

Loving Dogs:

Stories of Building Relationship and Communication with the More Than

Human

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Land Acknowledgement

With good reason, posthumanism and its related works bring up a plethora of “prickly” feelings for many people. At its core, posthumanism challenges us to move beyond the human and recognize a relationality with all beings - sentient/non-sentient¹, human/animal, object/subject. That is to say, my focus on the nonhuman is not coming with the cost of eliding the human (at least this is the furthest thing from my intention).

A main critique of posthumanism is pertinent in questions of race, gender, queerness, and ability - *How can we contemplate the “posthuman” if not all of us are seen as “human” yet?* My attempt to delve into the posthuman is interested in oppressions as they act upon all beings, knowing that the assemblages of identity have created interlocutors but also stand alone in their validity. Moreover, I see that identity is uniquely y/ours and can also offer spaces to view buttressing oppressions in order to abolish them.

My interest in animality and animacy, then, does not exclude the human, but rather highlights the ways in which oppressive systems that impact the human also impact the nonhuman. The overwhelming effect of oppression in enacting violence extends past humanity and into Nature - thus giving us an additional lens to view the scope of patriarchy, the medical industrial complex, and capitalism.

Another critique of posthumanism is that theorists sometimes utilize indigenous spirituality and knowledge without any attempt to credit those they cite. In this view, posthumanism has become the white intellectuals’ co-optation of indigeneity. Globally, indigenous communities have been practicing many of the “radical” notions posthumanism elaborates for centuries. The use of posthumanism to write over the Indigenous community is

¹A binary this author deplores

infuriating and calls for intensive examination of the subject and its continued use. All this to say, citations of knowledge are extremely important in any work, but, for me personally, the citational practices in posthumanism become increasingly more important given the history of the University of Michigan as an institution that has benefitted from the genocide of Indigenous peoples in the United States.

I am dedicated to raising up voices from systemically marginalized communities to think with the nonhuman. So frequently the academy writes and displays the histories of the nonhuman as Object across methodologies, theories, and in practice. Frequently, this standpoint is rooted in colonization and imperial thinking that comes from white, ableist, heteropatriarchy. There are often neo-colonial works that reproduce dominance over Nature as “natural” in order to continue to maintain this hegemony. In a rejection of this, I have made an effort to think with Indigenous scholarship and the scholarship of folks of color who stand in opposition to this continued colonization of thought.

Labor Acknowledgement

Dogs have a long history of being utilized as weapons of the state.

Specifically in the case of the United States, dog breeds² that have perceived tendency towards causing harm have been utilized to maim, attack, and incite fear in the policing of communities. Dogs also have a long history of being utilized as weapons through colonization. The reason many dogs were brought to the Americas lies in their colonial past of policing and enforcing colonial rule. Dogs have been utilized by folks who hold enslaved people in the

² Traditionally, German Shepherd Dogs (GSD) and Doberman Pincers. There are now movements to pivot from the use of these specific breeds and include Pit Bulls, mixed breed dogs, and “rescue dogs.”

bondage of slavery to incite fear, violence, and to “track” enslaved folks who liberate themselves from slavery. The United States government continues to intentionally use dogs to incite fear in communities and engage in violence. While it is true that the breed of dog does not determine how a dog will act, the phenotype of specific breeds (or just dogs in general) can incite (intergenerational) trauma in Black and Brown communities that have had these dogs weaponized against them.

The history of equating the animal to women, People of Color, queer folks, and disabled folks is long and well documented throughout feminist theory, antiracism work, and disability liberation. This piece takes an approach of living-with³ as a way to reconceptualize constructed boundaries species. For me and Esperanza, living with each other is a political commitment to care⁴ and a continued exploration of the impurity⁵ in communicating across species. In other words, our relationship is built on the imperfect ways in which we care for each other and the dedication to continue building our relationship *because* of its imperfection. The living-with dedication is a step beyond the hegemonic rescue narrative frequently associated with non-purebred dogs like Esperanza - the Rescue Dog.

Helena Pedersen’s work “Release the Moths: Critical Animal Studies and the Posthumanist Impulse” critiques the many ways in which posthumanist scholarship itself perpetuates the idea that it is attempting to disregard - the centrality of the human. Pedersen argues that through many modes of engagement, including the consumption of non-humans, the usage of “companion species” and the methodological reproduction of non-humans for humans, the human is seen as expressing a continued centrality through what animal activists would deem as exploitative and unnecessary practices. The flip side to this narrative is present in Kate

³ (Haraway, 2016)

⁴ (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017)

⁵ (Shotwell, 2016)

Soper's work which implicates the animal activist as perpetuating human exceptionalism as they give their lives to the work of nonhuman animal rescue.

Human exceptionality is here manifest, not in some arrogant indifference to animal well-being, but in self-abnegation to the animal's ends. Whether it be prayer, compassion, imagination, or the writing of poetry: they all, in differing ways, speak to the nature of the abyss between ourselves and all other animals, however divergent they are in their particular species characteristics and capacities the mantle of being a savior-esque actor on the behalf of the non-human.⁶

Soper's claims that the act of a "rescue" reproduces human exceptionalism is inescapable and rather, it should not be escaped but mobilized in order to continue advocacy for the non-human. In other words, there is a positivist take on human exceptionalism that charges the human to engage in the liberation of the Other. While as a whole, mainstream human exceptionalism reproduces oppression, radical human exceptionalism may reproduce necessary work to reach a muddling of the boundaries of the human and non-human.

Soper's argument is specifically interesting in conversation with the story-telling project I undertake here. In my initial? re-telling of my first encounter with my dog, Esperanza, I take on this savior-esque roll. I recount my "rescue" of her from neglect and my role in repairing her injuries. I create a narrative in which individuals will *thank me* for "rescuing" the abandoned Esperanza. Although I may never hear her side of the story from her lips, I highly doubt Esperanza would describe the events the same way I did. When Esperanza and I were first meeting, she did not like me very much at all. Who would? I represent a power dynamic that put her into her position of hurt in the first place. I acted out of my own human exceptionalism, knowing that she would die without my care and also knowing I had the power, resources, and knowledge to "save" her. Truly, I didn't give her much choice in the matter, and in my initial

⁶ (Soper 372)

account of our encounter, I refracted her perspective through my own. Helena Pedersen takes to task our politics of subjecthood in story telling by pointing out the stakes in which non-humans waiver when we contemplate the non-human subject.

From a critical animal studies perspective, tendencies towards subject boundary dissolution are never symmetrical and therefore cannot be innocent. Surely most nonhuman animals have never expressed any desire whatsoever to ‘co-emerge’ with the species that, to them, above all means violence, horror, and death? Theorising boundary-dissolution is relatively unproblematic for those who never need to experience oppression: Those to whom life is a constant struggle with suffering imposed by others, are likely to be more keen on protecting their subject boundaries from uninvited intervention.⁷

These stories, no matter how we may tell them, still foreground the perspective of the human since it is the only viable experience we know for certain. This means that in the stories we tell—even at farmed animal sanctuaries where the agenda is to abolish cruelty—the main actors are almost always humans, whether in accounts of the causation of harm, liberation, or both. This is not to say that non-humans in these stories do not have agency. Esperanza has chosen me and continues to choose me every day, just as I choose her when she wakes me up at six in the morning to take her to the dog park. Of course this is not the situation of many of the species we have forced into companionship. Agency of the non-human can be stripped away just as humans can be stripped away of their agency. In order for non-humans to have agency in their stories, *we have to give it to them* as their narrators, their interpreters. This still reproduces the ideology of human exceptionalism since it is yet another reproduction of our power over the non-human. The counter to this power is a resistance to participate in this system.

⁷ (Pedersen 72)

Notes of Gratitude

The Experimental Nature of Stories

I read my first theory work (that I remember) in the fall of 2015. My first semester of college introduced me to feminist studies, anthropology, and ecology. The sheer amount of theory I consumed, consumed me. As I learned to read critically and for justice work, a darkness made the weight of oppressions and the lack of pathways to justice crushing. Then in the winter of 2015-2016, I went through a state-mandated 40 hour crisis counselor training to support victim-survivors of sexual violence. At nineteen, I would get a dispatch call at 3:00 am and head to the hospital to support folks seeking Forensic Evidence Collection Exams, otherwise known as “rape kits.” This tangible assemblage demonstrated to me a personal philosophy that has carried me throughout my advocacy, academics, and activism:

My theory is nothing without action.

My action is led through ancestry, history, and theory.

The project before you is one facet of my attempt at action. I’ve spent six intensive years thinking in the context of the academy and with my community. In this time, without ever intentionally trying, I surrounded myself with storytellers and poets.

