dogs? And what geographies do they occupy (i.e. where are surplus dogs found, where are animal management organizations located, and how did this geography develop)? Prior to beginning my research, I developed a research plan that relied heavily on semi-structured interviews to answer these questions. Over the course of four months, I planned to conduct interviews with individuals from ten animal management organizations in Syracuse.

Unfortunately, gaining access to these organizations was more difficult than I anticipated, as most were resistant to participation.

During my fieldwork I identified three main reasons for this resistance. First, many animal management organizations were simply too busy to respond to interview requests or grant interviews. Second, strained relationships among animal management organizations left many organizations resistant to participation for fear of damaging their own reputation or jeopardizing relationships with other organizations. Finally, my role as researcher marked me as an outsider, making it difficult to earn participants' trust, and, as a result, participants were hesitant to share sensitive information (see Chapter 4).

After many failed attempts to arrange interviews and a growing fear that I would have no data by summer's end, I adjusted my plan to include archival research at the Onondaga Historical Association. My research questions were originally contemporary in focus, so I broadened my scope to include a historical component. I focused my efforts on early forms of animal control and animal welfare in Syracuse, paying particular attention to the establishment of the Central New York SPCA. Overall, the archives allowed me to reevaluate my research agenda by bringing together the past and present.

Overview

This thesis contributes to the growing literature on animals in geography. Its historical and contemporary consideration of pets in the city also contributes to urban geography and environmental history specifically, and cultural and nature-society geography more generally. Chapter 2, “Marking Territory: Claiming Space for Pets in Geography,” situates pets within the geographic literature and explores the need for more research on animals in geography. It explains why animals appeared and disappeared throughout the discipline’s history and exposes major omissions in geographers’ study of animals. Specifically, this chapter highlights the omission of pets (namely, their abuse and management) from geography, emphasizes the importance of pets to the discipline, and outlines a conceptual framework for studying pets in the city.

Chapter 3, “A Merciful Man is Merciful to His Beast: Animal Control and Welfare in the City, 1860-Present,” explores the establishment of animal control and animal welfare in Syracuse from the nineteenth century to the present. It explains major shifts in Americans’ attitudes toward animals (especially pets) over the last two centuries and details the necessity for and establishment of animal management in the city. Further, this chapter argues that while human-animal relationships have changed drastically since the nineteenth century, the way humans manage and relate to animals today is rooted in historical practices. Thus, this historical context is necessary to understand contemporary animal management practices.

Chapter 4, “The Dark Side of Pet Love: Contemporary Animal Management in Syracuse, New York,” examines the importance of animal control, the geography of animal shelters, and the pervasiveness of animal euthanasia in the United States. Specifically, it explores the strained

relationships among animal management organizations in Syracuse and highlights the consequences (namely, euthanasia) that occur when these organizations do not cooperate.

Finally, Chapter 5, “The Pit Bull Problem: Emotions and America’s Most Dangerous Dog,” demonstrates the significance of pit bulls in modern animal management. Pit bulls are euthanized in U.S. animal shelters more often than any other breed of dog (D’Addio 2011). Their designation as “dangerous” makes them desirable fighting and guard dogs but renders them highly unadoptable. This chapter explores how geographies of emotion (specifically, fear) produce and transform cultural understandings of pit bulls and how, in turn, these emotions generate everyday, material consequences.

CHAPTER 2: MARKING TERRITORY: CLAIMING SPACE FOR PETS IN GEOGRAPHY

Dogs walk with their owners down public streets and bark from behind fences in backyards. Commercial pet stores, trendy pet boutiques, and online pet emporiums advertise and sell billions of dollars of pet merchandise. Television commercials and magazine advertisements urge Americans to adopt pets and donate money to pet-friendly organizations. Pets are everywhere in America. Yet, they are noticeably absent from geography. This is a huge oversight in a discipline that boasts a tradition of studying the relationships between the physical world and human societies, as pets cross the nature-society divide. Pets, however, are neither strictly part of nature (we allow them into our homes) nor strictly part of human society (they are animals, after all). Where, then, do pets belong in geography?

Animal Geographies: Place, Politics, and Identity in the Nature-Culture Borderlands, a foundational text in animal geography, provides a preliminary answer (Wolch and Emel 1998). The focus of this edited volume was groundbreaking, no doubt, but so was its orientation within the discipline. Editors Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel came together from two different subfields (urban geography and political ecology, respectively) to tackle the animal question in geography. The intersection of their broader subfields—cultural geography and nature-society geography—is an ideal place to house animals, especially pets, because it addresses the duality of animals as both cultural and natural.

Despite animals' relevance to cultural and nature-society studies, geographers have largely neglected them. Prior to the 1990s, animals were marginalized in the discipline, discussed only as a tag-on to other topics. A “new animal geography,” however, emerged over the past

twenty-five years, alongside advancements in animal studies and animal rights (Singer 2009; Urbanik 2012). Still, geography presents a relatively narrow view of animals, as evidenced by an overwhelming focus on wildlife and livestock when animals are discussed at all. Ironically, for a majority of modern western societies, pet-keeping—not hunting, bird watching, or raising livestock—is the closest form of human-animal relationships, yet, geographers have paid very little attention to pets.

But what, exactly, is a pet? Anthrozoologist Hal Herzog (2010) explores two definitions. The first he attributes to historian Keith Thomas, who argues that pets are “animals that are allowed in the house, given a name, and never eaten” (Herzog 2010, 72). Herzog problematizes this definition by demonstrating exceptions to all three stipulations. Instead, he prefers anthrozoologist James Serpell’s definition of pets as “animals we live with that have no obvious function” (Herzog 2010, 73). Of significance in both definitions are humans’ willingness to live with pets (as opposed to animals that humans live with unwillingly—i.e. pests) and the “functionless-ness” of pets (as opposed to animals that provide a function to humans—i.e. working animals). But if pets do not provide a necessary function, why, then, are they worth studying?

First, pets are socially important. Pet ownership in the United States has nearly tripled since the 1970s, when approximately 67 million households owned pets, to 2012, when an estimated 164 million households (sixty-two percent) owned pets (Humane Society of the United States 2014a). Second, pets are ethically important. Despite Americans’ love for pets, approximately six to eight million surplus dogs and cats enter animal shelters annually, but only half find homes. The other half (about four *million*) are euthanized, regardless of many being healthy and adoptable (Humane Society of the United States 2014a). Finally, pets are

economically important. The American pet industry is a billion dollar industry and expanding every year. In 1994, Americans spent 17 billion dollars on their pets. Since then, spending has steadily increased to 55.7 billion dollars in 2013 and is estimated to reach 58.5 billion dollars in 2014 (American Pet Products Association 2014).

Pets, however, remain understudied in the discipline despite their academic and everyday relevance. The limited research on pets that does exist in geography focuses on pets as companions and commodities. Most notably, Heidi Nast examines the American “pet love” phenomenon, where pets are considered to be both “profoundly appropriate objects of human affection and love” and “sites of intensely commodified investment” (2006, 894, 897). While Nast and other scholars have paid attention to pet love, however, geographers have been slow to research the opposite trend of surplus pets. What is needed is a comprehensive study of pet overpopulation, animal management, and shelter euthanasia in the United States. Such research will examine the critical yet understudied existence of surplus pets in America, contribute to animal geography and geography as a whole, and support larger animal rights debates. Thus, the purpose of this literature review is to trace the development of animal geography, elaborate on specific gaps in the literature, and argue how and why pets deserve academic attention of their own.

The (Dis)Appearance of Animals in Geography

Animals first appeared in geography in the late 1800s with the advent of zoogeography, whose main focus was the scientific study of animals in relation to theories of evolution and natural selection (Allee and Schmidt 1951). Other disciplines, however, eventually subsumed zoogeography, and animals disappeared from the geographic literature as theories of

environmental determinism took precedence (Cresswell 2013). Later, animals reappeared (although marginally) in the 1930s with the development of the Berkeley School, which rejected environmental determinism in favor of regionalism (Sauer 1925). The quantitative revolution gained prominence in the 1960s, and animals disappeared once again, this time in favor of statistical and “scientific” research (Turner 2002). The 1980s, however, sparked the reappearance of animals in geography alongside the expansion of qualitative methods and critical geography (Urbanik 2012). Today, animal geography is a vibrant and rapidly growing subfield. Yet, animals are still a marginalized topic of study. Why are animals marginalized in geography? Why have they appeared (albeit rarely) and disappeared throughout geography’s history? What needs to happen for geographers to take animals seriously?

This story begins in the late-nineteenth century, when anglophone geography was established as an academic discipline. While other disciplines were highly specialized, geography set itself apart by studying “distinct perspectives of the world” rather than individual subjects (Castree 2005, 50). It was a unifying discipline committed to bridging the gap between “the natural sciences and the study of humanity” (MacKinder 1887, 145). The inclusion of both physical and human approaches gave geography a unique identity and distinguished it from other disciplines that focused solely on either the natural world or the human world (Turner 2002). Thus, when geography gained recognition as a distinct discipline, animals were considered a key component. Zoogeography, the “scientific study of animal life with reference to the distribution of animals on the earth and the mutual influence of environment and animals upon each other,” focused largely on the evolution, adaptation, and movement of wildlife across time and space (Allee and Schmidt 1951, 3). By the early-twentieth century, however, other disciplines such as biology and zoology assumed the zoogeographic tradition of cataloging animal species, leaving

physical geographers to focus instead on inanimate and spatially fixed nature, such as plants, landforms, and climate (Cresswell 2013). Most notably, theories of environmental determinism rose to prominence, and geographers, no longer interested in cataloging animal species, focused on the environment and climate as determinants of human culture (Semple 1911).

By the 1930s, however, environmental determinism was widely rejected for lacking evidence and being prone to racist generalizations, and regional geography—the descriptive study of places based on the division of earth into regions—gained prominence in its place (Hartshorne 1939). In the United States, Carl Sauer—spearhead of the Berkeley School and fierce critic of environmental determinism—developed a theory of cultural landscapes, which used inductive reasoning to gather data on humans’ impact on the landscape over time (Sauer 1925). Although not the primary concern, animal domestication was included in studies of cultural landscapes and revealed the centrality of animals (namely, livestock) to cultural practices and environmental conditions (Wolch 2002). Thus, geographers were interested in animals at this time, although in very limited ways.

Animals’ appearance in geography in the early-twentieth century, however, was brief, due to the onset of the quantitative revolution in the 1950s, which marked a rapid change in methodology from geography as a regional discipline to geography as a spatial science. Proponents of the quantitative turn argued that “geography is, no matter what other qualities, an approach to understanding through spatial attributes of phenomena” (Turner 2002, 56). As a result, the quantitative revolution “ushered in the idea that spatial analysis *was* geography,” thereby moving the discipline away from Saurian studies of cultural landscapes (and, therefore, away from the study of animals) toward more positivist approaches in geography (Hanson 1999, 134, *italics in original*). However, critical geography emerged in the 1970s as a critique of

positivism and brought together many left-leaning trends in geography. Radical, Marxist, and feminist approaches offered more nuanced analyses of social and cultural phenomena, paying particular attention to geographic injustices and marginalized subjects. This new turn in geography created the practical, theoretical, and methodological space to study previously neglected topics, including animals (Urbanik 2012).

Despite the historic relevance of animals, the development of animal-focused scholarship within geography occurred only recently. Over the past twenty-five years, animal geography emerged alongside the field of human-animal studies and the animal rights movement, the goals of which are to recognize the wide array of human-animal relationships and bring them to the forefront of our everyday and intellectual considerations (Urbanik 2012). Geographers Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel paved the way for animal studies in geography in *Animal Geographies*, wherein they argued that geographers included animals in their scholarship as an afterthought and called instead for a “project of coexistence,” where human and animal subjects carry equal intellectual merit (1998, xvi). Thus, the twenty-first-century “new animal geography” goes beyond “taking animals as merely ‘signifiers’ of human endeavor and meaning” and asks geographers to consider animal agency and its effects on both human and animal lives (Buller 2013, 1). As a result, geographers have begun to explore how animals impact “places, regions, and landscapes over time, prompting studies of animals and place” (Emel, Wilbert, and Wolch 2002, 409).

Animal Places and Spaces

The study of animals and place explores how different people, in different places, at different times, have socially defined animals and why animals are “‘placed’ by human societies in their

local material spaces” (Philo and Wilbert 2000, 5). Placement is done both conceptually (through the classification of animal species) and physically (through the delineation of appropriate places for animals) and exists across all societies (hunter-gatherer, feudal, industrial, capitalist, etc.). However, the placement of animals by humans is problematic, as animals have been treated as passive beings onto which humans give meaning. Such anthropocentrism neglects animal agency and brings forth the question, “can a ‘real’ geography of animals be developed, rather than an anthropocentric geography of *humans in relation to animals*?” (Philo and Wilbert 2000, 5, italics in original).

Much of the work on animals in geography attempts to move beyond this anthropocentrism by engaging with radical agendas that expose the mistreatment of and seek justice for marginalized beings. While these beings have traditionally been limited to humans, the growing acknowledgment of animals as sentient—particularly, the recognition of their ability to suffer—has expanded the sphere of social justice to animals (Singer 2009). As a result, a “spatiality of ethics which shadows the spatiality of [human-animal] encounter” has developed (Jones 2000, 268). Still, these ethics and relationships represent human valuations of animals, wherein animals are perceived as either “in place” or “out of place” (Jones 2000, 270).

