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The Dog that Could not Bark

A version of this paper was published in R.Sollund, ed., Ecological Crime and Speciesism, Nova Publishers, 2008.

Abstract

The paper analyses the practice of killing animals in animal shelters. This practice, executed in relative secrecy, contradicts the self-proclaimed mission of animal welfare services of "saving lives" and "finding new homes" for the animals. The reason for the secrecy is that, while the principle of welfare legitimises the existence of these services, in reality their activities are mainly aimed at policing the borders of social order of pet-human relations. They ensure that only those pets who comply with the role of unproblematic human companions are allowed to live. Those pets that lose their affiliations to homes are seen as dangerous transgressors. Stringent testing is undertaken in order to check whether they deserve re-admission to human spaces. At the same time the owners are also inspected to ensure that they behave in accordance with their socially prescribed roles as benevolent masters of animals, who can be trusted to keep the animals in their place.

A visitor, coming to the West from a less developed part of the world (let's say, the former Soviet Union), notices, among many new and wonderful things, the following. Nowhere to be seen are our unfortunate small brethren, stray dogs and cats. Not on street corners, nor near shops of restaurants, nor at construction sites or garages would one see a pack of dogs or a colony of cats, looking for scraps of food or just lingering about, resting or feeding their young. Every dog or cat one comes across is a pet, blessed with the care of humans. One feels then that this is indeed a humane society, not like the society one had come from. This feeling is confirmed by conversations with the locals, by numerous TV programmes dedicated to animal rescue, newspaper stories about policemen saving kittens from trees, adverts promoting donations to animal sanctuaries or somewhat mysteriously inviting one to "adopt" a dolphin or a seal. Obviously, even wild animals can feel human benevolence in this world of care.

[1] I am very grateful to Simon Hallsworth and Ragnhild Sollund for their comments on the earlier version of this paper.

The visitor realises that the absence of loose and needy creatures on the streets is the result of a good and well ordered society. Here owners love their pets and do not throw them out. If misfortune strikes and an animal is lost or abandoned, people rescue it and place it in a new home. There are, of course, some owners who abuse their pets. Also, some unfortunate animals, too old or too ill, cannot be placed in new homes and have to be put down. But these are generally felt to be exceptions. One also hears about the somewhat unsavoury practice of spraying and neutering domestic animals (this did not use to happen in the visitor's homeland), but if it helps to sustain the welfare of animals, maybe this is the price to pay. We humans are also restrained by civilisation. Civilisation represses the physical, denies us the pleasures of untamed desires, but it also limits violence and makes life safer and more predictable.

But what if this vision of civilisation is in fact underpinned and produced by enormous and unmentionable violence? What if this utopia of a harmonious society, where people and pets live contentedly together, is in reality a dystopia? What if behind the scenes there is daily death and destruction, relentless policing of the borders of 'civilisation', surveillance and interrogation of nature?

Welcome to an animal shelter in California

Some time ago, still blissfully ignorant about certain truths of civilised life, I went to see a friend in a metropolitan area of Southern California. Elena, an animal lover, had found a job as a volunteer in an animal shelter. The shelter, proudly displaying the sign "Dedicated to saving the life of every adoptable animal" on its gates, received animals either found on the streets or brought in by the owners who no longer wanted to keep them. To make it easier for the owners to leave their pets without fear of reprobation, the shelter had a special window, through which the animal could be anonymously discharged. There were dogs, cats, parrots, rabbits and snakes in the shelter, all waiting to be adopted. Because of the shelter's humane mission (saving lives), it received substantial donations from members of the public, and this was on top of the statutory funding it received from the county authorities.

The shelter was a part of the county animal services. Unlike the bad old days of dog catchers and animal pounds, the mission of these services is no longer restricted to destroying stray and infectious animals. Animal control officers (including those working in the shelter) rescue sick or endangered animals. If a pet is lost, the shelter tries to find the owner by the animal's micro-chip, or, if there is no chip, it waits for a certain number of days for the owner to appear. Officers have other roles to play. They can be called in to investigate possible animal-related law violations. They educate owners about their animal care responsibilities, and they can also, in more serious cases of neglect or abuse, undertake administrative action or criminal prosecution. All these activities are part of the county's programme for "promoting safe and healthy communities for people and animals". The shelter was a key hub in this web of care, and it entrusted to the volunteers the tasks of looking after the animals' everyday needs, feeding them and taking them for walks.