My ethnography classes taught us storytelling politic, my Jewish community reminded me that the foundation of our culture is on oral tradition, my interviews and time at animal sanctuaries shared personal histories of each animal I met, often motivated politically and culturally to change the hearts and minds of omnivores, and even the theorists I have loved have engaged with storytelling, urging us to read more stories and write our own.

It has become clear to me that my actions must follow the language of my ancestors and community. I must tell stories. Because of this, I've experienced "play" and "foolishness" as an integral form of thinking with all my co-constitutions. For this reason, my thesis is labeled as "experimental" which is just delicious to me. Delicious because my MS is very much a strategic display of my ability to engage in quantitative and STEM analyses for doctoral programs, and throughout my time here this is the closest I've ever come to conducting an "experiment." Also delicious because storytelling is the oldest form of knowledge production. Thus, I submit that as a form of storytelling, the thesis itself isn't new or experimental, but rather my submission of it as an MS thesis is what shakes things up.

As I pursued this project, I realized a larger political statement was being made in truly loving the thesis writing process. In my conversations with people about my desire to pursue a graduate degree (usually necessitating a thesis and/or dissertation submission) many folks cited (1) money and (2) effort as barriers to pursuing more education, perhaps in a different field entirely. I have been a long time advocate of fully funded and free education across the board in addition to removing barriers of "needing" a degree to accomplish a goal, providing a service, or getting a job. I also am passionate about citizen science, lived experience, and communal/ancestral knowledge pathways that exist entirely outside of a traditional academic model. I hadn't considered that academia was in need of pleasure activism (à la adrienne marie brown and Audre Lorde) as a massive part of this revolution until I started practicing it myself and sat with other students writing a thesis.

I was also reminded throughout the celebration of Jewish holidays throughout 5782 that the capacity to hold both the pleasure and joys of life and the grief, sadness, and fear is a practice cultivated through Shabbat, through atonement, through masquerade. The holding of multiplicity

is something that is actually quite rare in the hegemony of the United States. Americana culture loves a good binary, and the playfulness of transgression, the resistance of monocultural gender, and the expanse of sensation is often confusing to many. I've tried to write something authentic - not just grief, not just joy, but the beauty of both and more. The subject that I am choosing to write about is rife with contradictions, confusions, questions, and emotions. Rather than let this unsettle you and dismiss it, I would challenge you to think about *why*. For me, this is because I have been an active participant in the very exploitation that I am writing about. This and, there is no clear consensus on how the Animal wishes to engage in relation with us. As a Jewish woman, I have been historically and contemporarily, equated to the animal as a way to justify the oppression of Jews and women.⁸ While some theorists have reclaimed animality, as seen in object orientated feminisms,⁹ many vehemently oppose the association with animality in proximity to humanity. Both are justified and valid.

I am not by any means attempting to expunge myself from this discomfort - I am sitting in it with you.

Lastly, it is not lost on me that in writing this (shall we call it a love letter? a love and rage letter?), we are in year 5782 of the Jewish calendar, a *shmita* year. Shmita occurs every seven years and serves as an agricultural and spiritual year to connect with land. Agriculturally, Jewish folks would fallow their fields, celebrate the trees, and remember how beautifully entangled our lives are - in the roots of trees, mycelium of fungi, and in our love of dogs (I may have added that last one).

A Genesis for Relation

⁸ (Dayan, 2013)

⁹ (Ahmed 2006)

Their large eyes stared back at me through the thin wall of Pyrex that separated us. Never in my life had I seen something so large. I watched them with fascination as they simply sat there. This was a common occurrence. Our home had deep window wells that were absolutely perfect for trapping small creatures, exactly like this frog. The excitement always began with a distressed call from my mother. *Rachel! There's something in the window well!* With my latex gloves about three sizes too large and my Pyrex container I would climb down into the window well to retrieve frogs, rabbits, birds, and toads to release in the backyard. Each release was accompanied by several moments of pure childhood fascination.

My parents prescribed an inclination for science and the natural world and signed me up for a science camp through our local nature center. We would bike twenty miles per day and test water quality all over Rochester, Minnesota. I became familiar with pH meters and Secchi disks. Mostly, however, I became familiar with crayfish.

Their hard exoskeletons varied in pigmentation from the most beautiful shades of blues to blacks to greens. They enjoyed hiding in the river rocks I would frequently splash my feet into. They swam quickly down the river, searching for smaller critters to eat. We were taught how to pick up crayfish from underneath their homes. We were taught how to flip them on their backs so we could identify them as Male or Female. We were taught the difference between an Invasive or Native crayfish based on their colorations and back markings. I adored them.

I couldn't tell you today how to sex a crayfish or how to differentiate those who called these rivers home and those who were unwilling travelers but I can tell you that, despite their small size, crayfish have *muscle*. My clumsy hands would flip a crayfish on its back, and their tail would smack my palm with enough force to cause alarm. I wanted to be like them when I grew up. I wanted to, literally, flip off anyone who caused me distress.

The older I got, the more frequently the crayfish were marked as "Invasive" and placed in buckets on our bike trailers. At the end of the day, we'd bike back to the nature center and the beautifully colored and patterned crayfish were dumped into the "River Fish" tank. I watched with horror as the crayfish I had held in my hand, had felt kick against my palm, were gobbled up by the river fish, out of existence as quickly as they would fall. All the boys were discussing how *cool* it all was. How *powerful* the fish were. How the exoskeleton of the crayfish they once held *was not as strong as it seemed*.

I became aware that my experiences with the nonhuman were different from those of many who were interested in Nature. It was not until I began my environmental justice masters degree that I realized my fascination with the nonhuman was never grounded in science, but rather in pure childhood love. I was never as interested in the frog for dissection as I was in providing aid to the injured frog in the window well. I was never interested in invasive species, but rather the individuals and their intimate relationships with humans.

It was also during this time that I discovered my diversion from hegemonic relationships with animals was rooted in my Jewishness, yet another way in which I myself diverged from hegemony. My research has become increasingly more grounded in my own identity as a Jewish woman who engages in activism through the direct action of “animal rescue and rehabilitation.” My positionality created an urgency to make connections between the re/birth of the Earth Based/Eco Judaism, Wilderness Torah, JeWitchcraft, Feminist Midrash, and Vegan Judaism movements that intersect with concepts of The Natural and The Environment in both productive and exploitative ways. Given the dualism of being animalized in rhetorics of oppression and the profound contributions to posthumanism that Judaism has offered, this assemblage creates a paradigm through which nonhuman “dangerous” and “well-behaved” bodies are created and controlled through pathologization and violence.

However, in the creation of dangerous and well-behaved bodies, my love for the nonhuman remains a through-line, if not a resistance, to the oppressions that make and unmake intimacy. The exploration of a love story between us, among us, and through us strives to illuminate the precious and complex relationship that Jews have with the nonhuman, directly pushing back against antisemitic tropes of Jewishness in perpetual relationship to violence towards animals.¹⁰ A second branch of this research is to illuminate the profound knowledge, practice, and community that is held in the nonhuman that we frequently exploit for capitalism and control due to fear. A third aspect is to showcase the pervasiveness of systems of patriarchy and the medical industrial complex and the impact of these systems beyond the human.

I sample many types of thought and format of writing throughout this work, ranging from the CDC’s definitions of disease and virus, to midrash or Torah portions, to original fiction, poetry, and autoethnography, to photographs.

¹⁰ Specifically around the widely critiqued *Karppos* that still utilize live chickens.

There is much unsaid between passages. This is partially due to the practicality of time passing and my memory not keeping each moment locked away as I wish I would. This is also partially because I trust you, the reader, to fill in the gaps because I will tell a story about a dog, and each person, cognizant of this or not, has a relationship with dogs. It may be positive or negative, it may be intentional or passive, but the dog has served as a long lasting cultural icon across the world. Your relationship with dogs will directly impact the way these words fall into your consciousness.

Summer

Beri'ah | בְּרִיאָה

In the middle of the desert I was surprised to find the juicy, brightly colored *maracuya*. Never had I tried one before, but in the several months that I lived in Andahuaylillas while on an archaeological research project, I ate the fruit every day. Unlike my current routine of driving each week to the local branch of the national corporation, Fresh Thyme, to gather fresh fruits and vegetables that have been shipped from around the world, each morning I would walk to the local *panaderia* to pick up bread for the day then stop by a fruit stand to purchase passion fruits and papaya that would later be blended into a smoothie.

On my daily walk, I would breathe in the smoke rising from the fires of community members making the iconic terra cotta tiles that adorned the rooftops of Cusco. The smell was tar-like but also sweet, most likely from the simultaneous burning of eucalyptus trees which had been planted by the Peruvian government in an effort to fight erosion. The Quecha people who had lived in this area for generations resisted the eucalyptus trees forced on them. The eucalyptus is a reminder of ecological colonialism that has been in this area for centuries. It grows quickly to cover the hillsides and takes in so much water that it has actually sped up the erosion of sediments.