Robert Wilson (2010) explores how humans create spaces for animals amid larger landscapes. His book, *Seeking Refuge: Birds and Landscapes of the Pacific Flyway*, details the formation and management of migratory bird refuges amongst the agricultural landscapes of western North America. More broadly, his book tells a “story about the intersection of mobile nature with the grid” and examines what happens when animals move beyond the spaces and places assigned to them by humans (Wilson 2010, 6). When they do, animals “forge their own

‘other spaces’... thus creating their own ‘beastly places’ reflective of their own ‘beastly’ ways, ends, doing, joys, and sufferings” (Philo and Wilbert 2000, 14).

The development of these “beastly places” makes for uncomfortable human-animal encounters and prompts the enclosure of animals by humans. Michael Watts suggests, “the relationship between animals and modernity can be construed as a gigantic act of *enclosure*—necessitating, of course, loss and displacement” (2000, 293, italics in original). The zoo, perhaps, is the most iconic example of modern animal enclosure, displaying not only animals but also humans’ ideas about animals. Kay Anderson describes the zoo as “a cultural institution which reflects not nature itself—as if such an unmediated thing exists—but a human adaptation of the ensemble of life forms that bears the name ‘nature’” (1995, 276). She goes on to argue that zoos represent humans’ boundary-making activities and, ultimately, reflect cultural agendas. These boundary-making activities and cultural agendas are part of a larger social project wherein humans attempt to regulate and control “those whose difference [is] in some way threatening” (Anderson 1995, 292). Animals threaten human agendas when they move outside the places assigned to them by humans. Therefore, human-animal relationships are often contradictory, bound by a “dialectic of desire and disgust, domination and affection” (Griffiths, Poulter, and Sibley 2000, 57). Animals are either “in place,” and thus nonthreatening to humans, or “out of place,” and thus subject to enclosure and control.

In an American context, these distinctions date back to settlers’ first encounters with animals in colonial America (Anderson 2004). Since then, changing attitudes toward and relationships with animals have drastically transformed the places and spaces deemed appropriate for animals. Robert Wilson (2014) examines these transformations—from early American settlements where livestock roamed freely to twentieth-century spaces (such as zoos,

national parks, and refuges) where humans control animal movement. Thus, Wilson argues, “the shifting connections between Americans and animals led to changes in the geography of animals, both wild and domestic” (2014, 196).

Urban Animals

Cities are particularly suitable sites for observing these changes in the geography of animals. Humans have gone to great lengths to enclose and control animals in urban spaces, which are made distinct from suburban, rural, and wilderness spaces by their “conquest and exploitation of nature by culture” (Wolch 1998, 119). Early urban development was rarely concerned about non-human life, and, consequently, urbanization has had disastrous effects on animals. Yet, the inclusion of animals in urban geography is partial, as animals are either ignored altogether or researched only in relation to their usefulness to humans (Philo 1998).

According to Jennifer Wolch, geographers should expand urban theory to answer the following:

(1) how urbanization of the natural environment impacts animals, and what global, national, and locality-specific political-economic and cultural forces drive modes of urbanization that are most threatening to animals; (2) how and why city residents react to the presence of animals in their midst, why attitudes may shift with new forms of urbanization, and what this means for animals; (3) how both city-building practices and human attitudes and behaviors together define the capacity of urban ecologies to support nonhuman life; and (4) how the planning/policy-making activities of the state, environmental design practices, and political struggles have emerged to slow the rate of violence toward animals witnessed under contemporary capitalist urbanization. (1998, 120)

Further, Chris Philo recommends, “looking in more detail at animals in the city as a flash point in the struggle between animals and humans” (1998, 58). This struggle is a spatial one, wherein physical boundaries between humans and animals are desired but often crossed. A truly “ordered”

city, then, is impossible, as human control over nature is always temporary and partial (Griffiths, Poulter, and Sibley 2000).

A primary example of the urban struggle for space occurred in nineteenth-century cities between humans and livestock. The presence of free-roaming livestock (predominately cows, sheep, and pigs) was highly contested but simultaneously a necessity to and a burden of city life. Livestock were kept in cities mainly for slaughter. Yet, the unsavory sights, sounds, and smells associated with roaming livestock threatened city residents' quality of life. As a result, "some animals (cats and dogs) [were] turned into pets valued as an element of the urban world whereas other animals (cows, sheep, and pigs) [became] matter that should be expelled to the rural world" (Philo 1998, 60). Thus, in what Peter Atkins (2012) calls "The Great Separation," urban residents began to push livestock from city limits, ultimately contributing to a growing urban/rural divide.

While most livestock were removed from cities, horses remained a popular urban presence throughout the nineteenth century. They were regarded as "living machines" that hauled freight, turned machinery, and transported passengers throughout the city (McShane and Tarr 2007). Although other draft animals were present in cities (namely, mules, donkeys, and oxen), horses were the most popular due to their "strength, speed, social temperament, and ability to bond with humans," as well as "their ability to provide individual, versatile, self-propelled power" (Greene 2008, 42). By the 1920s, however, the rise of the automobile and a growing concern for public health and safety eliminated the need for horses in the city.

Today, zoos are the most appropriate spaces in modern cities to house large animals. Zoos transport people from confined, concrete cities to open, lush parks, thus establishing "a middle ground between the wilderness and the city, specially constructed meeting places for wild animals and urban Americans" (Hanson 2004, 2). However, urban residents need not visit a zoo

to encounter animals in the city. Pest animals, such as pigeons, rats, and squirrels, are a ubiquitous part of urban life. Animals are pests when they are “thought to be useless, especially if they are viewed as scavengers, are not deemed to be charismatic or particularly attractive, and are perceived to wreak havoc on human settlements or property” (Jerolmack 2008, 75). Like nineteenth-century urban livestock, pests negatively impact humans’ quality of life, and, consequently, city residents have gone to great lengths to eliminate them from the urban landscape.

In *Pests in the City: Flies, Bedbugs, Cockroaches, and Rats*, Dawn Biehler (2013) explores the history of pests and pest control in U.S. cities, arguing that pests are both a private and public matter. Historically, authorities treated pest infestation as a private, apolitical problem, rather than a public problem connected to larger social and environmental injustices. Beginning in 1900, public health reformers and private residents attempted to eliminate pests through advancements in urban infrastructure and pest control methods. By the 1960s, pest control came under scrutiny following the publication of Rachel Carson’s (1962) *Silent Spring*, which documented the ill effects of pesticides on humans and the environment. As a result, urban residents demanded environmental justice alongside effective pest control. Unfortunately, pests—like livestock and other unwanted urban animals—“are tightly woven into the ecological fabric of cities and have long resisted our efforts to disentangle them” (Biehler 2013, 11).

Thus, because animals resist the placement assigned to them by humans, the elimination of unwanted animals in the city is an impossible project (Griffiths, Poulter, and Sibley 2000). As a result, humans try to maintain order in the city by driving unwanted animals to the margins of society. Marginal spaces occupied by unwanted animals represent not only a wild and threatening nature but also humans’ desires to isolate culture from nature. Humans no longer

share the intimate relationships with animals characterized by nineteenth-century cities. Rather, urban development “has resulted in the incorporation of animals into the private sphere (as pets), [or] has removed them to a real or imaginary ‘wild,’” revealing the ways humans project expectations onto the landscape (Griffiths, Poulter, and Sibley 2000, 59).

As a result, certain animals have become “symbols of human fears or frustrations” (Nagy and Johnson II 2013, 2). Some animals (such as rodents) are feared almost universally, while other animals (such as feral cats) bring forth more contradictory feelings. Rodents are unquestionably despised because they are dirty, dangerous, and disease ridden (Sullivan 2004). They are “matter out of place” and, therefore, exist beyond society’s normal or safe worldview (Douglas 1966, 36). Thus, because humans fear what is out of place, they “campaign against animals that are alien, invasive, or destructive to human enterprise, and identify them with or treat them as trash” (Nagy and Johnson II 2013, 5). Unlike rodents, humans’ feelings toward other animals, like feral cats, are not as straightforward. Huw Griffiths, Ingrid Poulter, and David Sibley argue, “wildness in cats is, on the one hand, ‘unsettling’ because it contradicts the idea of the cat as a domestic, pet animal close to humans, and, on the other hand, it is a source of desire” (2000, 59-60). This desire stems in part from feral cats’ ability to help eliminate other unwanted animals (like rodents) to the tune of hundreds of millions annually (Jessup 2004). More so, their presence fulfills an even deeper human desire to connect with nature, signifying “spaces of desire where wilderness can be recovered” (Griffiths, Poulter, and Sibley 2000, 69).

Pets in the City

Urban residents need not look to marginal spaces to connect with nature, however, as the home is an accepted urban space where humans can interact with (specific) animals. These animals are

pets, “animals we live with that have no obvious function” (Herzog 2010, 73). Their “functionless-ness,” however, is a relatively recent phenomenon. Historically, pets assumed many roles, including food producers, hunting assistants, and physical laborers. Today, pets are kept for their companionship and compatibility with humans (Bain 2007). This shift from pets as workers to pets as companions gained popularity in the 1800s with the development of the “domestic ethic of kindness,” a moral code which identifies kindness to animals as a defining trait of civilized individuals. This ethic redefined certain everyday practices toward animals as cruel and argued instead that truly genteel people were distinguished by their “desire to promote happiness among all beings” (Grier 2006, 169). Thus, many animals, once valued for their utility, gained recognition as sentient beings deserving of humane treatment and affection.

Since the nineteenth century, westerners’ affection for pets—especially dogs—has grown rapidly, indicating yet another shift in pets’ roles: from laborers to companion animals to family members (Power 2007). The growing spatial proximity between humans and pets in the home requires a re-thinking of human-animal relationships and suggests that pets “actively shape the ways that family and home are lived in the everyday” (Power 2008, 537). The presence of pets in the home, however, is acceptable only under specific conditions. Pets are valued for their “animalness,” yet controlled in many ways—such as through training and spaying/neutering—in an attempt to “civilize” and make them suitable for household living (Fox 2006). Like feral cats, the acceptance of household pets is contingent upon maintaining order. Humans accept the presence of feral cats when they remain on the margins of cities, and domestic pets are kept so long as they follow house “rules” (i.e. some humans do not allow pets on furniture or in certain rooms in the house). Thus, space itself is an important factor in the acceptance or rejection of animals in the city (Griffiths, Poulter, and Sibley 2000).

This is especially true for dogs, who are considered acceptable city animals when they are domesticated pets living in a home but are disapproved of when they are strays living on the street. This disapproval is both practical and emotional. First, stray dogs present a public health and safety concern. Unlike feral cats, who do not often harm humans, stray dogs are capable of seriously injuring humans; thus, their presence threatens order in the city. Second, the dog's designation as friend and family member make the existence of strays ethically and emotionally unwelcome. Thus, stray dogs are "rescued" and placed in shelters to await adoption. However, shelters cannot care for the overwhelming number of stray dogs, and, without adequate resources to house them, euthanasia has become a common solution. Thus, without a proper *place*, stray dogs are considered useless—animals "out of place"—and therefore face uncertain futures (Haraway 2007).

Conclusion

While the acknowledgement of pets as family members (Fox 2006; Power 2008) and sites of commodification (Haraway 2012; Nast 2006) is important, the opposite trend of pets as surplus, unwanted, and out of place is significant not only to animal geography but urban and critical geography as well. The existence of surplus pets in the United States has serious social, ethical, and economic implications. Yet, surplus pets are invisible in geography—a substantial oversight in a discipline committed to upholding justice (Mitchell 2008). This invisibility is two-fold. First, surplus pets are invisible in the literature. Topically, they fall into the no-mans-land between nature-society and cultural geography, leaving them homeless (figuratively speaking) within the discipline. Second, surplus pets are literally homeless and, therefore, collected and sent to animal shelters. Yet, the shelters themselves are "sites of concealment," where euthanasia occurs out of

sight, contributing to the invisibility of surplus pets (Pachirat 2011; Wilson 2014). Thus, this review aims to make visible both the place of surplus pets in geography and the plight of surplus pets in the United States. One way to overcome this invisibility is to trace the history of surplus pets in American cities. This review provides an academic foundation for examining the history of surplus dogs in Syracuse, New York (see Chapter 3) and highlights the everyday significance of pet overpopulation, animal management, and shelter euthanasia in the United States.

CHAPTER 3: A MERCIFUL MAN IS MERCIFUL TO HIS BEAST¹: ANIMAL CONTROL AND WELFARE IN THE CITY, 1860-PRESENT

Environmental historian William Cronon recognizes shifts in cultural understandings of nature, arguing, “as we gaze into the mirror it holds up for us, we too easily imagine that what we behold is Nature when in fact we see the reflection of our own unexamined longings and desires” (1996, 7). Like all relationships with nature, human-animal relationships are mediated through culture. Over time, cultures change, as do our relationships with animals (Manning and Serpell 2002). Yet, the legacies of these relationships do not disappear. While human-animal relationships have changed over the past two centuries, the way humans relate to animals today is rooted in historical practices.