Soon into her job, Elena started to notice that the animals she knew and cared for were disappearing. They were not adopted, and yet she would come into work to find an empty cage. Information about the dog placed on the Internet for potential owners

would be taken off. A boxer or a poodle, with whom she'd played just yesterday, would be nowhere to be seen. Talking to other volunteers, she had her fears confirmed. They were 'euthanised', killed by a lethal injection. Elena was not completely unaware of killings. At a special orientation session at the start of the job, volunteers were told that the shelter had to kill some animals, but they tried to avoid it as much as they could. What shocked Elena was the sheer number of dogs that were killed (about half of all brought to the shelter, as it emerged) and the fact that healthy and friendly dogs who Elena knew well and to whom she had become attached were also killed. It was also frustrating to see that the dogs were often killed while there was a lot of empty space in the shelter.

Every day volunteers received a print-out with the names of the dogs. Those dogs that could be adopted had the word "available" written across their names. They were shown to prospective owners and were advertised on the shelter's website. They were free, after obligatory sterilisation or neutering, to be given for adoption. But across the names of some of the dogs ominously appeared the word "county". This meant that they now fully belonged to the state. The state (through the shelter) now decided what the fate of the animal was going to be – it could be sent to another shelter or humane society (usually this happened to purebreds who were more easily placeable) or it could be killed. The dogs who had already received a death sentence were no longer on the list. They were put in cages at the back of the building, and volunteers were advised not to take them for walks. The doomed dog was already in limbo between life and death and in effect was relegated to canine death row. Nothing could help it now. Even if a volunteer, feeling sorry for it, offered to adopt it herself or was prepared to search for a new owner, the shelter would not normally agree - all the documents for euthanasia were ready, and nobody would want to go through the trouble of changing them.

Gradually, the enormous significance of the word "adoptable", easy to skip when reading the shelter's motto, became apparent. Not all animals' lives were to be saved. On exploring the matter further it became apparent that "to be adoptable" and readmitted to the land of the living, they needed to pass special tests and prove their worthiness for adoption. The dogs, it emerged, were far from being exempt from killing just because they were young and healthy. Only the best of the best could be re-homed again. The so-called temperament tests were designed to weed out all kinds of misfits - nervous, fearful, aggressive, passive, territorial, untrained or unsociable dogs. Dogs judged adoptable after passing the first set of tests were often subjected to a secondary evaluation, while those who were to be euthanised did not go through any extra checks.

Reading later about "temperament tests", I recognised many of the procedures Elena described. The Sternberg test (2003), commonly used by shelters, has, for example, procedures named "thirty seconds of affection", "veterinary technician hug" and "food bowl guarding using plastic hand on stick". In the first one, the tester, unknown to the dog, comes in to pat and stroke the dog for thirty seconds. If the dog, instead of enjoying this affection from a stranger, freezes, moves away or growls, it does not pass the test. Similarly, if a tester gives a dog a tight hug, restraining it with his arms on its back and pushing it to the ground, and it does not relax or settle in a moment, and instead becomes tense, struggles, growls or stiffens, it fails. When a plastic hand emerges to take the dog's bowl, the dog needs to continue eating. If it freezes, growls,

snaps, lunges or bites the plastic hand, or is able to remove food, it fails. In other tests, it has to be friendly or indifferent if it approaches a cat in a cage, allow its teeth to be checked five times without protest, show friendly reaction to being in the presence of other dogs. Failure on more than one test equals a death sentence.

The dogs had, of course, recently lost their owners. They were put in cages in noisy rooms. They were surrounded by lots of strange people and animals. They were stressed out, frightened and depressed. To expect them to pass these 'objective' scientific tests in their condition was bizarre. But even if they were in the best of states, they, it seems, were put in a position where they had to subvert their own nature, their species-being. The dogs were invited to show affection to cats, relinquish their food, and remain happy in the face of all kinds of unwelcome stimuli. Essentially, to stay alive, they had to denounce themselves and show their complete compliance to a perverse authority that defined life and death on the basis of the tests almost impossible to pass. The meaning and significance of these tests were beyond their comprehension. They were thrust into a Kafkaesque trial, put through a process which they did not understand, where the rules were staked against them.