I passed folks selling stuffed souvenirs of the *cuy*¹¹ that are eaten for special occasions in Peru. In the United States, you can purchase newborn *cuy* at your local PetSmart or PetCo and keep them in wire cages so that they may be your companions. However, the highlight of my walk was always the dogs. Ever since I was a young person the companionship of non-humans has made me feel more at ease. With my United States upbringing, it makes sense that I cling to canines as my companions, and in Peru, too, I was attracted to dogs. The spay and neuter campaigns that are led by the government of Peru and non-profit organizations such as Cusco Protección de Animales are not as robust as their anti-rabies campaigns. There are almost no rabid dogs in Cusco, but there are many, many homeless dogs.

As I walked down the street from the *panaderia*, I discovered a small dog that normally poked around the market area cast aside on the side of the road, unmoving. Looking closely I saw that she had a severe neck wound that was badly infected. The wound looked deep. At this moment, I could not tell if she was still with me or if her life had already left. My own breath left my body.

YHWH is unpronounceable...because if one tries to do so, pronouncing these four strange letters (semi-vowels, semi-consonants; linguists call them aspirate consonants) WITHOUT any vowels, one simply breathes...Explore what happens if you try to do this, and almost everyone who does experiences either a breath or the wind. The notion of YHWH as "the Breath of Life" accords with a deep sense of God as intimate and transcendent at once. If we have no breath in us, we die. If there is no breath beyond us, we die. Breathing encompasses not only all humans but all life-forms. What the trees breathe out is what we breathe in; what we breathe out is what the trees breathe in. So YHWH as a breathing sound evokes "kol ha'neshama," all breathing beings, and "nefesh chaya," all those in which is the life-breath. It includes not only specific

¹¹ Guinea Pig

*life-forms but the interwoven life-process, in which all earth—even aspects that we often think of as not alive, like rocks and the ozone layer—take part in a planetary breathing.*¹²

A gasp of air filled my lungs. Through my inhale, I was able to see the dog exhale. She was breathing heavily and opened her eyes slowly at me. In this moment, our lives became linked through Holy Breath.

My teammates, junior archaeologists from Tennessee, told me that there was nothing that I could do to help the wounded dog. That I should leave her.

*tza'ar ba'alei chayim*¹³

In my panic and grief for her, I called my father, a doctor, who also told me to “make her comfortable” and “get her water and a blanket.” I pled with women in the streets,

“Help me! Where is the nearest veterinarian?”

At first they told me this dog would attack me and bite my face off. I asked them if they knew this dog. Did she have a home? They told me she was a street dog—homeless. They had seen her around the market and she had gotten into some food. Somebody had probably stabbed her in the neck to deter her, they said.

Once they caught on that I was not going to let this go, they wrapped up the dog in a potato sack, dumped iodine on her wound, and brought the local veterinarian. Their compassion and dedication to healing this animal was immense. As we worked to triage her, more and more women appeared from their homes offering blankets, water, and food.

“We saw that you were crying for her and my heart was with you.”

¹² Rabbi Arthur Waskow in “A Letter to Chebra” (April 14, 2004).

¹³ Tza'ar ba'alei chayim (Hebrew: צער בעלי חיים), literally “suffering of living creatures”, is a Jewish commandment which bans causing animals unnecessary suffering (Wikipedia 2021). This commandment is frequently cited as one of the foundations of the Vegan and Vegetarian Judaism movement.

As I carried this small dog, now purple from the iodine, down the streets, the veterinarian asked me if I wanted her to stay with me in my apartment or if he should take her back to his farm to care for her. I felt so connected to her that the very suggestion of our physical separation ignited acute fear. Without our physical connection, would we maintain our Holy Breath? The link that, although I may not have known it at the time, healed both me and the small dog I came to call Esperanza, or Hope.



Esperanza pictured hours after her rescue in our house, purple from iodine.

That first day, the whole archaeological team rallied behind the care of Esperanza. Each person took on an act of care - procuring dog food and treats, blankets, hot water bottles. Esperanza slept in a warmth she may have never known before while I read my book beside her, also feeling a warmth I had never known. I had trouble sleeping that night—I was fearful that her



breath would leave us. In the early hours of the morning I took up my place of reading beside her.

She then took up a place of permanence in my lap, an acknowledgement of our connection through the delicate placement of a paw.

The archaeological team was so thrilled to have her, but nobody was as thrilled as I was. In the cold of a Peru winter, I often felt like a team of one. I had been sold on this trip through the promise of a feminist approach to archaeology and a prestigious sponsorship by the National Science Foundation. To be paid to travel, learn, and do something that I loved to do as an undergraduate seemed like an opportunity that would open my entire world post-graduation. However, my arrival was met with a misogyny that has characterized



archaeology since its colonist conception in the 15th and 16th centuries. The very reason I went to the store every day and saw Esperanza every day was due to my perceived gender. *Since we're*

in the field all day, we don't have time to do the cooking or cleaning. Could you go to the store and get some food? Bread? I'll leave some money on the table.

As Esperanza healed from her injury, she began to show a distaste for the PI¹⁴ on our project, as did I. The tiresomeness of playing a housewife when I desired to be a scientist leached into my bones and reconstituted my dreams. No longer did I want this path for myself or for Esperanza. So when my PI returned Esperanza's distaste, I took the data, I took the dog, and I took a bus to Cusco where Esperanza and I lived for two more months.

I found a small hostel that allowed dogs a couple of blocks from the city center. When I checked in, I became extremely nervous that my purple dog with a hole in her neck would not be considered a welcome guest. The gracious woman at the front desk let me know that she loved dogs, and she asked me if that's why I was in Cusco - to rescue dogs. I looked at my¹⁵ tiny,



purple puppy sitting on the floor of this beautiful hostel and realized that *Yes, I am here to care for dogs.*

She led us up a flight of stairs to the very top level of the building. The entire floor would be ours for a discounted price, given her love for Esperanza and our shared dedication to life.

There were two beds, a bathroom, and a bookshelf that quickly became filled with the

possessions we acquired. Dog beds, sweaters to cover up her purple and protect from the cold

¹⁴ The principal investigator is the primary individual in charge of a research grant, cooperative agreement, training or public service project, contract, or other sponsored project (University of Minnesota Office of the Vice President for Research, Roles & Responsibilities).

¹⁵ To connote relationality rather than ownership

nights, and a collar to signify her transitional relationship to the human. The longer we strayed from our project, the more fiercely my PI fostered hatred for Esperanza until ultimately, the most obvious narrative arose: She Was Rabid.

I received multiple messages from the PI asking me to confirm that Esperanza was not rabid. In fact, by the time he had sent this message, Esperanza was vaccinated for rabies. Esperanza's vet in the United States put it bluntly: if she had rabies, she would have already died. Her wound was in her neck. Being an asymptomatic carrier of rabies for over a month and a half with an injury like that was simply something that could not happen. Esperanza's vet in Peru confirmed this and added that the Peruvian government participates in Mass Dog Vaccination Campaigns (MDVC) because of their proximity to citizens. "There were two cases of rabies in Cusco the past couple of years - once from a bat and once from a fox. Is she a bat or a fox?"¹⁶

However these statements did not quell the fears of my PI. He had deemed Esperanza rabid, dangerous because she did not like him. I wonder if this meant I was rabid.

What is Rabies?

Rabies is a preventable viral disease most often transmitted through the bite of a rabid animal.

The rabies virus infects the central nervous system of mammals, ultimately causing disease in the brain and death. Rabies virus belongs to the order Mononegavirales, viruses with a nonsegmented, negative-stranded RNA genomes. Within this group, viruses with a distinct "bullet" shape are classified in the Rhabdoviridae family, which includes at least three genera of animal viruses, Lyssavirus, Ephemerovirus, and

¹⁶ Chomel B, Chappuis G, Bullon F, Cardenas E, de Beublain TD, Lombard M, Giambruno E. Mass vaccination campaign against rabies: are dogs correctly protected? The Peruvian experience. *Rev Infect Dis.* 1988 Nov-Dec;10 Suppl 4:S697-702. doi: 10.1093/clinids/10.supplement_4.s697. PMID: 3206083.

Vesiculovirus. The genus Lyssavirus includes rabies virus, Lagos bat, Mokola virus, Duvenhage virus, European bat virus 1 & 2 and Australian bat virus.

Rabies affects only mammals. Mammals are warm-blooded animals with fur. People are also mammals.¹⁷



Two rabid mammals.