Specifically, the way humans control animals today is an extension of nineteenth-century attempts to regulate animals in cities. The abuse of animals in cities prompted the establishment of animal welfare organizations and animal control services beginning in the 1860s, and, as a result, new human-animal relationships emerged, ultimately influencing how humans control animals today. While the history of urban livestock and draft animals—particularly, horses (Greene 2008; McShane and Tarr 2007)—has been well documented, geographers have largely failed to examine the history of other animals in the city—namely, pets. This chapter explores the role of animals in American cities from the nineteenth century to the present. Specifically, it examines the use and abuse of working animals and pets in Syracuse, New York, the establishment of animal welfare organizations in the city, and the lasting effects of historical practices on contemporary animal control and welfare.

¹ “Humanitarian,” *Syracuse Journal*, August 12, 1870, Public Welfare – Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: General and Early to 1920, Onondaga Historical Association (hereafter, OHA).

Animals in the City, 1860-1920

Before the onset of the automobile, horses provided the power necessary to operate nineteenth-century cities. Due to their size, speed, strength, and disposition, horses were favored as America's most reliable "living machines." They hauled freight, turned machinery, and transported passengers throughout the city (McShane and Tarr 2007). From 1800 to 1900, America's urban population grew by thirty million people, placing strain on the workhorses who supported city life. Living standards and United States per capita GDP also skyrocketed during this time, facilitating greater trade and placing even further strain on workhorses, as all traded goods were, at one point or another, transported by horse (Morris 2007). Yet, while Americans benefited from horse power in the city, the horses themselves lived miserable existences. Drivers regularly whipped and overworked them, resulting in an average life expectancy of four years for urban workhorses, who routinely dropped dead in city streets, their carcasses left to rot or crudely processed by fat, offal, and bone-boiling firms (McShane and Tarr 1997).

Like most nineteenth-century American cities, such abuses were common in Syracuse, New York. From 1810 to 1860, salt was the city's main exported good, transported in small batches by horseback and horse-drawn wagon in the city, and towed by horses and mules along the Erie Canal. Over-packed with bags of salt, weary horses towed the export west to Lake Erie along the canal to meet the demand of growing populations. "The exhibition on the canal of horses with terribly raw breasts, caused by the rough collars, in towing the heavy laden boats, is of daily occurrence," reported a Syracuse newspaper.² In 1825, the Erie Canal was completed, linking Lake Erie with the Hudson River and connecting Syracuse to larger markets. As a result, salt became easily transportable in bulk along the canal at low cost to communities both west and east of the city (Bernstein 2005). Yet, steamboats were inoperable on the canal for much of the

² "Humanitarian."

nineteenth century, leaving horse power as the only practical form of energy available to operate canal boats. Within a year of its completion, nearly 9,000 horses were used for transportation on the Erie Canal (National Canal Museum 2013). Thus, both the Erie Canal and the Syracuse salt industry owed their successes to the tens-of-thousands of workhorses who labored on the canal.

While nineteenth-century Syracuse residents benefited greatly from the use of canal horses, the horses themselves—like those in other nineteenth-century American cities—were at the mercy of their owners. Canal horses were often underfed, forced to haul heavy loads over long distances in extreme weather, and subject to a variety of abuses, such as whippings and beatings. This abuse was widespread and public, acknowledged by compassionate observers as “a monstrous evil in the land” (Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 1873). “The teamsters who drive horses about Syracuse,” remarked one resident, “have too long enjoyed immunity from the consequences of barbaric treatment of their charges.”³ Horse abuse, however, was not limited to the tortures committed along the canal towing path. Nineteenth-century workhorses of all kinds, in Syracuse and elsewhere, were subject to endless abuses committed by humans in an era without animal protection laws.

In 1866, however, Henry Bergh, a wealthy man of leisure, took action on behalf of abused horses in New York City. He proposed a society, like that of England's Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which would protect animals under New York State Legislature. On April 10, 1866 a charter incorporating the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) was passed, followed nine days later by the enactment of an animal anti-cruelty law and the appointment of the ASPCA as its enforcer, both of which were previously unheard of. Upon witnessing a driver whipping his horse in the street, New York City

³ “The Syracuse Evening Herald...” *Syracuse Standard*, January 7, 1862, Public Welfare – Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: General and Early to 1920, OHA.

onlookers stopped to stare “not so much at the weak, emaciated equine, but at the tall man, elegant in top hat and spats, who [was] explaining to the driver that it is now against the law to beat one's animal” (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 2014b). Despite its novelty, Bergh’s ASPCA model quickly spread to other cities across the country. By the beginning of the twentieth century, many U.S. cities had founded humane societies, and most U.S. states had enacted anti-cruelty laws (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 2014b).

Syracuse was among the first cities to adopt the ASPCA model, as there was “abundant opportunity for the usefulness of such a society.”⁴ O. Robinson Casey, Syracuse’s equivalent of New York City’s Henry Bergh, worked at Keever’s General Store in the 1880s, where he sold supplies to Erie Canal boatmen and observed the endless abuse of canal horses (Palmer 2008). Casey, along with a growing number of Syracuse residents, disapproved of the way boatmen treated their animals and wrote to local newspapers exposing the everyday horrors of animal cruelty. Concerned citizens asked in desperation, “Where is Bergh?” and called specifically for a Syracuse society to protect animals:

We have clubs organized for the protection of game and fish, and why shouldn’t there be similar societies for protecting horses from the inhumanity of their drivers? The merciless beating of horses in our streets is witnessed much too often.⁵

In 1883, public outcry led to the establishment of the Central New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (CNY SPCA), headed by Casey. His work was “unpopular in the beginning,” but soon his “efficiency, courage, and fidelity won for him an almost national

⁴ “Humanitarian.”

⁵ “Where is Bergh?” *Syracuse Journal*, 1872, Public Welfare – Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: General and Early to 1920, OHA.

reputation in his branch of human work.”⁶ In only sixteen years, Casey drastically reduced the rate of animal abuse in the city from fifty cases in the summer of 1883 to only two cases in the summer of 1899.⁷ His success was aided by the public’s newfound realization “that animals really had rights which people were bound to respect.”⁸

This realization was part of a larger trend in nineteenth-century society known as the “domestic ethic of kindness,” a moral code which identified kindness to animals as a defining trait of civilized individuals (Grier 2006). This ethic redefined certain everyday practices toward animals as cruel and argued instead that truly genteel people were distinguished by their benevolence, thus inspiring new human-animal relationships. City residents began to acknowledge that inhumane living and working conditions not only threatened horses’ ability to work but also brought into question Americans’ morality. As a result, horses and other working animals were increasingly protected (like human laborers) as a matter of public duty, despite their standing as private property (Greene 2008).

Protecting animals, however, was largely an upper-class endeavor. Working-class citizens relied on horses and draft animals for their livelihoods, and, while cruelty was not always intentional, human needs were placed above animal welfare. Such was the case with Warren Fry, who was charged with starving his horse to death in 1899. “Fry is a laborer,” reported a local newspaper. “It is claimed that the horse was mortgaged and that for this reason he refused to feed it.”⁹ Such abuses, however, were considered inexcusable among “civilized”

⁶ “S.P.C.A.,” *Syracuse Standard*, February 2, 1895, Public Welfare – Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: General and Early to 1920, OHA.

⁷ “Respect for Animals,” *Syracuse Standard*, May 7, 1899, Public Welfare – Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: General and Early to 1920, OHA.

⁸ “S.P.C.A.”

⁹ “Allowed His Horse to Starve to Death?” *Syracuse Standard*, December 15, 1899, Public Welfare – Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: General and Early to 1920, OHA.

individuals, as “even the Indians on the reservation [made] some sort of provision for feeding and housing their animals.”¹⁰

Also during this time, dogs and cats, formerly kept as laborers (i.e. guard dogs and mousers), were increasingly kept as pets, serving no purpose other than human companionship. Following the domestic ethic of kindness, families kept pets in and around the house as “a medium for training children into self-consciousness about, and abhorrence of, causing pain to other creatures including, ultimately, other people” (Grier 1999, 95). Further promoting the domestic ethic of kindness, a children’s organization for the prevention of cruelty to animals, known as the Band of Mercy, was established in Syracuse in the late-nineteenth century, wherein schoolchildren pledged, “I will try to be kind to all harmless living creatures and try to protect them from cruel usage.”¹¹ Without such protection, lamented one Syracuse resident, “the manner in which dumb animals, especially dogs, are treated in our city by the owners thereof, is perfectly outrageous.”¹²

While pet animals became increasingly appropriate city companions, livestock and large working animals diminished in popularity. Throughout the nineteenth century, cities blended humans and domestic animals in ways Americans can hardly imagine today. Cows, pigs, and sheep were found in commercial stockyards where they awaited slaughter, in residential neighborhoods where they were raised for food, and in city streets where they offered a practical means of garbage control (Hartog 1985). Chickens, goats, and other small livestock animals were also kept in cities well into the early-twentieth century. Roaming livestock were so widespread and invasive that cities eventually enacted laws to control their movement, attempting to push

¹⁰ “Respect for Animals.”

¹¹ “Band of Mercy,” *Syracuse Standard*, March 10, 1884, Public Welfare – Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: General and Early to 1920, OHA.

¹² “Cruelty to Animals,” *Syracuse Journal*, July 25, 1873, Public Welfare – Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: General and Early to 1920, OHA.

livestock from city centers. Yet, city residents relied on urban livestock for their primary sources of meat and, therefore, regularly ignored early animal control laws. As cities grew and standards of living improved, however, the “odours, flies and unseemly sights” associated with roaming livestock threatened urban quality of life (Philo 1998, 60). As a result, cities enacted stricter animal control laws in the late-nineteenth century that barred livestock completely from public spheres (Grier 2006).

Pets in the City, 1920-Present

As livestock populations in the city diminished and pet-keeping gained popularity, animal welfare organizations like the ASPCA added pets to their agendas. Like workhorses, dogs and cats were subject to a variety of everyday abuses. Cities were rife with roaming pets—whether owned, abandoned, or feral,—and many of their abuses came in the form of early animal control. “Our city is infested with hundreds of useless dogs,” remarked one Syracuse resident. “Strangers remark it, and we acknowledge it.”¹³ While rabies was relatively rare, Americans feared the disease and, as a result, reviled roaming dogs, preferring to “kill off stray dogs” to curb the spread of disease.¹⁴ Thus, cities paid for dog-killing sprees, where dogs were beaten to death in the street or taken back to primal city pounds and either bludgeoned or drowned (Grier 2006). In New York City, dogs were disposed of like trash:

A large crate, seven feet long, four high and five broad, made of iron bars set three inches apart, was rolled up the aisles, and the dogs, about 48 at a time, were dropped into it through a sliding top door. The crate was then wheeled out to the water’s edge, where it was attached to a crane, elevated, swung out and dropped into the river, where it was kept

¹³ “Dogs Again,” *Syracuse Journal*, June 25, 1870, Public Welfare – Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: General and Early to 1920, OHA.

¹⁴ “Kill Off Stray Dogs to End Hydrophobia,” *The New York Times*, May 23, 1908, The New York Times Online Archive.

submerged 10 minutes, then it was lifted up, emptied and returned for another load.¹⁵

Eventually, along with the development of the domestic ethic of kindness and animal welfare organizations, killing sprees were outlawed in favor of more humane animal control methods. These new methods were the result of Americans' changing views toward animals, especially pets. Throughout the nineteenth century, the role of pets shifted from servants and laborers to best friends and family members (Grier 2006). While opinions of pets were by no means universal, by the early-nineteenth century, many Americans were too emotionally attached to dogs and cats to see them killed in the street. At the same time, horse power ceded to other forms of energy, and horse populations declined in cities, leaving animal welfare organizations more time and resources to focus on pets (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 2014b; Nye 1999).

In 1894, the New York City government placed the ASPCA in charge of animal control services—picking up stray dogs and maintaining animal shelters—and collected revenue from dog licensing fees as a source of funding (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 2014b). In Syracuse, O. Robinson Casey employed men to “go about and bark like dogs” as a strategy for collecting licensing fees.¹⁶ “When Fido and Tray answer from a house whose occupant hasn't bought a tag,” a local newspaper explained, “the S.P.C.A. will get a dog or \$3 next day.”¹⁷ Thus, licensing represented an important shift in Americans' relationships with animals. It indicated not only ownership of but also responsibility for one's pet. Whereas dogs and cats previously roamed freely throughout the city, animal control and subsequent licensing services encouraged owners to keep track of their pets' whereabouts. However, while

¹⁵ “Destroying the Dogs,” *The New York Times*, July 6, 1877, The New York Times Online Archive.

¹⁶ “Casey's Up to Date,” *Syracuse Standard*, June 8, 1908, Public Welfare – Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: General and Early to 1920, OHA.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

dog killing sprees were considered taboo by the beginning of the twentieth century, animal control services were still responsible for picking up—and often euthanizing—dogs-at-large. Thus, proper identification, mainly in the form of dog collars, was necessary to distinguish family pets from stray and feral animals.