Many animals brought to the shelter were killed without any formal testing procedure being applied at all. Fighting dogs were killed almost immediately after the required three weeks of containment (they obviously could not be trusted to subvert their nature). The same happened to dogs who were nervous and stressed on arrival. Periods when empty cages were in shortage, as well the end of the financial years, also coincided with killing sprees.

Why was the shelter running this murderous operation? Why were the dogs killed, with or without tests? The shelter's officers explained to volunteers that the shelter was concerned about welfare of humans: it had to ensure that adopted dogs were safe for their owners and did not endanger members of the public (or their pets). Hence the stringency of tests. The welfare of dogs themselves was brought up as an explanation: they claimed that when a dog stays in a shelter for a long time, it becomes institutionalised, unhappy and nervous, and it would have asked for euthanasia itself if it could speak. Lack of resources was a factor too. At the entry end, the shelter did not have sufficient funds to keep all the animals. At the exit end, possibilities of adoption were limited due to a lack of potential owners.

Here, however, was another enigma. In some cases, animals were killed even when people came forward who liked the dogs and wanted to take them home. Once Elena managed to take a condemned fighting dog, waiting for euthanasia in a cage at the back, for a walk. This was a violation of the rules, but as she was by then an experienced volunteer, she was allowed to do this. While walking the dog, she met a couple of young men who, after admiring the dog and learning about its sad fate, asked if they could adopt it. The shelter officers, however, told them that it was not possible. They could not be certain that these young men would not use the dog for dog fights. Soon after, they killed the dog themselves. The same fate awaited a Siberian husky, who, according to Elena, did not show any behavioural problems. Many visitors wanted to take it home, but the shelter employees did not advise them, saying, "She only looks nice. As soon as you take her home, she will jump the fence". She was killed as well.

Silences and truths

Obviously, the principle of saving lives was not the key operational principle of the shelter. Its real mission was hidden and surrounded by silence and evasion. Although the facts about killings were not hard to find (in the US all the statistics about operations of these facilities are available for those who want to know), the front of the shelter (open to the public) symbolically affirmed its sole concern with animal welfare (saving, preventing suffering, caring, providing new homes). It was a refuge from violence and death, a place where the politics of life were proudly proclaimed. The symbolism of love and care was displayed in the shelter's spacious foyer, with pictures of happy animals and their owners and posters speaking of the shelter's humane mission. Many of the people who brought the animals to the shelter were led to believe that they were delivering them to a sanctuary which would help them find a better life, not to a gulag where they were likely to perish.

The claims of the shelter were accepted that much more easily because they correlate with the general self-congratulatory premises of our relationships with domestic animals[2]. A view exists that people in the West may be indifferent to the plight of other human beings, but welfare of pets is paramount. Discussing the scope of violence in the modern society, philosopher Wendy Hamblet laments that "There are a meagre 1,500 shelters for battered women in the United States. Yet there are 3,800 animal shelters!" (Hamblet 2004, p.78).However, battered women should not envy cats and dogs. About half of all the animals brought to American shelters are killed (CNN 2007). This applies not just to public shelters (although they kill more), but to humane societies and private shelters as well.

The stark reality is that at the back end of the shelters, hidden from public view, a regime wholly different to that of welfare exists. This is the regime of examination and disposal. All of the animals are examined to establish if they are healthy or 'treatable'. Dogs are then subjected to tests which as we have seen almost set them up for failure. The vast majority of cats and other animals, 'rescued' from the streets or brought by their owners, are discarded without any testing.

Thus the life-affirming front shields the backstage, which operates in accordance to a set of principles that are not only different to those proclaimed at the front but which are diametrically opposed to them. This frightening contradiction, the terrifying reality that cannot be fully exposed is resolved in silences and half-truths (Merleau-Ponty 1964, see also Hallsworth & Young forthcoming).

The secrecy and the official outrage when truths are uncovered were made obvious to me when, on that visit to California, I went to the shelter with Elena's husband. Seeing his wife's distress at the disappearance of the dogs, he asked to talk to the shelter's management. Believing that as a member of the public he was entitled to some explanations (after all, the shelter was a public institution), he asked one of the senior officers a seemingly straightforward question, "Why are you killing the dogs?"

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[2] As Franklin (1999: 24) argues, "To characterize modernity as an increasingly sentimental period of benevolence to animals is to miss the fragmented nature of human-animal relations and the persistence of practices that contradict such a view".