The longer I shared my life with Esperanza, the stronger our link became. Through the imperfection of interspecies communication we began to know and love each other. Although the original plan, at the request of my parents, was to find her a loving home in Peru, when the time came for us to go our separate ways, it was clear that was not our destiny. For me, this looked like bouts of restlessness, anxiety, and nightmares that something would happen to Esperanza

¹⁷ Center for Disease Control *What is Rabies?* (November 30, 2020)

and I would not be there to support her. For Esperanza, this looked like many, many escape attempts - from climbing chain link fences to research with me in the field, sneaking out of our apartment to join me for breakfast, following me through the city (without my knowledge).

There was a moment through all of this in which we did become separated. I had gone to



look at the frescos in St. Peter the Apostle of Andahuaylillas. While inside, I couldn't shake this feeling that Esperanza was lost. I hurried through the church and could not find Esperanza. I began wandering the streets and asking folks if they had seen a small, tan puppy with large ears.

School-aged children began wandering with me in search of Esperanza, calling her name as we walked.

From down the street I saw her. She stood, rigid in the middle of the road. When I called to her, she began running towards me. I got on my knees to hug her as she jumped around - the excitement clear through her body. And that was that. Never again would we be separated. It wasn't until later that I began thinking through the specifics of what that would truly mean for the both of us.

When I began to look at the detailed requirements for bringing her into my home, my life, my family, the life that I hoped to share with her seemed fleeting - moving further and further away with each phone call to the Humane Society, USDA, and United States Immigration. Many online resources mentioned a series of vaccinations, quarantine, and health

inspections that she would need in order to come to my home. Given Esperanza's justified hatred



of other people, I was unsure how this would go over for her.

I was fearful that she would bite someone, and regardless of how valid such actions were for protecting herself, there was a likelihood that she would not make it through this system. If she were, for whatever reason, denied entry to the United States, she would be sent back to Peru immediately and would most likely be killed upon arrival due to her status as a street

dog.

We met with many veterinarians and got her up to date on all her vaccines. I asked for resource after resource to try to navigate this paper work. Everybody told me something different.

She would need to be quarantined.

She wouldn't need to be quarantined.

She would be allowed.

She would not be allowed.

She should receive vaccines now. She should be vaccinated in the United States.

I was at a complete loss trying to navigate this by myself. I placed a call to the border patrol office in Georgia to ask my questions and hopefully get some good news, a path forward. Rather, when I called, I spoke to a masculine voice who said, "They have such bad rabies down there. So many health problems. There's no way she would be able to enter."

I made a teary-eyed call to my parents, letting them know that I would be finding a home for Esperanza in Peru. Up until that point, my parents had been entirely wary of my interaction with Esperanza. I had grown up with a beloved companion dog, Monet, who was purchased at a high price for her small stature, hypoallergenic skin, and of course, perceived temperament. Shortly afterward Monet arrived, we all realized the flaw in the purchase of an animal - Monet had existed as a commodity for sale, but she was perfectly sassy, bold, kind, and goofy. She was priceless. Thus, my rescue of a street dog was a culture shock for a family whose only experience with dogs relied on a purebred dog breeder and a check of over one thousand dollars.

Nevertheless, the moment that I thought my parents would exhale in relief—I was not going to be bringing this dog home—turned into a moment of grief. They cried for our separation. They decided at that moment that Esperanza, a wormy street dog, was also priceless, regardless of her temperament (decidedly NOT kind to humans), worminess, and shedding.

My parents, unbeknownst to me, started sharing Esperanza's story with whomever would listen. I was quickly connected to family friends, work colleagues, friends of friends of a family member, really anyone who had connections to Cusco. The outpouring of love and support for Esperanza was amazing and prompted the close documentation of her experiences through photographs posted to an Instagram page. The more people interacted with Esperanza virtually, the more gracious their support became. I had folks who were willing to sponsor Esperanza financially, folks who wanted to adopt Esperanza (both in Peru and in the United States), folks who opened their homes to have Esperanza stay with them until we could navigate how to safely get Esperanza into the United States. However, it was through a local non-profit, *Cusco Protección de Animales*, that Esperanza is able to be with me today.

Cusco Proteccìon de Animales was the only animal rescue organization in the Cusco region at the time. To their knowledge, they may be the only animal rescue in Peru. The founder is a woman who is fittingly named Milagros¹⁸. Mila opened this rescue in her home and constantly fights against increases in payments for her property, tourist practices like nightly fireworks in the Cusco town square, and the culling of street dogs in Peru.

After exchanging several messages with me, Mila connected me to PetWings, a company that facilitated the travel of dogs in and out of Peru. She offered to care for Esperanza for two weeks¹⁹ as she underwent the mandatory vaccinations and health screenings necessary to bring her into the United States.

When I met Mila, she opened her door and gave me a hug. She pointed behind me, *Mira*. I turned and saw a white dog with brown spots. She looked to be average size, maybe forty pounds when a dog of her stature should have been closer to sixty. Mila had been trying to feed her for weeks but that dog just didn't trust her yet. Mila's response? *With time*.

I had been hesitant to entrust care of Esperanza to anyone who had reached out. Esperanza wasn't exactly neutral towards strangers she didn't know (with good reason) so I was fearful that she would be treated with harm for her fear-based reactions. Mila is still to this day one of the only people on the planet who I would entrust with care for Esperanza.

Plans were solidified, donations to Cusco Proteccìon de Animales were made, and the time came for me to go to the United States and for Esperanza to undergo a two week process of preparing for international travel. As I said a tearful goodbye to Esperanza, Mila asked me if I had any extra socks.

Any extra socks?

¹⁸ *Miracles*

¹⁹ This would be the first and last time that Esperanza and I would be separated for such a length of time.

Yes, so that she may always know that you are with her. It will be comforting.

So I took off my shoes, took my socks off my feet, and put them in the crate. I'm not sure if the thought of our connection through scent, through socks, was more comforting to me or Esperanza, but Mila was right. *It was comforting.*

Fourteen days later, Esperanza arrived in Minneapolis-St. Paul airport, completely vaccinated, with all the necessary paperwork, and with all the excitement in the world, to be reunited with the person who smelled like the socks in her crate.



Esperanza's first ride home.



A long awaited joyful reunion.

Walking in Different Directions

When my alarm clock goes off in the morning, I snooze it. My phone is programmed to wake me up thirty minutes before I get out of bed. In my sleepy state, I can only hear the jingle of metal clashing against metal, paws pounding down the stairs. Esperanza jumps onto my bed and puts her nose right up against mine. She's checking in on me and reading my body language. She can tell from my response whether it's time to get up or not. Most mornings she'll find that I have no plans on getting out of bed for thirty minutes. For both of us this is welcome. When the sun shines earlier, we will make this interaction brief. She will check in on me. I will check in on her. We will get up and start our day. But as the days become shorter, we tend to linger in these moments before the day begins. I'll roll over on my side and Esperanza will follow suit, filling the spot between my chest and the mattress beneath us. We try to keep each other in balance—not staying in this space too long as to never move forward but also to take time to rest (a radical notion these days).

Once the first move has been made—either Esperanza or myself getting out of bed, the other will follow suit. In the kitchen I start boiling water for tea and pour out Esperanza's water bowl, replacing it with new. I rustle with the bag of bagels I got at the farmers market. There's just no way a Jew made these and I shake my head, remembering the bagels I had growing up. Esperanza seems to agree as I drop a bagel crumb on the floor. She sniffs it, and leaves it be. I nod along with her. We then begin a sacred morning dance. I ask Esperanza if she wants to go for a walk. Sometimes she does, and sometimes she doesn't. Over the years, I have figured out that she doesn't like to go out too early or too late. If you ask her before 8:00, 7:30 at the earliest, she will decline in favor of more sleep, simply refusing to move. This morning when I ask, she steps

closer to me and lowers her head—an indication that she is waiting for me to put her harness on. As I do, we are so close. Nose to nose. Her eyes meet mine and I cannot help but smile. Oftentimes people will comment on Esperanza's eyes and I get why. There is something so... human... looking into them. She sees you when she looks back at you. You can communicate so much with just a glance.

As we set out on our walk I let Esperanza lead. When I first started going on walks with Esperanza, I thought I was pretty good at tiring her out. We would come to intersections in the road and she would lie down and simply refuse to walk further. I started picking her up and carrying her home—something I was happy to do, although it did make those free weights I had invested in completely useless.

We had only just begun our walk when Esperanza refused to move forward. Due to the brevity of our journey, I knew there was no way she had already tired. Do you want to go this way? I pointed in the opposite direction. Esperanza then got up, turned around, and led me down a new path.

Walking in One Direction

At a crossroads again. The tightening of the body. The refusal to move forward. You would think at some point the messages would come through clearer, but no. Humans are slow to learn these things. They are always thinking and moving, they are never just being.