As the United States became more industrialized and commercialized in the twentieth century, pet paraphernalia—such as dog collars and other pet-specific goods—and pets themselves became increasingly commodified, commonly bought and sold in markets and stores. Previous means of acquiring pets for free from friends and neighbors lost its appeal in the late-nineteenth century as European and purebred breeds gained popularity. Pet stores and private dealers provided consumers with more unique breeds than the mutts traded between friends, and by 1940 all the components of the modern pet industry were developed. Small businesses that once sold pet animals on the side developed into mainstream pet stores, and pets and pet supplies were produced, manufactured, advertised, and sold in increasingly larger amounts and on bigger and more competitive markets (Grier 2006).

Following World War II, the pet industry exploded, aided by the post-war economic boom (Grier 2006). The enormous growth in automobile use, combined with new and improved road networks, led to the rise of suburbs in post-World War II America. Suburbs provided Americans—mostly white, middle class families from cities—with larger living spaces (i.e. bigger houses and bigger yards), and the end of the war signaled a return to financial security and increased leisure time (Beauregard 2006). The availability of space, money, and time also marked a surge in pet-ownership beginning in the 1950s (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 2014b). This newfound enthusiasm for pet-keeping, however, had unintended consequences. In 1954, the CNY SPCA attended to 12,677 cases of stray, unwanted, and

surrendered dogs and cats.¹⁸ As the problem grew, some viewed animal overpopulation as an extension of family planning. While the human population growth rate began to decline after the post-war baby boom, the “family planning campaign apparently [had] not reached the Syracuse area pet population,” as many more pets were born than could be given a home.¹⁹

“Every year thousands of stray dogs roam the streets of Syracuse,” reported one local newspaper, “Many of them end up dead.”²⁰ Due to the large volume of strays picked up by animal control, shelters were forced to “[pack animals] into makeshift quarters” and euthanize upon overcrowding. As a way to curb pet overpopulation and collect revenue, the CNY SPCA ramped up its dog-licensing program in the 1950s by cracking down on licensing fees and seizing all dogs without up to date tags.²¹ Similar tactics were adopted nationwide but did little to end overpopulation. By the 1970s, five million dollars of federal tax money was spent to euthanize about 13 million unwanted pets annually.²² “In a human court, [this] would be considered a miscarriage of justice,” argued one Syracuse resident. “No trial by jury, no presumption of innocence, no chance to appeal. The crime: none. The penalty: death.”²³

At the same time, new public health and safety information identified dogs—specifically, their ability to bite and attack—as legitimate sources of danger, and, as a result, animal control laws were passed in the 1970s requiring that dogs remain leashed in public spaces.²⁴ Thus,

¹⁸ “CNY SPCA Collects Strays,” *Syracuse Post Standard*, 1954, Public Welfare – Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: 1920 –, OHA.

¹⁹ “Pet Birth Rate a Growing Problem,” *Syracuse Post Standard*, 1973, Public Welfare – Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: 1920 –, OHA.

²⁰ “Dogs Roam Streets and Many Die,” *Syracuse Journal*, November 16, 1969, Public Welfare – Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: 1920 –, OHA.

²¹ “SPCA Clean Up of Untagged Dogs,” *Syracuse Post Standard*, 1950, Public Welfare – Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: 1920 –, OHA.

²² “Pets: Wasted,” *Syracuse Herald*, October 22, 1978, Public Welfare – Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: 1920 –, OHA.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ “Pet Birth Rate a Growing Problem.”

owned dogs—specifically, leashed and licensed dogs—were considered acceptable city pets, while stray or at-large dogs were considered objects of fear and disgust.

This fear grew as the number of reported dog bites increased by sixty-five percent in Onondaga County between 1993 and 2000, with about half of the bites taking place in the city of Syracuse.²⁵ Yet, not all dogs were targeted as threats. For the same seven-year period, reports of pit bull bites increased three hundred percent.²⁶ It is no surprise, then, that city officials considered a pit bull ban in 2000, but the idea was reduced to a “dangerous dog” ordinance that is seldom enforced due to complaints by animal rights groups and responsible pit bull owners that the law unfairly discriminates against pit bulls.²⁷

Still, pit bulls are disproportionately affected by negative public perceptions. Despite being illegal in all fifty states, dog fighting made a comeback in the 1980s, and the pit bull was its dog of choice. It was also the preferred guard dog for drug dealers and gangs, with a hugely publicized attack in 1987 where a pit bull guarding a marijuana crop in California mauled and killed a two year-old boy (Associated Press 1987). It is no coincidence, then, that a *U.S. News and World Report* article published later that year named pit bulls “The Most Dangerous Dog[s] in America” (Twining, Arluke, and Patronek 2000).

This distinction, however, is misleading. According to the American Temperament Test Society (ATTS), a national not-for-profit organization that provides a uniform temperament evaluation of purebred and spayed/neutered mixed-breed dogs, pit bulls are among the most well tempered breeds. The test measures “different aspects of temperament such as stability, shyness, aggressiveness, and friendliness as well as the dog’s instinct for protectiveness toward its handler

²⁵ “County Launches Effort to Educate on Dog Bites,” *Syracuse Post Standard*, April 19, 2001, Public Welfare – Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: 1920 –, OHA.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ “Pit Bull Ban Urged in City,” *Syracuse Journal*, August 3, 2000, Public Welfare – Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: 1920 –, OHA.

and/or self-preservation in the face of a threat” (American Temperament Test Society 2014b). Of the 870 American Pit Bull Terriers tested as of 2013, 755 passed the ATTS Temperament Test, representing an 86.8 percent pass rate—higher than 121 other breeds, including the Golden Retriever. Similarly, of the 657 American Staffordshire Terriers tested, 555 passed, representing an 84.5 percent pass rate (American Temperament Test Society 2014a).

Conclusion

According to Heidi Nast, “it is now mainstream and apropos in many places to consider pets as subjects which are in many ways equal to humans” (2006, 894). This consideration of pets as equal to humans is representative of a very specific moment in time. This moment, which is unlike any other, cannot be fully understood without considering how we arrived here. Our current relationship with pets is part of a larger history that includes all human-animal relations since humans’ first encounter with animals.

Specifically, modern pet-keeping is part of the legacy left behind by nineteenth-century animal control. Animals—especially horses—took on new roles as cities expanded. As a result, the growth of cities produced new human-animal relationships, which, unfortunately, were often defined by abuse. The abundance of horses, however, combined with the compactness of cities, created a level of exposure to abuse that might have gone unnoticed in a different setting. Thus, the specific combination of animals and cities in the nineteenth century prompted the formation of animal welfare organizations. These organizations, along with parallel social and cultural trends like the domestic ethic of kindness, redefined what was considered acceptable human behavior toward animals and affected how humans and animals interact everyday.

The history of animal control and welfare informs modern animal management practices and highlights the significance of animals in cities. Every U.S. city must provide some level of animal management, which is vital to the order and function of the city. Despite its importance, geographers have failed to acknowledge the everyday relevance of animal management and its impact on both human and animal lives. Thus, this chapter provides the foundation necessary for understanding contemporary animal management practices (see Chapter 4) and makes a case for why geographers should pay attention to animals in the city.

CHAPTER 4: THE DARK SIDE OF PET LOVE: CONTEMPORARY ANIMAL MANAGEMENT IN SYRACUSE, NEW YORK

Americans love their pets and treat them like family; they also kill millions of pets each year. This is perplexing. From 1970 to 2010, the number of pet dogs and cats in American homes increased from about 67 million to roughly 164 million. Meanwhile, irresponsible pet-keeping practices, over breeding, and abandonment continue to increase surplus pet populations. As a result, animal shelters take in about eight million surplus animals annually, but are forced to euthanize nearly half (Humane Society of the United States 2014a).

While shelter euthanasia is a contested topic and has received a great deal of media attention, the mass killing of animals is not new or uncommon. Large-scale hunting and fishing operations and agro-industrial slaughter systems kill animals by the billions every year in the United States alone (Burt 2006; Marvin 2006; Ufkes 1998). Yet, while animal shelters kill far fewer animals than hunters, fishermen, and meatpacking companies, Americans are particularly disturbed by shelter euthanasia. This is due in part to modern pet-keeping practices and the deep emotional attachment Americans have for their pets.

Americans' love for pets, however, is part of a larger contradiction. On the one hand, pet love has brought awareness to shelter euthanasia. Pets, especially dogs, are increasingly considered members of the family, a sentiment that conflicts with euthanasia trends and makes pet lovers uncomfortable (Power 2008). Since the 1970s, the annual number of dogs and cats euthanized in animal shelters has decreased from twelve million to roughly four million (Humane Society of the United States 2014b). While this is an improvement, animal advocates consider current euthanasia rates intolerable.

On the other hand, pet love has helped perpetuate pet overpopulation (and subsequently animal shelter intake and euthanasia) through irresponsible pet-keeping practices, such as overbreeding, failure to spay and neuter, and abandonment. Thus, the desire to keep pets, the ability to produce and consume pets as commodities, and the practice of irresponsible pet ownership help maintain the current animal shelter and euthanasia system in the United States. Surplus dogs and cats continuously enter animal shelters and are euthanized by the millions while Americans create more surplus pets. This system is surprising, especially considering Americans' love for their pets. Yet, geographers have failed to examine the importance of animal control, the geography of animal shelters, and the pervasiveness of animal euthanasia in the United States. Pets are socially, ethically, and economically important (see Chapter 2). Therefore, equally important is their management, which takes many shapes and requires collaboration among multiple organizations. These organizations, however, do not always cooperate.

Such is the case in Syracuse, New York. Upon beginning my research, I set out to understand how the city manages surplus dogs. I intended to use interviews with key people from animal control, animal rescues and shelters, and animal advocacy and welfare groups to illuminate this topic. However, I had difficulty gaining access to participants and setting up interviews, and when I was able to interview participants, they often were not forthcoming. Therefore, this chapter examines two things: First, drawing on the geographic literature on qualitative methods, I reflect on the methodological challenges I encountered. Second, using the data I was able to collect, I discuss the existence and management of surplus dogs in Syracuse.

Participant Resistance

Of the organizations where I interviewed, I spent the most time at Helping Hounds Dog Rescue, a non-profit organization that works to find permanent homes for rescue dogs in the Central New York area.¹ Helping Hounds is located in a former veterinary clinic off Erie Boulevard, a high traffic, local artery running through the city of Syracuse. The facility is set back from the Boulevard and shares a parking lot with the Shoppingtown Mall. A simple green and white sign advertises Helping Hounds, dwarfed in comparison to the Macy's department store sign that towers above the single-story rescue. Volunteers exit through the rescue's back door with leashed dogs. Keeping a controlled distance from the dog ahead, volunteers walk the dogs in circles around the parking lot then reenter through the back of the rescue like a revolving door of adoptable dogs. Four outdoor pens line the side of the building where dogs are rotated in and out throughout the day to enjoy extra time outside. Inside, crates and pens occupy most of the available floor space. The layout is awkward—originally intended as an office, not a rescue—but not uncomfortable. Dog beds offer relief from the cold linoleum floor, and chew toys provide entertainment for dogs awaiting permanent homes.

The primary purpose of animal rescues and shelters like Helping Hounds is to house—and oftentimes dispose of—surplus animals, mostly dogs and cats. Yet, before entering an animal rescue or shelter, dogs and cats generally go through animal control first. Upon finding an abandoned dog in a public park in Syracuse (see Chapter 1), I was surprised to learn that local shelters cannot directly take in stray dogs. “We get in big trouble if we take in strays,” a staff member at Helping Hounds Dog Rescue informed me after I brought in the abandoned dog.² The rescue was, however, able to accept “owner surrenders,” and the staff suggested if I house the

¹ All interviews were conducted in confidentiality, and the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement. The names of all organizations are real.

² Conversation with employee at Helping Hounds Dog Rescue, June 2013.

dog in my residence for a week (thus claiming ownership), then I could legally surrender the dog to the rescue. I received a similar response from the CNY SPCA, who further informed me that Dog Control was exclusively responsible for collecting stray dogs.

When formally asked to elaborate on these practices, however, many animal management organizations in Syracuse were reluctant to participate in interviews. Upon beginning my research, I did not anticipate this reluctance because, at the time, I was unaware of the risks involved in participating. After many failed attempts, I finally landed some interviews that revealed the dangers of participation. Several interviewees admitted that relationships between animal control, animal rescues and shelters, and animal advocacy and welfare organizations were tenuous and that speaking candidly about other organizations could be harmful if word got back to those organizations. Participation, therefore, posed two major threats. First, if participation itself or the information shared during interviews was perceived negatively by other organizations, it could further strain already delicate relationships and lead to a lack of cooperation. Second, and of most concern to participants, a lack of cooperation could impact dog rescue rates, as organizations rescue fewer animals when they do not work together.