This caused outrage. To speak of murder in the land of euthanasia was to break a taboo. He was declared “hostile” to members of staff, and told that he was unwelcome in the shelter. Next time he came in to collect his wife after work, the front desk staff called the police. In five minutes after the call, two police cars arrived, and he was escorted from the premises by armed officers as a “potential threat”.

Pets and their place

What are the animals guilty of, and why are the shelters destroying them so indiscriminately? To answer these questions, we need to look critically at the place of animals (particularly those defined as pets) in modern societies. It appears that by losing their owners (whatever the circumstances), cats and dogs put their entire existence under question. They lost their status of entirely unproblematic human companions, attached to the space of the home. The fact that their owners gave them up of abandoned them makes them suspect – what if they had been trouble? If they had been abandoned to the streets before coming to the shelter, this was even worse. On the streets, outside of human supervision, they turned into pests or vermin, acquired bad habits and thus almost completely compromised their chances of finding a new home. Then, following their admission to the shelter, they most certainly developed negative reactions to institutionalisation (the so-called shelter syndrome) and this also made them unadoptable. The implication here is that the pets should have stayed where they were, within the borders of controlled domesticity. Outside these borders, they turned into dangerous polluters.

Animals can be likened to people who transgress the boundaries of order. As Mary Douglas argued, “A polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone…Pollution can be committed intentionally, but intention is irrelevant to its effect…’ (1966: 114).

Following their displacement, it is very difficult for the animals to become accepted as pets again.

It has been long noted by social scientists that the ways in which animals are socially defined and placed by humans in their material and imaginary spaces explain variations in their treatment. Edmund Leach pointed out that we treat each other – and animals – according to certain classificatory schemas. “What we need to know about *the other* – whether animal or human – is where he, she or it *fits in*. Of animals, are they food or not-food, pets or vermin or savage monsters? Can we kill them with impunity or are they ‘sacred’ and untouchable?” (1973:17). Writing about pets, Richard Thomas (1983) showed that they are non-food, they live together with humans and are regarded as quasi-family members.

The position of pets in the centre of human world – in the space of a home – creates a sharp differentiation between them and other animals that are placed outside domestic boundaries (such as farmed animals, wild animals, animals used for medical experiments or for industrial farming). Being admitted to the homespace, they become included in the network of affective bonds with other members of the household and entitled to care. But in return domesticated animals have to change their behaviour, become tame and compliant. They become simultaneously objects of affection and

domination (Tuan 1984). They must subjugate their whole existence to the will of their masters. Their nature is transformed through breeding. Their bodies must become, to use Foucault's (1979) notion, "docile", they are manipulated, transformed and improved through training. In the ultimate expression of power, their sexual organs can be removed, and the whole operation of their body is "corrected" in the interests of the humans.

"Pets", our animal companions, have had a place in human society for thousands of years, playing both utilitarian and affective roles (Serpell, 1989). Post-industrial alienation made pets especially important objects of affection. They have been turned into "libidinal currency", through which bareness of social contacts, isolation and narcissism have made animals into screens of human needs and fantasies (Nast 2006). Dog ownership grows, opportunities to pamper pets rise exponentially, with some animals turning into the elite of the world of consumption, enjoying their own spas, therapists, yoga classes, special parks and beaches, and even becoming beneficiaries of huge estates.

However, the power relationship between pets and humans remains profoundly unchanged. Animals who no longer fulfil their practical or emotional utility in the household become totally disposable. If they chew curtains, damage the parquet floor, bark or just turn into a burden, they can easily lose their status as quasi- family members and the whole rationale for their existence. One survey showed that among the behaviour problems that contributed to surrender to shelters were: barking (41 %), chewing (24%), hyperactivity (45%) and housetraining accidents (21%). Aggression to other pets was present in less than 8 % cases and aggression to people in less than 9% (Dog's Owner's Guide). On average, American households keep their pets only for two years (Tuan 1984: 88). As with material commodities, there is no recognised moral obligation to keep something which one no longer wants. Animals are treated as property, and this legitimises their destruction. Being thrown out of the confines of home, they join the heap of waste of modern civilisation, of once loved and desired but now redundant and forgotten objects, destined for disposal.