Rachel points in front of us. Do you want to go this way? Stillness. She stands in the path to the right of us. Do you want to go this way? Stillness. She stands in the path to the left of us. Do you want to go this way? I begin walking down the path and she gets the message. I pull on the leash slightly to let her know I want to veer to the right of the path, but she was already ahead

of me. Ah, another storm drain. Yes, another storm drain. This is where it all goes down²⁰—all the TruGreen on your lawns that will give me cancer, all the sidewalk salt that stings my paws in the winter, all the dog poop—uncollected in careless moments, all the non-native species of plants and fishes that are dumped. They all end up here. There's so much to smell, but I can never quite see the objects that pool at the bottom.

The storm drain will feed into the river where I play. Rachel found a dog park on Broadway Street that is right by the Huron River. Some days, Rachel will let me splash into the river. I put my paws in the water and for a moment everything is still. The cool water runs through my fur, making it look as if it is floating with the current. The moment of stillness is short lived.

I hop.

I jump.

I run.

The adrenaline.

In those moments, I play.

And just as soon as the energy has come, it is spent and we walk home slowly, our steps moving in the same direction.

²⁰ Literally



A Walk

A walk.

As per usual, the midday was initiated by the ritual of lunch followed by a walk.

The ceremonial harness and leash.

The cup of tea, iced to reflect the change in seasons, placed in a portable mug.

The shoes created for carrying her long distances.

Each component sacred for our time together.

That day the ritual stopped nearly as soon as it began.

A whiff of something new clings to the air.

I begin my pursuit in earnest, she is unaware of this adventure at first. But when my body becomes rigid, pointing at the New that lay on the patch of grass she has realized the intention of today's ritual is different than another. Today is an initiation into a life in service and holobiant togetherness.

I had become lost in conversation with my partner, Eric, on the usual subjects - science fiction, board games, and climate change. The newness of spring has served as a time of reflection for many and this day was not unlike any other. The debates of coats vs no coats and the contentious conversations over umbrella vs no umbrella marked the transition into summer in Minnesota, and our transition from undergraduate students to Adults in the Real World. For him, this meant a transition to working the corporate sector - something neither of us had entirely envisioned. For me, this meant a year of AmeriCorps - also something neither of us had entirely envisioned. The rigidity of her body was the first thing that tipped me off. She stood, nose barely above the ground, pointing to a small patch of grass that created a small barrier between the sidewalk (a city-designated SAFE place to walk) and the road that cars drove to fast on, carrying University of Minnesota students, faculty, and staff to their daily engagements. There lay two tiny bodies, bright pink in their newness. The pink of their flesh directly contrasted with the brilliant yellow of their beaks, indicating to me that these were mere babies who had been arrested from their nests and released into our metropolitan business. A gasp of surprise got Eric's attention, marking once again my communion with these babes who would initiate me into awakened symposiums with the world anew.

I turned back with Esperanza following behind me with a quick shout to Eric - "Stay here and watch over them!"

Then the utterance I heard with more and more frequency throughout my life was voiced for the very first time “Perhaps we should... let nature take its course?”

The response was clear and direct. “I’m going to take them to the wildlife rehabilitation center.

Do you want to come with me or not?”

The journey was always intended to be taken together.

I retrieved a small box and towel from my apartment - thankful I had stored them away as I began the and also beginning a new ritual of keeping the boxes and rags I accumulated for such purposes. I returned outside to see Eric standing above these babies.

“Are they okay?”

“Yeah they’re okay. I think this one is bleeding, though.”

Sure enough, the smaller of the two babies had been moving less and less. There seemed to be a spot on their body where the blood was coming from even though we couldn’t find it. This was highlighted by the red marks left on the towel after my latex-gloved hands transferred them into the box.

Rushing to the car with a delicate intention, we began our drive to the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center of Minnesota, located in the suburb of Roseville about twenty to thirty minutes away. As I drove, the silence of our humanness was disrupted by the chirps of the birds, extending their mouths towards Eric for food. He looked as if he was going to cry.

“Are you okay?”

“It’s just hard. I’m getting attached and I just want them to be okay.”

In reflection, I can’t recall if my attachment to the babies was immediate or absent altogether.

My response negated the latter.

“Being attached to them is okay. I would hope we would care for each other out of impulse.”

When we arrived at the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center we legally transitioned the care of these babies to the veterinarians with the signing of brief papers. We made sure to check the box that indicated

Yes, we would like to be informed of the healing journey of the animals.

Yes, we would like to be invited to their re-release back into Nature.

We left a donation to the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in their names. The amount was miniscule for the work that the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center would do for these babies, but being students the ten dollars scrounged between us was all we could offer.

I consider this to be the beginning of what became the Neo-Animal-Renaissance of my life. It is true that the entirety of my existence has been surrounded by helping the nonhuman but completing this task in partnership with Esperanza and my partner felt more intentional, more based in an awakened mission of providing aid where there had been none before. Thus, the Neo, Animal, Renaissance.

A Multitude of Times

In walking with Esperanza, a renewed relationality with the nonhuman had made its way to us.

A chihuahua in the road with a limp,

A lost house cat with a baby bunny in her mouth,

A snake that had been run over by a bicycle,

A squirrel with mange,

A bird that had been attacked by a feral cat,

A feral cat with three legs,

A baby bat fallen from a barnyard beam,

A raccoon, who was sick,

A lost house cat,

A mouse, displaced from his home,

A dog, hit by his companion at the dog park

A dog hit by her companion at the dog park

A dog hit by his companion at the dog park

A dog...

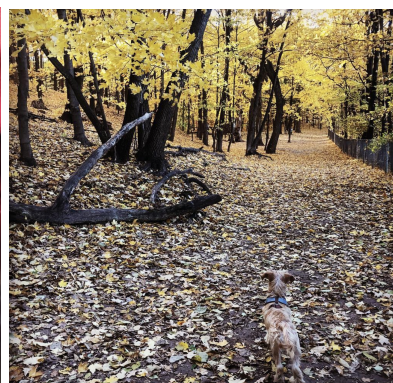
A bunny in my mother's window well (because we love a full circle narrative).

It was beginning to feel as if this was *inescapable*. Everywhere I began to see the struggles of my worlding companions, often at the hands of humans. The aid I could provide (at the very least, transportation to aid) became so frequently utilized I started driving around with a wildlife rehabilitation kit in the back of my car²¹ and a first aid kit in my backpack.

I'm unsure if I ever reached the status of First Name Basis with the rehabilitators of Dane County and Washtenaw County, despite the frequency with which we interacted. Nonetheless, this continuation of Sighting, Acting, Repeat when it came to abuse, neglect, and accidental encounters with danger pushed me to seek education on how to Care for animals, especially those who were nearing the end of their time on this plane of existence, especially those who had never known the deliciousness and heartbreak of loving with another species.

²¹ A tupperware container with holes at the top, gauze, towels, water, blankets, dog/cat food, birdseed, etc.

2018 & 2019 In Captured Moments





Communion of Communication

In spending more and more time with Esperanza, it was becoming clear to me that I alone would not be able to support her in her drastic transition from constantly fearing people, animals, noises, rain, to comfort. I had purchased Esperanza a bright red harness that had

DO NOT PET**DO NOT APPROACH**

scrawled across it in white stitching. My training as a legal advocate for survivors of violence had taught me many things, one of them was that the law was seldom on your²² side. I was constantly fearful that someone would not listen to Esperanza when she told them she needed space. I was fearful she would be removed from our apartment complex, fearful she would be removed from my care, fearful she would be removed from this earthly plane for no fault of her own.

To make this clear: I was never fearful of Esperanza.

Other than my own fear which was a profound initiator of my early decisions, I also wanted Esperanza to experience ease and comfort throughout the rest of her life. Her anxiety was

²² “Your” operationalizes as a moniker for groups who have been systemically disadvantaged by the United States legal system which was created to and continually operates to support hegemony. In this particular example, “your” stands for the nonhuman animal.

so clearly fabricated by the human existence that refused to accommodate the walking teddy bear with a bite.

I asked many of my friends for recommendations of Dog Trainers who would not utilize punitive methods²³. The Twin Cities Obedience Training Club (TCOTC) was continually spoken of (1) for its professionalism, (2) its abhorrence of punitive methods, (3) its diverse course offerings, and (4) its cost (I was still an undergraduate student after all). I enrolled Esperanza in Basic Training, Reliable Recall, Loose Leash Walking, Tricks 1, and Household Manners over the course of one year.

The first day of our very first class (Basic Training), we were told to attend a “humans only” orientation. That hour was spent breaking down why “training” was less about controlling your dog, and more about *communicating with* your dog.