My research design relied heavily on interviews to answer my research questions. I mailed letters, sent emails, made phone calls, and visited facilities to request interviews. In most cases, I had to use a combination of approaches, using each approach several times, before an interview was arranged. Of the ten animal management organizations I pursued, two immediately agreed to interviews, four eventually agreed to interviews, three agreed but never followed through, and one evaded my requests altogether. Similar to Patricia Adler and Peter Adler's (1987) *membership* levels, which assign peripheral, active, and complete member status to qualitative researchers in the field, I discovered three *access* levels during my own field

experience: immediate, delayed, and denied. Immediate access to participants was occasionally granted, albeit rarely. Two of the ten groups I pursued agreed to interviews on the spot. In both cases, I stopped by their facilities unannounced and, by chance, was given permission to conduct interviews immediately. More common was delayed access, where participants eventually agreed to interviews but only after many requests or negotiations. This process, although time consuming and often frustrating, was worthwhile once an interview was secured. Many times, however, I repeated this process without success, as several organizations denied my interview requests.

Delayed access to participants contributes to Beverly Mullings's (1999) argument that positionalities—the ways a researcher describes his or her social position in relation to participants—are dynamic across time and space. Mullings argues that researchers must seek positional spaces, or “areas where the situated knowledges of both parties in the interview encounter, engender a level of trust and co-operation,” to acquire data (Mullings 1999, 340). In overcoming participants' reluctance, I was essentially able to find positional spaces wherein both the participants and I were comfortable conducting interviews. This was possible, for the length of the interview at least, because our positionalities complimented each other. Mullings argues that complimentary positional spaces “are often transitory and cannot be reduced to the familiar boundaries of insider/outsider privilege based on visible attributes such as race, gender, ethnicity, and class” and that researchers should seek positional spaces that are not informed by identity-based characteristics (1999, 340). However, similarities in race, gender, ethnicity, and class were crucial to landing my interviews. As a white, female, upper-middle-class American interviewing other white, (mostly) female, upper-middle-class Americans, these similarities were undoubtedly

helpful when seeking positional spaces and central to building the trust necessary to obtain interviews.

Along with interview data, I also collected historical data on animal management from the Onondaga Historical Association (see Chapter 3). While animal management is a hallmark of modern cities, it originally stems from nineteenth-century livestock removal laws and public health initiatives. During this time, cities were building and improving upon water, sewage, and waste management systems and making advancements in scientific knowledge regarding the causes of communicable diseases (American Public Health Association 2014). Animals represented a major threat to all of the above (producing large quantities of waste and carrying a myriad of diseases), and horses, still the main source of transportation in nineteenth-century cities, meant the continuation of stables, manure, and masses of flies. In response, authorities worked tirelessly to rid cities of animal contaminants through the enactment of street-cleaning departments and animal laws requiring the removal of livestock and livestock waste from public areas, thus laying the foundation for new forms of animal control (Duffy 1992).

Most advancements in animal control, however, were made during the post-World War II era, as Americans began to change their attitudes toward pets (specifically dogs) and to embrace new modes of consumer culture. Heidi Nast argues, “a new and highly commodified valuation of, and love affair with, pet animals has coincided politically, libidinally, and economically with the demise of industrialization and the rise of post-industrial spaces and intensified consumption” (2006b, 302). Consequently, Americans’ “love affair” with pets, particularly during the 1990s,

was a primary motivation for improved animal control and welfare and prompted support for a “no-kill” animal shelter movement in the United States (Winograd 2009).³

The no-kill movement, however, has not reached Syracuse. While many rescues and shelters (like Helping Hounds) have adopted a no-kill policy, the Dewitt Animal Hospital (the city-funded facility responsible for taking in dogs collected by Dog Control) has not implemented a no-kill policy due to practical and economic constraints. Such constraints include caring for a never-ending influx of surplus dogs on a narrow budget. Thus, gaining access to participants at the Dewitt Animal Hospital and other animal management organizations was difficult due to the everyday reality that many individuals were simply too busy to respond to interview requests or to take time out of their schedules to grant interviews.⁴ Animal management organizations were largely under-staffed, and individuals were overworked. As a result, finding time to meet with me during their busy and irregular schedules was, for some, next to impossible. A lack of face-time with participants meant that I had to turn to email to solicit participants and correspond with them before and after the interview process.

Email was essential for three reasons. First, many of the small animal management organizations did not provide phone numbers or mailing addresses. This was because many of the organizations were run by volunteers (with no paid staff) and located at volunteers’ homes. Thus, due to privacy and safety concerns, email addresses were provided in lieu of phone numbers and home addresses. As a result, I was unable to call, mail letters to, or walk-in on organizations directly. Second, even when phone numbers and addresses were available (mostly at larger organizations), I was often given a work email address rather than an office telephone

³ A “no-kill” shelter is an animal shelter that does not euthanize adoptable animals or euthanize when the shelter is full. Instead, animals are only euthanized if they are terminally ill or considered dangerous (Winograd 2009).

⁴ The Dewitt Animal Hospital ignored my requests for an interview.

extension. Participants were more comfortable with email because it allowed them the time to think about responses, screen for unwanted solicitors, and develop preliminary relationships without the awkwardness or pressure of real-time and face-to-face communication. Finally, email was a practical means of communication for many individuals who did not hold nine to five office jobs. Many participants were away from their desks for much of the day or held unrelated day jobs and focused on animal management in the evenings. This meant that scheduling a time to talk on the phone or meet in person was often difficult to coordinate, making email the most logical mode of communication.

Despite the mode of communication, interviews presented a variety of challenges. Namely, I am skeptical about the quality of information I received from participants. My skepticism is four-fold. First, many participants were reluctant to participate in interviews in the first place, leading me to believe they were privy to information they did not want me to know. Second, many participants bad-mouthed other participants, making it difficult to determine if what was said was true or said out of angst, or both. Third, many participants warned that other participants might simply tell me what I wanted to hear, rather than the truth. Finally, interviews were often rushed, interrupted, and cut short, leaving me unable to ask clarifying questions.

Such behavior from participants, however, was not surprising due to the tension surrounding animal management practices in Syracuse. Newspaper articles regarding the euthanasia policy of the Dewitt Animal Hospital placed animal control, animal rescues and shelters, and animal advocacy and welfare organizations under public scrutiny (Knauss 2013a, 2013b). This made my requests for interviews particularly unwelcome. Regardless of my good intentions, participants were skeptical of my presence, as other outsider inquiries had proved detrimental. Such scrutiny also put pressure on the relationships among animal management

organizations. Just as they did not trust me, it was obvious that they did not trust each other. This was made apparent during interviews when, on numerous occasions, participants outwardly disparaged other organizations. As a result, I had to be honest about my research intentions and relationships with other organizations without betraying participants' privacy and trust.

This balancing act brought forth questions of responsibility. Namely, *what* exactly was I responsible for and to whom? I was responsible for my actions in the field and my own words—both spoken and written. I was responsible for representing participants' actions and words honestly and accurately. But, was I responsible for the *content* of their behavior? In other words, despite participants knowing the justifications and potential outcomes of my research, was it my responsibility to censor their behavior? If so, could my research still be considered honest and accurate? If not, what negative consequences could participants incur? It was a lose-lose situation: either I protected participants and omitted part of my data or ran the risk of speaking (potentially inaccurately and with unknown consequences) for participants.

Such debates are not new to qualitative researchers. Linda Alcoff recognizes the problem of speaking for others primarily as “a concern with accountability and responsibility” (1991, 16). She argues that sufficient research alone is not enough for the researcher to justify his or her claims. Instead, more attention must be paid to the researcher's social location and discursive practices. Namely, Alcoff calls for the use of dialogue (i.e. speaking “with” rather than “to” others) and the development of “strategies for a more equitable, just distribution of the ability to speak and be heard” (1991, 29). Speaking with, rather than for, participants allows for more equitable research relationships and data collection. However, many of the subjects I support are animals. Thus, my research moves beyond simply *speaking with* (rather than for) human subjects

to *advocating for* more-than-human subjects. Doing so is tricky, as animals cannot communicate the same way humans do.

Geographies of Control

The tense social climate surrounding animal management in Syracuse makes collaboration difficult. In 2012, Syracuse Dog Control picked up 910 dogs. Of those, 573 (sixty-three percent) were euthanized (Knauss 2013a). Statistically, dogs collected in Syracuse are more likely to be euthanized than dogs collected in other cities in Upstate New York.⁵ Recently, the DeWitt Animal Hospital renewed its contract with the City of Syracuse to accept dogs picked up by Dog Control. This decision upset many animal advocates in the community because of DeWitt's euthanasia policy. Due to the large volume of dogs picked up by Dog Control annually, no-kill shelters in the area do not have the space or resources necessary to provide the service. DeWitt, on the other hand, a private, for-profit facility, is only required to hold an unlicensed dog for five days or a licensed dog for ten days, after which they may euthanize it (Knauss 2013b).

Consequently, many dog rescues and shelters identified the need for more space as a primary concern. "We would love to expand our facility to house more dogs," a staff member at Wanderers' Rest Humane Association informed me.⁶ Unfortunately, finding the budget to do so

⁵ Stray dog survival rates from 2011 and 2012 in five major cities in Upstate New York:

- Ithaca, including Tompkins County (2011): Tompkins County Animal Control, a division of the local SPCA, picked up 534 dogs. Of those, 75 (14%) were euthanized.
- Albany (2012): Animal Control picked up 323 dogs and delivered them to the Mohawk Hudson Humane Society. Of those, 57 dogs (18%) were euthanized.
- Buffalo (2011): Animal Control picked up 1,850 dogs and delivered them to the city animal shelter. Of those, 676 (37%) were euthanized.
- Rochester (2012): Animal Control picked up 3,093 dogs and delivered them to the city animal shelter. Of those, 1,544 (50%) were euthanized.
- Syracuse (2012): Dog Control picked up 910 dogs and delivered them to private contractor DeWitt Animal Hospital. Of those, 573 (63%) were euthanized (Knauss 2013b).

⁶ Interview with employee at Wanderers' Rest Humane Association, July 2013.

is nearly impossible for most small shelters. Larger shelters, like the CNY SPCA, have a slightly easier time fundraising. “If there’s a special case—a certain dog in need or a project that needs funding—we can put out an advertisement and have fifty-thousand dollars in donations by the end of the week,” reported one CNY SPCA employee.⁷

Helping Hounds Dog Rescue also relies heavily on private donations to support their mission. With room for about fifty dogs, the staff at Helping Hounds rely on volunteers to donate their time (as well as money) to walk, play with, feed, and clean up after the dogs. An elderly volunteer arrives every morning before sunup to begin a never-ending laundry cycle. Other volunteers, ranging in age from pre-teen to late-sixties, arrive throughout the day to help maintain the facility and care for the dogs. One volunteer drives to the rescue everyday on her lunch break to train one-on-one with a special needs dog named Stewart, the rescue’s longest resident. After three years of living at Helping Hounds, Stewart has finally found a permanent home—thanks, no doubt, to the volunteer who dedicated her time to training him.

With a rising concern for animal welfare in the United States, animal management services have evolved to meet the public’s changing values. A dramatic shift from dog pounds, where minimal care was provided to animals, to animal welfare organizations, where information and resources are provided to help both animals and the community, has already occurred. However, sufficient funding for such services is difficult to attain, despite private donations. Even the ASPCA, one of the United States’ oldest and most well-established animal welfare organizations, has had trouble obtaining proper funding for animal management services since the Society’s founding in the late-nineteenth century. In 1894, the New York City government placed the ASPCA in charge of animal control, and the public celebrated its more humane methods of managing animals. Affording humane methods, however, was more costly than

⁷ Interview with employee at the Central New York SPCA, July 2013.

previous methods of animal control, which included killing sprees and other cruel practices. One hundred years after its original partnership with the City of New York to provide animal control, the ASPCA's contract expired, and the Society made a decision not to renew. The job had drained the Society's resources, which were steadily declining since 1956 due to the exorbitant cost of providing animal control service (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 2014b).

Lack of adequate funding for animal control not only decreases efficiency but also compounds the issue of animal overpopulation. According to animal control expert Geoffrey Handy:

An effective animal control program not only saves cities and counties on present costs—by protecting citizens from dangerous dogs, for example—but it also helps reduce the cost of animal control in the future. A city that impounds and euthanizes 4,000 animals in 2001—at a cost of \$50 to \$90 per animal—but does not promote spaying and neutering will probably still euthanize 4,000 animals a year in 2010. A city that euthanizes 4,000 animals a year in 2001 and institutes differential licensing, funds a subsidized spay/neuter program, and has an educational program for both adults and children will likely euthanize significantly fewer animals in 2010 and save on a host of other animal-related costs as well. (2000, 18)

In the United States, animal control is a government responsibility but local officials may outsource the service, depending on the availability of resources. If maintained by the public sector, the question becomes where to place animal control within government departments. Generally, public animal control programs are found in public safety (police/sheriff) departments, code compliance departments, public health departments, or as their own, separate departments. Designating animal control as part of a law enforcement, code compliance, or health related service, however, gives it a greater ability to enforce animal law (Aronson 2010).