Owners may employ the medical-administrative apparatus (veterinary doctors) to dispose of their animal. Doctors may easily end its life, employing expert judgement and pronouncing impossibility of its "normalisation" as a pet for being too ill, too old or displaying behavioural 'deviations'. Some owners simply give their animals away for euthanasia without asking for any assessment. Others may throw their pet on the streets, where it then becomes a "pest" or "vermin", unauthorised transgressor of the urban boundaries. Here the apparatus of public hygiene will become involved, with the animal destroyed or taken into a shelter for examination. Finally, the owners may surrender the animal to the welcoming embrace of institutional care and 'give them away for adoption', with all the ensuing consequences.

"You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave"

One way of understanding the operation of the shelter might be to consider the control services as simply performing the utilitarian functions of waste disposal. They remove unwanted matter from where it no longer belongs. Humans relinquish their ex-pets to the cold and indifferent embrace of state machinery. The state collects, examines,

sorts and gets rid of the living matter. It cannot be expected to love your pets; it deals with them in the only possible manner it is capable of, coldly, mechanically and bureaucratically. This view however would fail to explain the observed contradictions in the operation of this machine, its murderous obsessions, its perennial suspicion of both the dogs and their owners.

It is not enough for the animal control agencies to place some dogs with people who want to take them and discard those who were left unwanted. They interrogate nature with great vigilance to prevent any unsuitable animal re-entering the human space. Even outside the walls of the institution the need for vigilance remains.

The dogs, who come into the orbit of animal services, remain suspect even if they are left alive and given for adoption. There is a chance that they were not properly screened, that a mistake has been made. A group of American animal behaviour scientists describe in a recent article how they used a modified Sternberg temperament test to evaluate a sample of dogs adopted from a New York public shelter (and previously tested there). The results showed that most of the dogs should not have been allowed to be adopted. Although only one dog out of 66 (1.5%) was reported to be aggressive to the owner, 71.2% of the dogs exhibited behaviours that could be "consistent with aggression". Thus, barking was exhibited in 30.3%, while 34.8% of the dogs were reported to growl or lunge in at least one of the tests. 6.1% were reported to bite or snap. Although the authors concede that it is hard to construct totally objective scientific tests, and that disagreement exists in the literature about specific indicators of unacceptable dispositions (for example, it is difficult to differentiate between various types of aggression in behaviours such as "chasing bicyclists, joggers, small animals etc. while barking"), this for the authors of the paper does not discredit the idea of testing. And while none of the owners who were interviewed wanted to get rid of their dog, the authors argue nevertheless that as a high percentage of unsuitable dogs had been adopted, the shelters should refine their screening procedures.

The owners are suspect too. The authors of the paper suggest that the owners they interviewed did not truthfully report owner-directed aggression for "fear of repercussion for the dog, and/or concern about whether they would be blamed for the behaviour" (Christensen et al. 2007: 94). The owners' fear for themselves and their dogs exposes the fact that we are seeing a real power relationship at play here. Not just the dogs, but the owners are subject to an examining gaze.

If a person wants to adopt an animal from a shelter, he has to go through a screening procedure of sorts. In the Californian shelter the officers explained their reluctance to give animals to many of the potential owners by the need to ensure that a good home was found for the animal, that it would not be abused and neglected. But again, everything is not as simple as it seems. Arnold Arluke, who conducted participant observation in another American animal shelter, described some of the reasons why owners were denied adoption "even though their resources and attitudes seemed acceptable to workers" (Arluke and Sanders, 1996, p.92). Some potential adopters were rejected because the shelter staff thought that as they had full-time jobs, they would not be home enough, even though by all other standards they seemed likely to become good owners. Others were thought to be unwilling to sterilise their animals, keep them fenced and on a leash. Although these objections were phrased in terms of

animal welfare, there was an obvious concern here with the owners' duty to society. The shelter wanted to make sure that the owners behaved as responsible humans and kept the animals in their place. By being absent from home or lax with animals, the owners endangered the order of things and threatened to unleash chaos.

Similarly, concerns about animal neglect and cruelty can be linked to the socially prescribed role of the owner as a benevolent master. The failure to play this role may result in serious sanctions. If, say, a neighbour complains that an animal is mistreated, an officer can take it away. If there is a suspicion that a dog is used for dog fighting, this can bring serious repercussions. The owner can be fined or subjected to criminal prosecution. The rescued animal can then be brought to a shelter or a pound and killed by the very animal control officers who had saved it in the first place. On the other hand, if the owner complains about its animal to the animal control officers, and reports his dog for barking or biting, the dog will be taken away and most certainly killed.