“I’ve always had German Shepherd Dogs²⁴. Each one is different. You may think ‘oh well I’ve done this before!’ and try to do the same thing with this dog as you did with your previous dog. It won’t work. You have to figure out a new communication style with each dog. They’re all different. They’re *individuals*, even if they’re the same breed, size, whatever.”

That was certainly true of Esperanza, who ran an undercurrent of fear, compared to our family dog, Monet, who exuded confidence and flair, but mostly, stubbornness. As a child, I was very involved in the “training” of Monet. We got books and watched videos on all the tricks we could train her to do. We taught Monet to dance, to roll over, to jump through hoops, to run through tunnels, to shake, etc. We did all of that with her until she grew tired of it and finally said no more. When we asked her to jump through the hoop she would just walk away. We, of course,

²³ Shock collars, electric fences, hitting, starvation, mutilation - many of which are legal.

²⁴ Frequently this particular breed is abbreviated to GSD and is most known for their appearance as police and military dogs.

lost interest in the games when she did, but the communication we built with her while attempting all these “tricks” was useful for interacting with her for the remainder of her life.

Esperanza was different.

The first thing they wanted us to do was have your dog “sit.” It didn’t matter where. All that mattered was when we said “sit” the pup would sit. Of course, by the age of twenty, I was not so much interested in the “trick” of sit, but rather how to communicate with Esperanza that I needed her help doing something, mostly driven from a place of intuitive protection. Esperanza sat almost immediately. In fact, our instructor commented on how quickly Esperanza and I figured out how to communicate that task to each other. The next challenge was “lie down.”

Esperanza. Would. Not. Lie. Down.

Ever.

We tried it at the training facility - nothing.

We tried it at home - nothing.

We tried it outside - nothing.

It’s not that Esperanza never lay down, just she never lay down when I or anyone else asked her to. I didn’t put much concern into the act of resisting to lay down, she has the right to do whatever she wants regardless of if I ask her to or not. But I was confused as to why she would sit but not lay down when asked.

At first I thought it was me. Was “lie down” a weird way of asking her to do this? Sure, I thought of this as “laying down” but maybe it was something different to her. Like nap? Relax? Perhaps a non-English, non-human word, sound, or noise? Every time Esperanza would lay down of her own accord, I would let her know that’s what I thought she was doing and I would

give her a treat. Soon she understood if she lay down, she would get a treat. Soon she learned if I said lay down and she did lay down, she would get a treat.

This process took over three months.

Finally, when I was sure we had it down, we went back to the training club. I was so excited to show off our newest accomplishment - “lie down.” The instructor came over and I asked Esperanza to lie down. Nothing. I looked at him, almost in a panic. Had I made up all the time we spent working on this together?

The trainer nodded and moved away from us. “Try it again.”

I could feel the redness in my face, knowing that Esperanza would not lie down when I asked her to. Our relationship was doomed for failure, and it was all my fault. So I asked her, in peak humility, “Lie down.”

And she did.

The trainer approached us again and she immediately stood up.

“She only trusts you.”

Lying down is a submissive and relaxed position. It had never connected in my mind that when I asked Esperanza to lie down, I was actually asking her to be relaxed, comfortable, meditative, submissive, and at ease. I was actually asking her to trust me, might I add, in a rather commanding and expective way. This realization made lying down all the more special for the two of us.

The countless experiences I had with Esperanza like this, getting to know her and flexing our brains, made me hungry for more. I started to believe it excited Esperanza as well. Every time I took out my TCOTC bag and water bowl²⁵ I never had any intention of competing with

²⁵ Each students (dog-human pair) would have to bring their own water bowl to stop Kennel Cough epidemics which are often spread through dog saliva.

Esperanza²⁶, but we did flirt with the idea of learning agility and doing those exercises together. When I enrolled Esperanza in Tricks 1, I actually had no intention of Esperanza ever doing a Trick for a Treat. I didn't want her to feel as if she had to perform to know she was valued. I didn't know that the class ended with an exam to certify your dog with the American Kennel Club (AKC).

I didn't know much about the American Kennel Club when we first enrolled. I vaguely knew about the PureBred dog shows that they hosted, which continually made my stomach turn. The parading and pageantry that went into judgment of dogs was so interlaced with ableism and capitalism that I could hardly stomach the concept, even as a young child. I quickly learned that the American Kennel Club was an authoritative voice when it came to all things dog related - on topics ranging from veterinary medicine to food to "breeding."

The American Kennel club offers a wide range of certifications that your dog can achieve, many of which were classes that were open for enrollment through TCOTC. One that stood out to me was the Canine Good Citizen Test (CGC).

CGC is a ten-skill training program that's open to all dogs—purebred and mixed breed—that focuses on teaching the basics of good manners and obedience, instilling the values of responsible ownership, and strengthening the bond between you and your dog at home and out in the community.

After mastering the ten skills, passing the CGC test together, and taking the Responsible Dog Ownership pledge, you and your pup will join the proud ranks of over 1 million dogs who have earned their Canine Good Citizen award— accomplishment that's definitely worthy of extra belly rubs!²⁷

²⁶ To do so would go against my personal philosophy of what exploitation looks like in human-animal relationships.

²⁷ AKC 2022

At first glance, I thought that having Esperanza certified through CGC may quell some of my fears that systems of law and policing would stand between us. If she was a Good Citizen, she would be okay. In further reading of what the CGC “10-skill” requirements, were, I knew that Esperanza would never be considered a Good Citizen.

Test 1. Accepting a Friendly Stranger

Test 2. Sitting Politely for Petting

Test 3. Appearance and Grooming

Test 4. Walking on a Loose Lead²⁸

Test 5. Walking Through a Crowd

Test 6. Sit and Down on Command and Staying in Place

Test 7. Coming When Called

Test 8. Reaction to Another Dog

Test 9. Reaction to Distraction

Test 10. Supervised Separation

Each of these “tests” explicitly state that *politeness towards people* is the main requirement for success - no matter how uncomfortable or unpleasant your dog may actually find the interaction. After reading the list I couldn’t help but laugh, my brain just couldn’t comprehend these wild requirements any other way. The only thing that mattered in becoming a Good Citizen was pleasing people who may have oppressed you, you actually didn’t matter at all.

It felt like a game. One in which Esperanza and I would never advance, due mostly to the trauma that she had suffered at the hands of the human.

²⁸ Esperanza could probably actually do this, although our relationship to a leash is countercultural than as is described through AKC.

The Canine Good Citizen Test has been utilized as a benchmark for many “rescue dogs” and “bully breeds” in order to skirt breed specific laws that mandate wide-sweeping culling of particular breeds²⁹. Washington State has recently updated its breed-specific legislation in 2020 to include the CGC as an integral part of the policing of particular breeds:

(1) A city or county may not prohibit the possession of a dog based upon its breed, impose requirements specific to possession of a dog based upon its breed, or declare a dog dangerous or potentially dangerous based on its breed unless all of the following conditions are met:

(a) The city or county has established and maintains a reasonable process for exempting any dog from breed-based regulations or a breed ban if the dog passes the American kennel club canine good citizen test or a reasonably equivalent canine behavioral test as determined by the city or county;

(b) Dogs that pass the American kennel club canine good citizen test or a reasonably equivalent canine behavioral test are exempt from breed-based regulations for a period of at least two years;

(c) Dogs that pass the American kennel club canine good citizen test or a reasonably equivalent canine behavioral test are given the opportunity to retest to maintain their exemption from breed-based regulations; and

(d) Dogs that fail the American kennel club canine good citizen test or a reasonably equivalent canine behavioral test are given the opportunity to retest within a reasonable period of time, as determined by the city or county.

Although it is becoming popular to remove breed-specific legislation altogether, mostly due to the amazing work of activists and scholars who expose the interconnections of

²⁹ Most often, the Pit Bull which is actually an umbrella term for a sub-group of terriers rather than an actual distinctive breed.

breed-based biases and systemic racism³⁰, the CGC is often cited as a way to continue the policing of dogs and as a way to justify killing them for noncompliance.

The fear-based mentality that many have, that I have, around their dog being considered a Good Citizen³¹ leads to the belief that *you must be able to control your dog - wholly - in mind, body, and spirit*. The pathology of control in the nonhuman is seldom new. There are entire fields of scholarship and social movements that have noted the ontological turn that compels the Dominion over animals as being integral to capitalism and widespread dehumanization (as a means to enslavement, colonization, genocide, incarceration, etc.). This patriarchal need to *control* the natural, and, more widely, all your relations, is etched into the very ways we define our own intimate relationships.

Working as a legal advocate, I became familiar with my non-profit's definition for Relationship Violence: **a pattern of unwanted behaviors used by one partner to maintain power and control over the other**³². What then, would a relationship look like if it were dedicated to practicing resistance to this widespread, normalized, relationship founded on the accumulation and maintenance of power and control over the other?