Unfortunately, Syracuse Dog Control is found within the Department of Parks and Recreation, an odd placement for the service, according to members of several local rescues, due

to its limited authority to enforce animal law. Its placement within Parks and Recreation, however, while not ideal from a law enforcement standpoint, is economically advantageous, as the Parks and Recreation department is adequately funded. According to one Dog Control employee, all their material needs are adequately met: “Equipment wise, uniform wise—the stuff that the officers need—the city, from day one, since I’ve worked here, has been spectacular as far as giving them what they need. No complaints there at all.”⁸ Yet, these services are largely in support of human health and safety, not animal welfare. Syracuse Dog Control does not handle any animal cruelty cases; they are primarily responsible for collecting stray dogs and delivering them to the Dewitt Animal Hospital. Separate units, namely animal cruelty investigators at the Syracuse Police Department and CNY SPCA, handle cruelty cases directly. Their law enforcement statuses allow investigators to inspect possible cases of cruelty, seize abused animals, and punish offenders.

In September 2012, the Syracuse Police Department designated Officer Rebecca Thompson as the department’s first animal cruelty investigator who, in conjunction with the CNY SPCA, investigates animal cruelty in Syracuse. Officer Thompson covers the criminal nature of animal abuse while the CNY SPCA handles the care and custody of the animals that are seized (Baker 2012). “We follow up on every single complaint,” one investigator informed me regarding the CNY SPCA’s cruelty hotline, where concerned citizens can report complaints of animal cruelty, neglect, and abandonment via telephone, email, or online form. This requires constant attention, as citizens report new complaints everyday in Syracuse. “The stuff we see... It’s just awful. Heartbreaking.”⁹

⁸ Interview with employee at Syracuse Dog Control, June 2013.

⁹ Interview with cruelty investigator at the Central New York SPCA, August 2013.

Undoubtedly, individuals involved in animal management in Syracuse care about animals. However, certain displays of care are valued more than others. “We’ve had problems in the past with female investigators because they can be too emotional,” reported an employee at the CNY SPCA.¹⁰ Thus, the “emotional female” is valued less as a cruelty investigator than the “rational male.” It is no surprise, then, that cruelty investigators and animal control agents in Syracuse are almost exclusively male. These positions are stereotyped as physically demanding and dangerous, dealing with barking dogs, dog attacks, sick and injured dogs, and roaming dogs. Conversely, staff and volunteers at Syracuse animal rescues, shelters, and welfare organizations, whose responsibilities include caring and finding permanent homes for unwanted dogs, are overwhelmingly female. Thus, a clear division of labor exists between the men who *collect* surplus dogs and the women who *care* for surplus dogs.

The placement of animal welfare organizations within public and private sectors creates a further division of labor. In the United States, animal control remains largely a municipal function, while animal welfare is largely handled by non-profit organizations. Both, however, frequently lack adequate funding (Pietroburgo 2012). Geoffrey Handy writes:

The most common obstacle to establishing an effective animal care and control program... is the problem of funding. As a general rule, in 2000, adequate funding of an animal care and control program costs at least \$4 per citizen annually. However, city and county officials are often tempted to strip down animal control programs to the point of ineffectiveness, or they insist that pet registration (licensing) and other fees pay for all or most of the program. (2000, 17)

Thus, privatizing animal control and care services is an attractive option for municipalities lacking proper funding, infrastructure, or training for such programs. Such is the case in Syracuse, whose municipal dog control department partners with the Dewitt Animal Hospital—a private facility—to care for surplus dogs. Generally, programs combining public, private, and

¹⁰ Interview with employee at the Central New York SPCA, July 2013.

non-profit entities provide humane yet cost-effective animal control methods and often lead to better outcomes for animals. Not only do these public-private partnerships merge resources, expertise, and personnel, but they also offer “the potential for a dramatic improvement in government response to the public interest concern of controlling and caring for stray and homeless animal populations” (Pietroburgo 2012, 2-3).

While animal control is a mandatory public service, governments often contract it out to private partners. A trend toward privatization gained popularity in the late 1970s and 1980s under new neoliberal regimes, the rationale being that under a competitive market system, private vendors could provide higher quality services at lower prices, thus eliminating inefficiency in the public sector (Harvey 2005). However, public-private partnerships within animal control have existed in the United States since the mid-nineteenth century, predating the era of neoliberalism and the trend toward privatization by more than a century. Further, these partnerships are not always effective. Despite public-private partnering in Syracuse, over half of the dogs collected by Dog Control—a public service—and delivered to the Dewitt Animal Hospital—a private business—are euthanized.

From start to finish, each surplus dog in Syracuse travels to various locations and is filtered through diverse systems. First, a surplus dog thinks and moves freely, often crossing municipal, county, and state lines. Once collected by Syracuse Dog Control, however, the dog’s agency is limited and largely dictated by her captor. From the street, the dog is taken directly to the Dewitt Animal Hospital, where she is then processed and placed in a kennel. Ideally, this process ends in adoption. However, other outcomes include return to owner (if the dog’s owner comes forward), transfer to a foster (a temporary home where an animal can await adoption), or euthanasia.

To increase the likelihood of adoption, the Dewitt Animal Hospital participates in local animal transfers, wherein they transport dogs otherwise destined for euthanasia to other rescues and shelters with higher adoption rates, like Helping Hounds. Less than one mile away from the Dewitt Animal Hospital, Helping Hounds benefits from a high-traffic location as well as the luxury of choosing which dogs they accept, unlike the Dewitt Animal Hospital which is forced to accept every dog picked up by Dog Control. Helping Hounds partners with out-of-state rescues and shelters to handpick their dogs (mostly non-pit bull breeds that are likely to be adopted quickly). Their partners enter high-kill shelters in Tennessee, Alabama, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Texas, and temperament test “staff favorites,” pulling adoptable dogs that would otherwise be euthanized due to overcrowding. Once the chosen dogs are pulled, they are transported by planes, private transport companies, and volunteer networks to Helping Hounds, where they await adoption. As a result, Helping Hounds has a nearly perfect adoption rate, while less than one mile away, hundreds of dogs are euthanized at the Dewitt Animal Hospital every year.

This transport system is highly contested among animal rescues and shelters in Syracuse, but most animal management organizations I interviewed were reluctant to share too much information. “We’ve worked really hard to form good working relationships with other rescues. We don’t always agree with their practices. But we can’t criticize them either. There’s a lot of walking on egg shells,” a board member of the Animal Alliance of Greater Syracuse, a local animal advocacy group, informed me.¹¹ On the one hand, Helping Hounds saves dogs from the South who are otherwise destined for euthanasia. Their dogs vary in breed, age, and size, ensuring that there is enough variety to keep adopters in Syracuse satisfied. On the other hand, other local rescues and shelters argue that transporting dogs from the South to Syracuse creates

¹¹ Interview with board member of the Animal Alliance of Greater Syracuse, July 2013.

competition, making it more difficult for local dogs (mainly pit bulls) to get adopted. In response, Helping Hounds eliminates breed competition by purposefully choosing non-pit bull breeds for transportation. Still, many rescues and shelters disagree with long-distance transport, arguing that the transfer of dogs from out of state still creates competition for local dogs (despite pulling non-pit bull breeds).

Conclusion

Overall, resistance from animal management organizations to participate in my interviews highlights the tense conditions under which these organizations operate everyday. Fear of public criticism and the possibility of straining already-fragile relationships leave participants reluctant to share sensitive information. Further, tensions among local animal management organizations make collaboration difficult, leading to a decreased ability to save surplus dogs. Thus, euthanasia rates remain high in Syracuse, a material consequence and everyday reminder of a flawed animal management system.

Two main tensions weaken this system. First, animal control and animal welfare have opposing missions. Cities exercise animal control in the name of *human* health and safety, while advocates promote animal welfare in the name of *animal* health and safety. Thus, animal management organizations often clash, and animals suffer from their inefficiency. Second, tensions exist between saving money and saving lives. Rescuing animals is extremely costly. Therefore, animal management organizations have turned to euthanasia as a cost-cutting necessity.

Though euthanasia rates in Syracuse are high, they are not insurmountable. Despite tensions among animal management groups, the outlook is positive. A board member of Cuse Pit

Crew, a local pit bull advocacy organization, commented, “Just like Civil Rights and women’s rights, we’re now fighting for animal rights. We’ve seen a lot of changes for the better. It’s finally the dogs’ time.”¹² But *which* dogs? While animal control and welfare practices are slowly improving, social and cultural prejudices leave certain dogs (namely, pit bulls) at greater risk of euthanasia than others (see Chapter 5).

¹² Interview with board member of Cuse Pit Crew, July 2013.

CHAPTER 5: THE PIT BULL PROBLEM: EMOTIONS AND “AMERICA’S MOST DANGEROUS DOG”

Every animal shelter is different. Unfortunately, though, some shelter characteristics are quite common. Rows of kennels house unwanted dogs. Usually, a single dog occupies each kennel, with new dogs leaving (via adoption or euthanasia) and entering every day—a testament to the never-ending supply of surplus dogs in the United States. The dogs bark constantly. The noise bounces off concrete walls and echoes through the kennels like firecrackers in a tin can. Urine and bleach permeate the air.

There are approximately 13,600 animal shelters nationwide, many of which fit the above description (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 2014c). Of the six to eight million animals who enter these shelters annually, a majority are pit bulls, averaging about thirty-three percent of shelter intakes (D’Addio 2011). Recently, pit bulls have received much negative publicity and earned a fearsome reputation. This reputation stems from a series of well-publicized attacks by pit bulls and has led to a general dislike of the breed (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 2014f). Thus, it is impossible to discuss animal shelters (and animal management more broadly) without discussing pit bulls. The plight of the pit bull, however, is not inherent to the breed. Rather, its reputation is socially constructed.

Kay Anderson (1995) argues that nature as a whole is socially constructed. She develops her argument using the zoo, which she views as “a cultural institution which reflects not nature itself—as if such an unmediated thing exists—but a human adaptation of the ensemble of life forms that bears the name ‘nature’” (Anderson 1995, 276). Anderson discusses the transformation of the modern zoo—from nineteenth-century “pleasure gardens” to twentieth-

century conservatories—to show how humans have engaged historically in cultural self-definition against an animal other. She goes on to argue that zoos represent humans' boundary-making activities and, ultimately, that zoo agendas reflect cultural agendas. These boundary-making activities and cultural agendas, however, are part of a larger social project. Anderson argues that throughout the twentieth century, zoos became part of a “quest for regulation and control of those whose difference was in some way threatening” (1995, 292). Here, Anderson channels, but does not quite articulate, the role of emotion in humans' desire to manage nature. Furthering Anderson's claim, I argue that humans' boundary-making activities and desire to manage nature reflect and reproduce human emotions.

According to Anderson, regulating and controlling animals is one of the most common ways humans attempt to create boundaries with nature. Anderson focuses on the zoo as a space where nature (in this case, animals) is abstracted and shaped by, and for, humans. While zoo-keeping undoubtedly facilitates important human-animal relationships, it is certainly not the most common means of doing so, as pet-keeping is now the closest form of human-animal interaction (Fox 2006). These interactions, I argue, are bound by human emotion. Thus, this chapter examines how geographies of emotion produce and transform cultural understandings of human-animal relationships. In particular, it explores how specific human emotions toward dogs are created and why these emotions are both complicated and contradictory. I further argue that the designation of the dog as “man's best friend” is reserved for specific types of dogs. “Dangerous breeds”—historically, bloodhounds, German shepherds, Doberman pinchers, and now pit bulls—are often excluded from this category not due to an innate incompatibility with humans but rather to cultural designations of fear (Delise 2007).

Emotional and Animal Geographies

Scholars criticize emotion as being the antithesis of reason and objectivity, thus explaining its near absence in geography (Bondi, Davidson, and Smith 2007). A new trend has emerged, however, that recognizes the omnipresence of emotion not only in everyday life but also in the discipline. According to Ben Anderson, the ability of emotions to intersect with nearly every aspect of life “means that there can never be a carefully circumscribed affectual or emotional geography separate from other geographies” (2013, 454). This overlap between emotional and other geographies is most obvious at the scale of the body, as the body is the foremost site of emotional experience (Davidson and Milligan 2004). “Recognition of the inherently emotional nature of embodiment,” Joyce Davidson and Christine Milligan argue, “has led many to the conclusion that we need to explore how we feel—as well as think—*through* ‘the body’” (2004, 523). The use of “the body” refers specifically to the human body and signifies how embodied emotions shape the human experience of “being-in-the-world.” Emotional geography foregrounds the body as “a site of feeling and experience” and focuses on “a psychological subject, where thoughts and affects are entangled in complex and devious ways” (Pile 2010, 12).

While emotional geography’s focus on human subjects allows for its intersection with nearly every topic in human geography, its influence is virtually undetected in animal geography. Animal geography moves beyond humans to include more-than-human subjects to gain a fuller understanding of social and cultural practices. Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel argue, “taking geographical approaches to the animal question, or the issue of human-animal relations, will generate rich and provocative ideas” (1998, xiii). Their call for geographers to study human-animal relations rests on the knowledge that humans are always, and have always been, involved in social, cultural, and ecological relationships with animals (Philo and Wilbert 2000). This has

prompted geographers to explore how animals “leave imprints on particular places, regions, and landscapes over time, prompting studies of animals and place” (Emel, Wilbert, and Wolch 2002, 409). Cultural ideas about animals evolve in place over time due to social and technological changes, the outcome being a “shifting but place-specific ensemblage of animals valued and used according to particular, legitimized codes” (Elder, Wolch, and Emel 1998, 86). Thus, this is an ideal place for the intersection of animal and emotional geographies.