All this shows that public animal control organisations are not humanitarian organisations, nor do they just act as a waste disposal apparatus. They are a part of the disciplining machine dedicated to policing, checking and enforcing obedience on animals and owners.

The real mission of animal control services

The dog-catchers in the old days were agents of what Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* (1987) called "the power of death". They imposed order on the chaos of natural world by disposing of lives in an absolute way. Our shelter, on the contrary, operates in what Foucault called in the same work the area of 'bio-power'. It normalises life, by deciding which life forms can be fostered, and which can be disallowed to the point of death. It sorts out everything that is too unpredictable, too implicated in the nature's unruly ways, and leaves only those animals that fit the pre-determined role of a pet. For this purpose it pursues a programme of sterilisation, testing and extermination, directly influencing the animals' reproductive process. This makes it, of course, into a classic eugenics programme, discredited in the 20th century in relation to humans, but continued in relation to domestic animals (in fact, as Lisa Gålmark argues in this volume, human and animal eugenic projects were closely linked). The new "soft" language of community safety and animal welfare masks the totalitarian concerns about reproduction of the norm and elimination of the elements that deviate from it.

The aim of this programme is to reproduce the ordered world of human-animal relations and weed-out the misfits. Like eugenic programmes dreamt of in the nineteenth century and practised by variety of political regimes in the first half of last century (as diverse as Sweden, USA and Hitler's Germany), this one uses 'science' to separate those creatures who show "genetic deficiencies" or some acquired traits that make them dangerous for the social order. This programme stretches beyond the confines of the shelter, and affects the whole of urban society, from the commercial breeders to the houses of animal owners to the space of the streets. The shelter is the agency which is at the centre of the procedures that construct the animal, to use Foucault's expression, "as effect and object of power, as effect and object of

knowledge". But similarly, the shelter examines the potential owners for their capacity to normalise the dogs and keep them in their place.

The shelter performed two functions: it evaluated the suitability of the dogs and it evaluated the suitability of the owners. To be suitable the dog had to be docile, the owner responsible. But the outcome is never certain, mistakes can be made, and in both cases the machine errs on the side of caution. It establishes critical thresholds that can only be met with great difficulty: the dog fails and has to be destroyed, the owner fails because they cannot prove that they are responsible, the dog cannot be homed and is killed instead… Every failure drags the animal further into the machine's vortex, towards its violent core.

In the community other programmes are used, aimed at reform of pets and their owners. The humans need to be disciplined and educated about their duties as pet-owners. This is why shelter employees and other animal control officers are involved in education and training programmes. They often work in partnership with charities and humane societies to promote ideas of responsible ownership. This includes taking animals to obedience classes and to vets. This also includes their sterilisation.

The reproductive sphere of course is of a particular concern here. Sterilisation of cats and dogs is seen as a way to cut the "flood" of animals to the shelters and prevent unneeded animals from being born. This is constructed as a duty of owners, and efforts are made to instruct the younger generations of prospective owners about this duty. One Californian animal charity, Maddy's Fund, distributes colouring books for children designed to teach them "the responsibility, empathy and the benefits of animal companionship". In one such book, entitled, "Spay and Neuter for Life", the kids are invited to colour a picture of happy cats and dogs holding placards, "Proud to be spayed", "Neuter me" and "Yay for spay". All of these animals are shown, like kids' toys or cartoons, without their sex organs. The text on the page explains that "fewer puppies and kittens makes it easier for animal shelters to find loving homes for dogs and cats already born."

Critics of the drive towards sterilisation doubt if it will reach the desired effect. People want puppies, and availability of animals from shelters would not extinguish commercial breeding. Moreover, the supposed benefits to animals mask the deeply utilitarian nature of our relationship to pets. As Clare Palmer (2006) argues, at the root of human-pet relationships is the principle of instrumentalism, which implies treating animals as ends to other means. De-sexing of animals is part of the same dominating logic as killing of them in animal shelters. While promoting de-sexing of animals as an answer to overpopulation and inevitable killing of animals, animal welfare organisations instead reinforce the logic that leads to mass killings in shelters. Sterilisation, creation of totally docile bodies of animals, is a method of disciplining nature, of putting it under human control.