Some Words That Bite

“Crocheting with this trash feels to me like the looping of love and rage³³” - Perhaps a note to me, in my love-driven rage, as we knit the story of companion species intimacies.

³⁰ *Pitbull: Battle Over an American Icon, The Law is a White Dog, Afro-Dog*

³¹ For a variety of reasons ranging from policing to protection to class status

³² TAC

³³ Staying with the trouble (79)

The waiting room always increased my blood pressure. I'm not sure how I ever got a solid reading when they put that cuff around my arm. Its constriction made me squirm. The feeling of rushing blood and my increasing pulse forced me to disobey the nurse's instructions: *sit still and don't cross your legs*. By the time I was finally called back into that horrid room I could feel my blood pulsing in my finger. They had given me some bandages to keep their waiting room free of blood stains - it didn't match the facade of healing.

When they asked me to get on the scale I wanted to decline. I've declined to let physicians know my weight for a couple of years now. The force of gravity on my body was not quantifiable for their medical model - at least in my eyes. The absence of weight on my shoulders (literally) meant that I could begin the process of reclaiming my body. But they asked me to step on the scale that day and I did. I asked them not to tell me what the number was so they wrote it down for me. I still remember what those numbers look like on that page.

"So - a dog bite eh?" The nurse practitioner was wearing a face shield and a mask. Despite the rational reason, COVID-19, I couldn't help but note that I was all too uncomfortable with the degree of anonymity that this afforded her.

Yeah, I said as I offered up my hand - still bleeding from the finger.

"Well we'll get you started on some antibiotics," *I nod*, "and you'll have to make a report to the police."

When I called on the phone you told me I could receive care without the police. You told me you would make a note of it for public health records.

"Ah well it's no big deal. You just give me some information, you'll get a call from the police, they'll get a statement from you. They always want to talk to the victim."

But I am not the victim.

Because I frequented the dog park I had seen the multiplicity of ways that humans colliding with animals caused a falling out - most frequently for the dog. That morning I had been looking over the lush summer prairie and seen a dog strung out on the fence line. She lay there - her body listless and her foot clearly stuck between the squares of the fence.

Just as her body went into “Freeze” to protect her, mine started running to provide her aid. I didn’t even have time to think before I went to lift her body to be met with swift objection from her teeth digging into my finger.

I didn’t notice the blood dripping down my shaking hands till after she was free. I didn’t notice the pain until Esperanza and I did a couple more laps around the dog park. It was only when I got back into my car and bled through my third band aid that I thought *Wow I might need stitches.*

I called my partner at work and asked him to drive me to urgent care. As we drove over to urgent care, I called and asked only one question:

Do I have to report dog bites?

The nurse practitioner let me know that she wanted me to start on antibiotics but wouldn’t fill the prescription until I gave her the details of the event. I provided her with the story - not the names or phone numbers. She said she needed them to follow up with the Owner to make sure the dog was vaccinated for rabies. I said I had already done this. She really didn’t care.

I could feel the hotness in my face as she once again let me know that the police would be contacting me. My anger boiled over in my body at once again being forced into this corner.

My words were biting as I described to her the undo anguish she has caused me, the dog, and their family. The edges of my sentences sinking further down into the bedfellows of the medical industrial complex and policing, trying to bleed them of their injustice. I ripped into her complicity in coercing me and weaponizing medicine for the sake of the carceral state. And all she had to say was

I'm sorry, with a shrug. You did a good thing.

The collision of my mortal humanity and the nonhuman at the nexus of medicine and the carceral state was so ripe for me that day. The animal control officer assigned to “my case” called me every day for two months. After speaking with the human of the dog who bit me, I called the police officer back and told them I didn’t want to be contacted by them again and that I would be blocking their phone number.

I'm just trying to help you!

What absolute *trash*.

The through line in all of this for me is the clear and present attempt to make bodies seem dangerous - hers, mine, ours, yours. This is, afterall, one of the best ways to control bodies - by making them afraid. Simply put, “well behaved” dogs do not bite. Cora, the dog who bit me, was a seven year old purebred border collie that competed in agility. Otherwise known as Ms. Americana in dog form.

Lassie Can Bite.

Dogs express their emotions just as people do. (INSERT BEASTS OF BURDEN QUOTE). Without the words to tell me that she was afraid or in pain or fearful, the dog bite was the most intimate form of refusal I have ever experienced. Cora is now inscribed on my body in the form of a scar. Our intimate relationship was fleeting but life changing in how my body became altered by our violent embrace. Cora, like me in urgent care, was pushed past her limits of safety and security and lashed out in an attempt to communicate. Our combined denial of control has marked us both as *dangerous*.

If we are knitted together, undeniably in dangerous intimacy, how may we crochet with the trash, the refuse, the garbage of this oppression to reconstitute our justified love and rage as quilts, a radical thought and action necessary for further entanglement.³⁴

To Think on Fears & Freedoms

I used to trim back Esperanza's nails with ease. Given her aforementioned predisposition for hating strangers with a vengeance, I figured it would be in the best interest of her health and wellbeing, the unsuspecting groomer's health and wellbeing, and my wallet to do this work myself. I trim her hair, leaving the pieces outside for our other constituents to build their homes. Neither of us particularly enjoy the process. For that reason, I only trimmed her hair back with the change of the seasons - from summer into fall, from fall into winter, and from winter into spring. Of course, being in the Midwest region of the United States and the rapid change we've experienced in climate over these past couple years, a season here or there is accidentally missed altogether.

³⁴ (Haraway, 2016)

In the summer I trim her hair outside - it keeps the hair from littering our home and also cuts out the middleman for the purchase and resale of bird housing materials. On our balcony, when I went to trim Esperanza's nails, I barely touched her before she started screaming. The sound caused me to drop the nail trimmers, usher her inside, and search her body for unnoticed cuts, scrapes, bruises. Although I found none, there had clearly been a wound.

Every time I take Esperanza to the vet, I ask them to trim her nails. I figure they are professionals and, if they are poking and prodding Esperanza for blood samples they may as well trim back her nails. It took me a long time to find a vet I liked in Madison. As someone cautious about the lack of legal protections afforded to dogs³⁵, especially at the hands of veterinarians, I'm particular about who interacts closely with Esperanza and I am always vocal about issues. So you can imagine my relief at finding a veterinarian that matched my nearly impossible standard - she seemingly matched my values around the nonhuman.

So, when the veterinarian told me that Esperanza would have to wear a muzzle³⁶ in the veterinary office I obliged. It didn't feel like a good choice, and I was vocal about this. They vet techs let me know that the muzzle actually activated calming pressure points behind the ears. *It was a good thing.* They also reminded me that Esperanza needed veterinary care, and this was *the only way she could get it.* It didn't feel like a good choice, but I did it anyway, and now I can't cut her nails anymore.

³⁵ Specifically, it is still completely legal for veterinarians to mutilate dogs to conform to aesthetic or lifestyle desires of humans (ie. cutting their ears off, cutting their tails off, removing their vocal cords). It is also common practice to euthanize dogs due to their expiration of a perceived ability (ie. this dog can no longer hunt) and/or for marked disability (ie. this dog can no longer walk, this dog is "crazy" and bites people). It is also legal to euthanize dogs due to nothing else than their breed, temperament, or desirability (ie. they have been at the shelter too long).

³⁶ Muzzles are often depicted as "saving the dog from themselves" in the classic "bite the hand that feeds you" narrative. In many ways, muzzles are amazingly effective at preventing harm to dogs, especially from systems of policing and legality, that justify the killing of these dogs based on their "bite record" and how many "strikes" are against them in said record. For this reason, the muzzles protect dogs from entering "bite records" thus protecting them from government-sanctioned euthanization in the name of public health and safety.

I had been told time and time again that I couldn't be present with Esperanza for exams because her "aggression" was rooted in her desire to protect me. So, when I dropped Esperanza off I figured once I was no longer in sight, Espernaza would relax, the muzzle would calm her, and the skilled veterinarian would soothe her. When I picked her up, this was continually confirmed by them letting me know that Esperanza had "behaved so well." That is, she behaved well until I noticed that I was being charged a \$40 **BIOHAZARD** fee.

"She expressed her anal glands when we trimmed her nails... But! She was really good!... Up until that point..."