The overlapping geographies of pets and emotion are especially relevant. Today, companionship is the most important facet of pet keeping, as evidenced by centuries of selective breeding in dogs and cats to ensure their compatibility with humans (Bain 2007). Therefore, when the bond between humans and pets is broken (i.e. when a dog attacks a human or when a human abuses a dog), humans often react emotionally (Twining, Arluke, and Patronek 2000).

This intersection between animal and emotional geography is rich yet underdeveloped and overlaps with the new “policy turn” in geography, as emotions now have valid scholarly and political purchase (Anderson and Smith 2001). Victoria Henderson argues, however, that employing emotions in politically meaningful ways requires a “more grounded discussion of how *specific* emotions are spatialized and (re)produced across time” (2008, 28). This unpacking of emotions is particularly useful when reflecting on humans’ relationships with pets. In modern western societies, pets are often described as “part of the family,” a distinction that is as much a social classification as an emotional one (Fox 2006). This inclusion of pets as part of the family began in the early-nineteenth century when pet-keeping gained popularity alongside the domestic ethic of kindness (Grier 2006).

Specifically, dogs are at the apex of westerners’ affection for pets (Nast 2006). According to Heidi Nast:

Dogs are for the first time being formally and regularly accommodated in doggie beaches, parks, high-class hotels, cafes and restaurants; department stores and mainstream retail catalogues feature substantial selections of pet goodies; and new genres of boutiques and retail outlets for pets (many of them online) have emerged. (2006, 894)

Thus, dogs have truly earned their reputation as “man’s best friend.” This designation, however, is misleading, as not all dogs are deemed worthy of the title (Delise 2007). “Dangerous breeds,” the most publicized of which is the pit bull, are excluded from this category based on cultural designations of fear.

Geographic scholarship on fear has focused primarily on fear in urban spaces, particularly public parks (Bromley and Stacey 2012; Madge 1997), fear of crime (Hutta 2009; Smith 1987), women’s fear (Valentine 1989; Wilson and Little 2008), and their subsequent intersections (Pain 1997). Fear greatly impacts the way humans experience space and place and often limits one’s physical and social mobility (Saville 2008). Fear is felt and experienced by individual bodies but can also be mobilized and manipulated at very large scales. Thus, the mobilization and manipulation of humans’ fear of dogs is palpable at city, state, and national levels, prompting widespread panic (Swift 1987). Harkening back to Henderson’s (2008) call to unpack specific emotions categorically and historically, in the following section I examine how fear of certain breeds—especially the pit bull—is (re)produced over time and how this fear generates material and political consequences.

Pit Bull Panic

Euthanasia statistics are a frightening reality. However, they do not explain why certain places euthanize more dogs than others or why certain breeds are euthanized more than others. Of the 910 dogs picked up by Syracuse Dog Control in 2012, 573 (sixty-three percent) were euthanized,

more than any other city in Upstate New York. According to an employee at Loki Grrl, a local dog rescue, euthanasia rates are higher in Syracuse due to “less land and stricter laws within city limits. Instead of dogs staying on large rural properties or running into a neighbor’s yard, they run into the street, into I-81—right into the dog warden’s arms. There are more dogs per square inch here, so of course our euthanasia rates are higher.”¹ Yet, of the 573 dogs euthanized in 2012, seventy-five were pit bulls, which cannot be explained by land limitations or stricter laws (Knauss 2013b). Instead, pit bulls are euthanized more than other breeds due to their designation as “dangerous” and the subsequent unadoptability that accompanies this designation. Echoing common perceptions about pit bulls, an employee at Syracuse Dog Control argued:

The people that are so pro-pit bull, they say, “it’s not the dog, it’s how they’re raised.” Well, you know what, part of that is true. But there’s another part of that—even the best pit bull still has that aggressive nature towards other animals. The way I compare it to is, I have a chocolate lab that I duck hunt with. I had to teach that dog very little. It was bred to be a hunter. Pit bulls are bred to be aggressive. Like I said, I didn’t teach my dog anything. You don’t have to teach a hunting dog to hunt; you don’t have to teach a pit bull to be aggressive.²

Thus, the designation of pit bulls as “aggressive” and “dangerous” perpetuates the public’s fear of the breed, leading to fewer adoptions and increased euthanasia. A “dangerous” dog is defined as:

Any dog which a) without justification, attacks a person, companion animal or farm animal and causes physical injury or death, or (b) behaves in a manner which a reasonable person would believe poses a serious and unjustified imminent threat of serious physical injury or death to one or more persons, companion animals or farm animals. (Wolf 2014)

Often, dangerous dog designations are abused, labeling entire breeds of dogs as dangerous or vicious without regard to the temperament or behavior of individual dogs (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 2014e).

¹ Interview with employee at Loki Grrl Rescue, July 2013.

² Interview with employee at Syracuse Dog Control, June 2013.

Today's most "dangerous" dog, and therefore the most feared, is without doubt the pit bull. However, this is a recent development. Over the past 200 years, views and beliefs about canine aggression have changed, as has Americans' definition of "dangerous" dogs. Yet, the character of these breeds has changed very little (Delise 2007). Instead, Americans' perceptions of and emotions toward certain breeds have shifted alongside changes in social and cultural attitudes, as I now discuss.

Throughout the nineteenth century, large guard dog breeds gained popularity, and with their popularity came an overabundance of those breeds. Bloodhounds, Newfoundlands, mastiffs, bulldogs, German shepherds, and Doberman pinchers were all deemed (sequentially) America's favorite guard dogs—their reputations simultaneously celebrated and feared, as they were trained to attack intruders. However, when these dogs attacked non-intruders (i.e. children, family members, or innocent strangers), the public associated their role as guard dogs with unprovoked attacks, thus stigmatizing entire breeds of dogs rather than analyzing individual cases (Delise 2007). Karen Delise, Founder and Director of Research at the National Canine Research Council, argues:

While the study and examination of individual cases of fatal dog attacks on humans can provide insight into canine behavior, equally revealing is the examination of human reactions and interpretations of canine behavior after an attack. One remarkable aspect of the human/dog bond is the extreme and often emotional public reaction towards an episode of fatal canine aggression. (2007, 1)

Thus, while incidents of canine aggression are often isolated, the emotions evoked from such incidents bind events together, hence the stigmatization of specific breeds as dangerous and the

implementation of breed specific legislation (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 2014a).³

America's most "dangerous" dog of the moment is the pit bull. However, this is misleading. For one thing, the term "pit bull" does not denote a single breed of dog. Therefore, due to the vagueness of the "pit bull" label, many people have trouble recognizing a pit bull when they see one (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 2014f). Therefore, a fear of pit bulls tends to lump all pit bull-looking dogs together.

Media Attention

The media takes advantage of connections between cognition and emotion by exposing stories they know will elicit emotional responses from audiences. Specifically, events perceived as negative, uncertain, or uncontrollable (like dog attacks) are associated with fear (Roseman, Spindel, and Jose 1990). John Murry and Peter Dacin (1996) suggest that the relationship between cognition and emotion is bidirectional—cognition about events in the environment gives rise to emotions that, in turn, provide information about the environment. They argue:

Individuals experiencing negative emotions tend to analyze carefully environmental events or stimuli to determine causal links with their own emotional experience. While there have been few empirical studies in this area, research has shown that people are more likely to seek explanations for negative than positive events or outcomes. (Murry and Dacin 1996)

In other words, negative emotions prompt a detailed analysis of situations. When dogs attack, the news media identifies the dogs themselves as the source of negative emotion (Davidson 2010).

According to a staff member at the CNY SPCA, "the media likes to grab onto this stuff because it's a seller... Media is crazy sometimes. You'll be on a call and all of a sudden the media finds

³ "Breed specific legislation" is the blanket term for laws that either regulate or ban certain breeds of dogs from specific cities or municipalities in the hope of reducing dog attacks (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 2014a).

out about it and they have six camera units there and they're filming everything." Dog attacks not only inflict physical pain on subjects but also break the traditional human-dog bond that is widely celebrated in America. Thus, breaking this bond signifies more than fear of injury; it signifies a loss of control.

While pit bulls are stigmatized as dangerous today, their reputations were not always fearsome. Pit bulls originated in the nineteenth-century British Isles as ancestors of the English bulldog, a breed that looked much like today's pit bull and was originally used to "bait" bulls. In 1835, however, bull-baiting was deemed inhumane and outlawed, and dog fighting became a popular replacement. Soon, a new fighting breed was created by crossing the English bulldog with terriers to create smaller, more agile dogs. The best fighting dogs were celebrated as heroes for their courage and fortitude in the pit but were also prized for their gentleness toward humans (Hausman and Hausman 1997). Bite inhibition was encouraged through selective breeding so handlers could manage their dogs during fights, and, as a result, pit bulls gained a reputation for their trustworthy nature with humans (Garber 1996).

In the nineteenth century, immigrants from the Isles brought pit bulls to the United States, along with their families and possessions. Valued for much more than their fighting abilities, pit bulls were used as guard dogs to protect homes from predators and worked as helpers on family farms. They were also constant companions and earned the title "nanny dog" for their gentleness, loyalty, and protection of children. The pit bull became a prominent part of American culture and was considered an "All American Dog," admired throughout much of the twentieth century for qualities that Americans like in themselves—friendly, brave, and hardworking (Garber 1996).

The 1980s, however, marked a shift in the way Americans viewed pit bulls. A series of well-publicized pit bull attacks on people tainted their once-clean image and stigmatized the

breed (Twining, Arluke, and Patronek 2000). On the one hand, the news media has an obligation to report the truth, and, unfortunately, the truth is that sometimes pit bulls attack humans. On the other hand, the news media has long been criticized for being sensationalist as well as biased (Cohen and Richardson 2002). The pit bull, more than any other breed, has born the brunt of this sensationalism, portrayed as “the archetype of canine evil, predators of the defenseless.

Unpredictable companions that kill and maim without discretion. Walking horror shows bred with an appetite for violence” (Verzemnicks 1996, quoted in Cohen and Richardson 2002, 285).

The public looks to the news media as a source of information to warn them against danger, and pit bull attacks are dangerous. However, the media preys on audiences’ emotions by highlighting “newsworthy” stories to gain viewership (DeWerth-Pallmeyer 2013). Pit bull stories are newsworthy because they are an example of an abnormal crime. The deviant behavior of a dog attacking a human is at once fascinating and horrifying. Therefore, the media sensationalizes such stories and highlights them in the news so they appear more common than they actually are (Cohen and Richardson 2002). Thus, the news media appeals to the public’s emotions by overemphasizing pit bull attacks, which, in turn, perpetuates the public’s fear of pit bulls.

Consequences and Contradictions

Prompted by the public’s fear and a barrage of negative news media, cities and states across the country have enacted legislation to regulate pit bulls. An estimated 630 American cities currently abide by breed specific pit bull legislation, a type of dangerous dog law that bans or restricts specific dog breeds based on perceptions of danger (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 2014a). Pit bulls are seen as “an abomination or disturbance in the natural order—an unacceptable threat to the perceived security and stability of the entire community and

a violation of the almost sacred image of the dog as an amiable cultural hero” (Twining, Arluke, and Patronek 2000, 2). Thus, breed-specific legislation is one way to restore order to the chaos caused by pit bulls. Similarly, Kay Anderson (1995) regards zoos as regulatory institutions, much like breed-specific legislation. She argues, “various versions of Nature were invented by [zoos] that inscribed the broader social project and rational quest for regulation and control of those whose difference was in some way threatening (Anderson 1995, 291). Comparably, breed-specific legislation regulates and controls threatening breeds. It physically and symbolically forms boundaries between humans and dogs, creating enough distance so humans can feel safe.

Pit bull bans, however, are not universal, and irresponsible breeding and failure to spay and neuter ensure that there is a large and growing population of pit bulls in the United States. Due to the combined effects of the public’s fear of pit bulls, breed-specific legislation, and insurance conflicts (many insurance companies will not cover households with pit bulls), pit bulls are difficult to find homes for. Thus, animal shelters often euthanize pit bulls due to sheer quantity and lack of resources (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 2014f).

Animal shelters are significant sites of emotion and reveal the ways emotion is dynamically tied to place. Davidson and Milligan argue that institutions shape human emotions and show how “emotional expression, if not experience, is more or less ‘governed’ by rules” (2004, 526). The rules established at animal shelters imply that killing is okay in specific cases. “Most of our euthanasia are dogs that are behaviorally unsound,” reported an employee at Wanderers’ Rest Humane Association, and most of those are pit bulls. Thus, euthanizing pit bulls is justifiable when it keeps humans safe from danger.⁴

⁴ Interview with employee at Wanderer’s Rest Humane Association, July 2013.