Among other more innovative disciplinary solutions is temporary adoption of dogs by prisoners. Prison-based dog training programs now offer rehabilitation for canine and human. One website invites us to "Picture this: prison inmates receive training to, and in turn, train dogs from animal shelters. The prisoners learn a joy, a compassion and a responsibility that can come only from raising and training a dog, as well as skills that can help them find a job. The dog becomes adoptable. Some lucky family gets to

adopt a well-trained dog that, just a few weeks before, would have been put to death merely for being unwanted" (Prison-Based Dog Training Programs 2007). For all its merits, this 24/7 disciplining of humans and nature is the ultimate dream of a control machine: a setting, where men and dogs are locked in a loving embrace, reforming each other!

Fighting chaos

It is difficult to argue against the need to control the reproduction of animals living side by side with people. A vision of cities where packs of abandoned cats and dogs are allowed to roam does not sit well with modern sensibilities. Although in natural conditions feral overpopulation tends to be resolved, at least partly, through death of the young and sick animals (Putman 1989), nature is no longer trusted by humans to sort itself out.

Pets, abandoned by their owners or born to stray dogs or cats, are an abomination in any ordering project. They represent, using Mary Douglas's expression, 'the challenge of aberrant forms' (1966:.40).When a dog or a cat finds itself outside the homespace, it becomes perilously close to being classified as pest or vermin. Also, the presence of ex-pets in spaces of urban 'wilderness' as Griffiths et al (2000) suggest, is unsettling because they contradict the idea of pets as domestic animals close to humans, and mobilise deep-rooted fears of wild and untamed nature. But as they never entirely lose their "pet" assignation, they also turn into "unnatural" figures and become objects of dread, deep-rooted horror which humans experience when familiar life-forms metamorphose into something strange.

Less developed societies resolve the problem of stray animals through violent interventions, which tend to co-exist with a more laissez-faire approach to messiness and disorder. In Moscow, before its capitalist transformation, the stuff of children's nightmares was a vision of a lorry from which dog catchers would spring with their hooks and nets and drag one's beloved pet to a certain death. These eruptions of almost pornographic violence seemed to be a reminder of the dark forces of death that could be unleashed upon you and your loved ones at any moment. But in everyday life nature and humans co-existed in a chaotic assimilation. People fed stray dogs, and it was not unusual for a family to take a puppy born to a street bitch home, or even adopt the mother together with her litter. Shops, hotels and workers' canteens would have a fostered cat or dog or two. Although the animals often did not have a particular owner and did not sleep on the premises, they could rely on their bowl being filled with water or milk and on scraps of food being left for them on a piece of newspaper. Families of cats occupied the basements of blocks of flats, creating an unmistakeable smell firmly associated with urban communal living. Some of the residents fed them, while others simply tolerated them as unfortunate creatures that, for all the inconvenience of co-habitation, did not deserve to perish.

But developed Western societies do not tend to tolerate chaos. Late modernity has been associated with obsessions about order, and urban environments have seen a visible proliferation of commercially controlled spaces, protected from undesirable elements (Davis 1990; Bauman 2004 among many others). Any unattached population, and not just cats and dogs, represents a threat to the hyper-controlled

urban setting. Groups 'with no abode and no function' (from 'asocials' to immigrants and refugees) become an object of the public anxiety and state repression.

Repressive drives of control machines, their waste disposal and disciplinary functions have to be reconciled with the ideology of welfare that still requires the state and the citizens to assist the weak and the needy. Like other groups who are redundant to the late modern project, unattached cats and dogs cannot be just discarded without any care or procedure. This is where strange ambiguous concepts and propositions emerge, such as tough love (in relation to human deviants) and merciful destruction (in relation to delinquent animals). In an example of paradoxical interpretations of what we can and cannot do to animals, a UK veterinarian suggests, writing about feral cats: "Control of cats by shooting or poisoning is almost certainly illegal as long as cats are still afforded protection as domestic animals under the Protection of Animals Act (262), England (1911) and Scotland (1912), and the Cruelty to Animals Act (1986). Control by trapping and humane destruction of cats using chlorophorm or the administration of a lethal injection by a veterinary surgeon is legal and practised widely by pest operators" (Neville 1989: 263).