However, not all humans fear pit bulls, nor are all humans relieved by their deaths. On the contrary, many people love pit bulls and are saddened by shelter euthanasia. An employee at the CNY SPCA notes:

A lot of people say to me, “I don’t know how you do that, see that horrible stuff.” And you do get upset. But fortunately I’m able to block it out of myself and just do my job. What I’ve noticed, and I’m not embarrassed to say, but what I’ve noticed is, I’ll get home from work, and maybe I’ll be sitting with the kids and we’re watching something on T.V., and then all of a sudden a commercial will come on—which will be something really stupid; it doesn’t matter what it is, but it’s sad—and all of a sudden I’ll start crying. And it’s like, ok, why am I crying?⁵

While the media describes pit bulls as dangerous and, consequently, something to fear, pro-pit bull organizations are working to reverse this stigma. According to Hilary Twining, Arnold Arluke, and Gary Patronek, “in the face of social disapproval or even fear, stigmatized individuals seek to manage or respond to these adverse perceptions by relying on interpersonal strategies that minimize, neutralize, or evade their stigma” (2000, 3). Because dogs cannot do this themselves, humans are responsible for managing breed stigmas. Impression management often involves a “team” of individuals who work together to control perceptions of themselves, and some suggest that these team demonstrations of self can cross species lines, such that humans who are responsible for certain animals seek to control how other people perceive their animals (Twining, Arluke, and Patronek 2000).

Pit bull advocates care about the breed’s negative image and work tirelessly to combat the public’s fear of pit bulls by appealing to different emotions. Through social media, the power of celebrity, and humane education and outreach, pit bull advocates are trying to convince Americans that pit bulls are no more dangerous than any other dogs—and they are slowly succeeding (Minton 2013).

⁵ Interview with employee at the Central New York SPCA, July 2013.

April 2007 marked a turning point for pit bulls. Michael Vick, then quarterback of the Atlanta Falcons NFL football team, was found guilty and imprisoned for financing and participating in an illegal dog fighting ring (Gorant 2010). This case was significant for several reasons. First, the federal government brought charges against Vick and succeeded in a conviction, both of which are extremely rare in dog fighting cases and considered major developments in animal law. Second, the defendant, Michael Vick, was a high profile public figure, bringing unprecedented attention to dog fighting and animal abuse (Animal Legal Defense Fund 2011). Wayne Pacelle, President and CEO of The Humane Society of the United States, even enlisted Vick as an anti-dog fighting spokesperson upon his release from prison in an attempt to reach wider audiences in the campaign against animal cruelty (Pacelle 2011). Third, the dogs seized from the fighting ring (all of which were pit bulls) were not euthanized. Instead, they were court appointed a guardian to house the dogs and evaluate their temperaments (Animal Legal Defense Fund 2011). Of the 49 seized dogs, only one dog was recommended for euthanasia due to extreme aggression. The rest were deemed suitable for sanctuaries, shelters, foster homes, and adoption (Gorant 2010). Those 48, known as the “Vicktorious Dogs,” were celebrated as ambassadors of the breed and proof that not all pit bulls are bad (Pacelle 2011).

Thus, advocates now use the same techniques to promote pit bulls that adversaries have used for decades to disparage them. Namely, advocates use positive examples of individual pit bulls to proudly represent the breed, as opposed to adversaries who use isolated incidents of pit bull aggression to stigmatize the breed. Two Sports Illustrated magazine covers visually depict this shift in emotion. Figure 1, published in 1987, vilifies the breed with a picture of an aggressive—teeth bared, ears back—pit bull and warns, “Beware of this Dog.” Figure 2,

published in 2008 after Vick’s arrest, normalizes the breed with a picture of a curious—ears up, head tilted—pit bull with a fancy collar and leash.



Figure 1



Figure 2

As illustrated by media strategies, focusing on individual animals is an important emotional strategy. Christopher Bear and Sally Eden criticize geographers for their tendency to “focus on *groups* of animals... rather than on individuals” (2011, 337). Instead, they examine how humans encounter and make sense of animals by distinguishing between entire species and individual animals. This strategy is especially relevant to pit bulls. The media tends to take isolated examples of pit bull aggression and attach negative stereotypes to the entire breed. Thus, pit bulls (plural) are often portrayed as a public safety concern. When an individual pit bull (singular) is examined, however, it is easy for advocates to highlight the pit bull’s positive qualities. Rather than being part of the larger population—and, therefore, part of the problem—individual pit bulls are celebrated for their affectionate, obedient, and playful personalities. Thus, individual pit bulls—as opposed to the entire breed—are better able to win the hearts of the public and, consequently, redeem the breed’s image.

Conclusion

“Without doubt,” Davidson and Milligan remind readers, “our emotions *matter*. They have tangible effects on our surroundings” (2004, 524, italics in original). Specifically, humans accept, reject, and categorize dogs based on emotions, and, in turn, these emotions generate material and political consequences. Dogs often elicit positive emotions from humans, as evidenced by their designation as “man’s best friend.” However, this designation is reserved for certain types of dogs. Humans exclude pit bulls from this category due to their association with negative emotions, namely fear.

Hal Herzog (2010) refers to this fear as a “mental virus” that, like a biological virus, can erupt into an epidemic. An epidemic,” he argues, “goes through three stages. The first is slow, steady growth. Once it hits the proverbial tipping point, it spreads like fire until the third inevitable stage: burnout” (Herzog 2010, 121). Americans’ fear of pit bulls has reached epidemic proportions. The portrayal of pit bull attacks in the news media, together with the association of pit bulls with dog fighting and gangs, has led to the designation of pit bulls as dangerous. This perceived danger ignites fear from the public, which the media further sensationalizes. The resulting public panic directly impacts the well-being of pit bulls through the implementation of breed-specific legislation and euthanasia. To use Herzog’s analogy, fear of pit bulls has spread like fire over the last three decades. While pit bull advocates work tirelessly to reverse the public’s perception, fear of pit bulls is still quite palpable, as evidenced by the disproportionate number of pit bulls euthanized in animal shelters annually.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

While driving home from campus one Saturday evening, I saw two teenage boys throwing rocks at a pit bull. I parked my car and hurried over to them. “HEY!” I shouted. “Is that your dog?” The boys stared at me blankly. “Is that your dog?” I repeated. “No,” answered one of the boys. “It just followed us home.” I called to the dog, “come here, pup.” She crept over to me, tail wagging, as the boys rushed inside their house and shut the door. I walked to my car, whistled for the dog to follow, and pulled out a bag of dog treats to feed her. She was small and black, except for a patch of grey hair under her chin. Her coat was filthy, her nails were overgrown, and, like the abandoned dog I found in the park nearly two years earlier, she had no identification tags.

Having been in this situation once before, I knew to call Syracuse Dog Control. I was greeted by an answering machine:

You’ve reached the City of Syracuse Dog Control Office. Nobody is here right now to take your call. Please call back during the hours of operation, which are Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

I decided not to leave a message. Instead, I hung up and called the CNY SPCA, only to be greeted by another answering machine. “Thank you for calling the Central New York SPCA. We are currently closed.” This time, I left a message with my location, contact information, a description of the dog, and a plea for someone to help her. Then I hung up and called the Humane Association of Central New York. An agent answered. “We aren’t taking in strays at this time,” she told me. When I asked her what to do with the stray dog, she confirmed that both Dog Control and the CNY SPCA were closed for the weekend. “Sorry,” she said. “I can’t help you.”

The agent's response was frustrating but not surprising. After two years of researching animal management in Syracuse, I was well aware of the system's flaws. This thesis analyzes those flaws and suggests that animal management in the city fails to address both human and animal needs. Animal control collects surplus dogs to maintain human health and safety. Animal rescues and shelters house surplus dogs, and animal advocacy and welfare groups campaign on behalf of surplus dogs to maintain animal health and safety. Yet, neither human nor animal needs are adequately met. On weekdays after 5 p.m. and on weekends, animal control is unavailable. Therefore, residents concerned about surplus dogs, for their own or the dogs' sake, cannot adequately find help. Animal rescues and shelters are overcrowded and underfunded, and turn to euthanasia as a solution to dog overpopulation. Finally, animal advocacy and welfare groups lack the resources necessary to address these problems, leaving both humans and animals at a disadvantage.

While there have been vast improvements in animal control and welfare over the last two centuries, Syracuse has not resolved the issues facing animal management for two reasons. First, modern animal control and welfare are rooted in historical practices. Although Americans' attitudes toward animals have changed drastically since the nineteenth century, the way humans manage animals today is much the same as in the past, pointing to larger structural and systemic intractabilities. Second, many organizations—some with opposing missions—are involved in animal management in Syracuse. Tensions among these organizations make for unproductive working conditions and limit the possibility of change.

Overcoming these tensions was my biggest challenge in the field. Due to tense relationships among animal management organizations in Syracuse, many people were reluctant to participate in interviews. Overall, interviews were risky for participants. Many worried that

shared information might leak to other organizations, possibly straining already-fragile relationships, which could lead to a further lack of cooperation among animal control, animal rescues and shelters, and animal advocacy and welfare organizations. Worst of all, this lack of cooperation could have serious material consequences. Namely, when organizations do not work together, they save fewer animals.

Why should we save animals and why should geographers care? First, animals (especially pets) *matter*. They are socially, economically, and ethically important. Sixty-two percent of American households own pets, of which fifty percent consider their pets family (Associated Press 2009; Humane Society of the United States 2014a). This helps explain why Americans spent 55.7 billion dollars on their pets last year alone (American Pet Products Association 2014). Yet, despite this love for pets, Americans euthanize nearly four million dogs and cats every year. Second, pets *matter academically*. For a majority of modern western societies, pet keeping remains the closest form of human-animal relationships, but pets are largely neglected in geography, representing a huge gap in the literature.

Moreover, pets *matter geographically*. The geographies of surplus dogs and animal management organizations (i.e. the movement of surplus dogs and the location of shelters) can be seen in every city in the United States and speak to wider themes in geography concerning space, place, and scale. Pets, especially dogs, provide new frameworks for examining space. Dogs are an example of mobile nature (Fiege 2005). They move on their own, crossing a variety of human-made boundaries. They move between public and private spaces and across city, county, and state lines. This mobility poses a challenge for animal control and makes keeping order, particularly in cities, an impossible project. Dogs also complicate our understandings of place. They are welcome in some places (i.e. the home) but not others. Even these distinctions,

however, are not universal. Some dogs have free reign in the home, others are restricted to certain areas within the home, and some are not allowed inside the home at all. Likewise, dogs are allowed in public places so long as they remained leashed, but unleashed dogs are generally forbidden. Finally, dogs are visible across multiple scales. Specifically, humans attempt to control dogs at small scales (i.e. controlling dogs' bodies through spaying and neutering) to large scales (i.e. national dog control laws). As a result, different levels of government (i.e. municipal, state, and federal) are involved in controlling dogs across different spaces, places, and scales.

The way humans control animals is also temporally important, as modern animal control practices are part of the legacy left behind by nineteenth-century cities. The growth of cities produced new human-animal relationships, which were often defined by abuse. As a result, cities formed animal welfare organizations and redefined what was considered acceptable human behavior toward animals. Thus, the history of animal control and welfare informs modern animal management and highlights the significance of animals in cities. Despite its importance, however, geographers have failed to acknowledge the everyday relevance of animal management and its impact on both human and animal lives.

Further, the study of pets in geography is necessary for understanding the everyday function of cities. It has moral implications for animal lives (which, I argue, is reason enough to study pets) but also contributes academic merit. Examining pets, particularly in relation to space, place, and scale, expands our understanding of non-humans in geography. Cultural geographers in particular are now interested in what they call post-human and more-than-human geography. Thus, studying pets speaks to this current interest in geography and extends our knowledge of non-human lives. Studying pets also challenges preexisting assumptions about how humans interact with nature. Pets complicate how we understand agency, boundaries, borders, control,

mobility, and morality, and how humans look at and interact with animals. Therefore, because geographers have a vested interest in studying humans and the environment, animals deserve a more prominent position in the literature.

What is needed, then, is more attention to pets in geography. Pets are a surprising omission in the discipline considering they bring together so many facets of geography. They intersect broadly with nature-society and cultural geography, as pets are simultaneously natural and cultural (Wolch and Emel 1998). They unite seemingly disparate topics, such as economics and emotions (Herzog 2010), and transcend vastly different time-periods (Clutton-Brock 1995). Pets are found in cities (Philo 1998), homes (Power 2008), parks (Urbanik and Morgan 2013), and laboratories (Arluke 1998). They are commodities (Collard and Dempsey 2013; Haraway 2012), companions (Haraway 2003), and laborers (Sanders 1999). Most of all, they are sentient beings and deserve to be treated as such (Singer 2009).

Hence, I could not turn my back on the stray pit bull I had found. I hung up the phone in desperation after leaving my number with the agent at the Humane Association who promised to contact me if the dog's owner came forth. I had little faith that would happen. It was Saturday, and Dog Control and the CNY SPCA would not open again until Monday morning. I could not take the dog home with me, nor could I leave her on the street. A young couple walking back to their apartment overheard my phone conversation and inquired about the dog. They too were baffled by Dog Control's hours and the Humane Association's inability to help. "Stray dogs don't just take the weekend off!" After strategizing for some time on the couple's front porch, they agreed to house the dog for the weekend until the CNY SPCA opened on Monday. Relieved, I gave them my phone number and asked that they keep me updated on the dog's fate. I never heard from them again.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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