The same obfuscation of the actual truth of what we do to animals is displayed in the work of our animal shelter. It tries to achieve public acceptance through the language of love and care, while at the same time conducting regulatory control of nature heavily weighted towards death.

The combination of waste disposal, disciplining and welfare functions in the work of the shelter is not unique to animal control services. As David Garland (1985) showed, in modern society ideologies of welfare have been merged with the apparatus of control. But it seems that while welfare continues to play a key role in the system of public legitimisation, other, more important functions of control machine are covered up and executed in relative silence. As we saw, the shelter loudly proclaimed its humane mission. It invited volunteers to assist it in making the animals' lives more comfortable and enjoyable. It promised the surrenderers to look for a new home for their pet. Recruiting animal control officers, it did not make their future duties fully explicit either. Shelter employees, who find out eventually that they would have to authorise and\or personally perform the killings, tend to start their jobs believing that their main task would be to help animals find homes. When they discover the truth, they either leave or develop a range of neutralisation and blame displacement strategies (Arluke & Sanders 1996; Frommer & Arluke 1999, see also the discussion of denial by Sollund in this volume).

No one seems to enter the doors of the institution with the full realisation of the extent of violence that takes place there. Surrenderers are misled by promises of care. Volunteers and staff start their jobs without a complete understanding of their duties and the context in which they will be performed. But at the same time the reality is never completely hidden. It is always guessed at, creating fear and anxiety (Merleau-Ponty 1964). The categories do not fit and the violent core of the "animal welfare" project becomes progressively uncovered. People either become complicit in the execution of violence, or, faced finally with the stark truth, escape (like Elena did, resigning soon after the described events).

Conclusion

As we have seen, the shelter is not dedicated to "saving the life of every adoptable animal". It is a social control agency, which polices the borders between humans and nature, prevents transgression and administers justice. Animals who have deviated from their role as pets are examined and punished. Humans who deliver personal violence to animals (rather than using socialised violent agencies) and deviate from their role as benevolent masters are examined and punished as well. The fact that people indulge increasingly in consuming pets as hyper-commodified objects does not contradict the fact that every aspect of our relationship with pets is happening under the close gaze of the state.

Modern urban society was described by Henry Lefebvre as "the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption". This society consumes prodigiously and creates rapid obsolescence of objects – from cars or bathrooms to, it seems, animal pets. At the same time it is also a society where compulsion is the basis of social order, where power agencies and structures project their will on the sphere of everyday life. Here, despite the ideology of individual freedom and satisfaction of every possible desire, we see "the death of the ludic spirit" and "the dreariness of everyday programming in its rational organization" (Lefebvre 1968: 78-79).

Animal control services are a part of this social order. They control animals' reproduction. They regulate our relationship with pets. They take violence out of everyday life, but instead they deliver their own bureaucratically organised violence. They prevent chaos, but move the fight against the unruly nature into the confines of shelters and other agencies.

Decisions about the pets' way of life and, even more importantly, their way of death, are being removed from the owners. This is done both through compulsion (licensing laws, animal welfare legislation etc.) and through deception and seduction, through promises of easy solutions to moral conundrums. Misleading people into believing that their pets are being taken care of increases the circle of use and disposal of animals as it liberates the owners of personal responsibility. It eases the transition of the animal "family members" from human homes where they could rely on some care to the murderous clutches of institutions.

Killing does not have to be a part of the ordering process. For example, a number of American shelters have now introduced no-kill policies. These policies, according to some critics, have meant that such shelters turn away most of the animals, passing them on to those institutions that would kill. Italy has prohibited euthanasia of healthy dogs and cats altogether. This has led to another problem. Animals get warehoused in shelters and become afflicted by parasitic or infectious diseases and, at best, have to lead the life of boredom with the ensuing behavioural pathologies (Lucidi et al 2005: 105).

The presence of pets in a modern society creates some painful dilemmas. These dilemmas are often hidden away behind the screen of false sentimentality and the language of "care". Hard facts, which can be discovered away from the public gaze, contradict the facile assumptions about the increase of human benevolence to animals,

which supposedly characterise our age. They also show how oppressive the attempts to rule in the chaos of natural (and social) life can really be.

And so, after having a good look at the Western utopia, the visitor starts missing the land where families of cats lived in smelly basements and dogs ran after bicycles, barking.

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