Dogs have two small oval-shaped sacs on either side of the anus. The purpose of the glands is to produce a fluid with a strong odor (very pungent and fishy smell) unique to each dog. It's believed that the expression of a small amount of this fluid marks territory. Most dogs can also involuntarily express their anal sacks when they are fearful or become stressed.³⁷

It was becoming dreadfully clear to me that there was something going on with Esperanza's *mental health* that was being triggered by me approaching her with the nail clipper. We tried desensitization therapies, leaving the clippers out and giving her a treat every time she interacted with them. We cut dry pasta in the sink with the nail clippers to get her used to the noise. She remained fearful. That was when I decided that other solutions had to exist, and if they didn't we would find them.

It wasn't until I met the team at Compassionate Care Animal Hospital that I learned about the "Fear Free Pets" movement. Upon reading their website, I made the same judgment call that I had made before - *these people align with my values*. When I called to make an appointment, they scheduled us for something called "Happy Tails."³⁸ Upon arriving, the vet tech had me wait

³⁷ "Anal Glands in Dogs: Everything You Need to Know" (AKC 2021).

³⁸ It is notable that each of these appointments can cost upwards of \$60. Esperanza is insured through an ASPCA pet insurance plan that costs \$35 per month. Her insurance is able to cover the bulk of Esperanza's medical needs, due to a caveat that medicalizes her *behavior*. If a veterinarian prescribes

at a patch of grass beneath a tree, probably 500-700 feet from the entrance to the veterinary clinic. When she came out to meet us, she greeted Esperanza with baby food and asked how far Esperanza would willingly move towards the entrance of the clinic. Zero. Zero feet she would move. So, instead of being poked and prodded that day, the vet tech spent one full hour sitting beneath a tree, giving Esperanza treats, and absolutely schooling me on what medical consent truly meant, a lesson learned to benefit not only Esperanza, but also myself.

Much like the countless, in-depth research studies that have been conducted on the bodily legacy of traumatic stress events in humans, there are similar effects in our nonhuman companions. The way the vet tech described it to me that day, “There is a finite time that the body can remain in “freeze” mode before it starts to lash out. It sounds like Esperanza has reached her limit. We try to work with dogs when they are puppies so that never happens, but it is never too late to start.”

The treatment was beautiful, love.

For weeks the vet tech would sit with Esperanza, under the tree, and give her treats until they *knew* each other. Until one day, Esperanza would walk with the vet tech into the veterinary office. Until one day, Esperanza would *trust* her.

There is a lot of push back on this veterinary practice. Mainly, veterinarians do not have the available time to dedicate hours on end to building true relationships with their patients (sound familiar?). There is also the case for urgency, for preventative medicine while the relationship is being created, and the skepticism that it is even possible. When I asked each of these questions, I was met with an answer that came up in my body as contentious.

behavioral counseling, and/or diagnoses her with behavioral issues, Esperanza is able to have behavioral therapies and interventions (such as the Gabapentin she takes before going to the vet) covered by her insurance.

“If something were to happen and we would need to do emergency medicine, or if the relationship was taking years on end to build and there was a need for preventative medicine in the short term, we would suggest *sedating the dog*.”

I can’t help but think about sedation within the context of my own brilliantly designed, human, body. The brilliance of the design ~~unfortunately~~ holds the memory of what happens to me, even if I am not conscious of remembering it. I highly doubt there is a difference between that experience and the experience of a dog being sedated³⁹.

This moment was transformative for every being I’ve come into contact with since. In my own experience, I really examined what did true consent look like and feel like in my body when it came to medicine? Did I actually want this? Or, more likely, was I doing this out of fear? What would the fear mean for me later? These questions carried a new strength as Esperanza and I encountered more and more beings (nonhuman and human) that needed aid. In this way, I could very well be, and most likely was, the individual that inspired fear.

Spring

Yetzirah | יצירה

I could just barely see the sun begin to shine over the prairie. The changing landscape of the dog park never happened slowly. There was always one day in which I would set my eyes on the park and find it to be abundant with asters and goldenrod where I could swear there had never been any before.

The park was split into two sections: one for dogs who were over 18 inches tall, and one for dogs that were under 18 inches tall. The so-called “small dog” park was monitored by a stick

³⁹ Motivated by my own intuition, which I should have learned to trust earlier.

that had been cut to measure 18 inches from the ground. If your dog was shorter than the stick, you could hang. Esperanza and I will walk around the whole park (big and small) before anyone else gets here. The grasses that have gone to seed provide the perfect place for trying to catch bugs and for chasing any small critter that may have crossed our path. I can only tell where Esperanza is from the movements of the grasses, like waves enveloping her.

Around nine o'clock in the morning our friends would start to arrive.

Ollie

Merl

Sophia

Ozzie

Pepper

Holly

Champ

Lola

Wookie

with humans in tow.

I have never seen beings so excited to be reunited than when I watch the dance each dog does when a new friend arrives. The rigid bodies - *is this my friend?* The barking - *hello! friend?* The sniffing, the hugging, and of course, the playing.



From Left to Right: Boomer⁴⁰, Wookie, Bonnie, and Esperanza.

The usual pairs would break off and run around the space. The puppies (Champ, Ozzie, Lola, and Sophia) would run circles around the small dog park. Looking at them, we knew their time in the small dog area would be short. Their long, lanky bodies tripped and fell over each other as they chased. When they were full grown, the almighty stick would evict them from this play place.



From Left to Right: Esperanza pictured with Wookie, Ollie, and Scarlett & Blueberry⁴¹.

The older dogs would have a more mellow play time, or decide not to play at all. Merl and Holly liked to be an onlooker, simply surveying the play going on, while Ollie and Wookie liked to *play* with Esperanza. Pepper was **clearly** not happy to be at the park.

While the dogs played, the humans talked.

What does your dog eat. Where does your dog get their hair cut. What vet does your dog go to.

How is your dog's ear infection. How do you trim their nails like that. Should I take my dog to

day care. How should I help my dog cope with anxiety. How does your dog do in the car. Where

did you get that collar, leash, water bowl, doggie door, harness, coat, food, crate, toy, ball.

⁴⁰ Boomer & Bonnie come later in the day—around 10:00—and mostly on the weekends.

⁴¹ Scarlett & Blueberry (mother and son) live with our good friends Madison and Daniel. These days, Blueberry has surpassed the 18 inch height marker so we have to meet them in the Big Dog area.

My nine o'clock crowd was incredibly dependable, so we got to check in on each other every day. Being outside, in a mask, six feet apart from a stranger would not seem like the place to make friends. However, I quickly learned that this place had brought us together for a similar, impassioned reason—dogs.

The conversations always began the same way:

Oh what's this little fella's name?

Oh sooooo cuuuuuuuute.

How old is she? She? He? Oh she gotcha okay!

Do you know what breed?

Do I know what breed... Honestly no⁴², but people love to speculate anyway.

Oh I think she's got some terrier in there for sure! And she's so long! Corgi? Dachshund?

Where did you get her?

Well, that's actually an interesting story.

Once launching into my meet and greet with Esperanza, the reaction is mostly surprise. Every now and then, I run into someone who has a similar story about meeting their dog, or they know someone who knows someone who has a similar story. Often times the reaction is:

*They just don't have the same respect for dogs **down there**.*

The breath got caught in my chest the first time, the second time, the third time dog park patrons told me this. Everyone seems to have a story of traveling “down South” and seeing hungry dogs, mistreated dogs, and sick dogs. Although I have never confronted them out loud, my mind always wondered why they didn't do anything at all to help.

⁴² The advent and popularized use of “Doggie DNA Tests” is often suggested to further categorize Esperanza within breed-specific terminologies. Some landlords mandate that Doggie DNA Tests or “Poo Print” tests be ordered so that they may (1) restrict certain breeds from living in their rental properties and (2) fine residents a specific amount of money for each piece of poop that is not picked up by the resident through DNA testing of the unwanted fecal sample.

If Esperanza was born in the United States, she may have been “rescued” due to her perceived cuteness and youth but perhaps disposed of due to her lack of predisposition for affection towards strangers. Had she been larger, with cropped ears, a cropped tail, and robust cranial structure, she may have had another fate altogether. Had she been rescued by anyone other than a white woman, she may be deemed less “rehabilitated” and more “retaliatory.”⁴³

The conversation continues with an in-depth lineage of their dog. The breed. The mixed breed. The age. Their temperament. Why they chose to buy their dog rather than adopt. One thing that is always mentioned, even subliminally, is their guilt for not adopting.

We just really wanted a dog right now.

With the pandemic, all the dogs had been adopted!

*My son/father/uncle/mother/niece is allergic so we need a **hypoallergenic dog***⁴⁴.

They were just so cute.

I grew up with this breed.

*They are known to have **great temperament***⁴⁵.

I know it's not as noble as your story.

I nod along. I think of the homeless dogs in Peru, the United States, the world.

But of course, *They just don't have the same respect for dogs **down there***. Sure.

The Opposite of a Conclusion

Esperanza may I interview you? My eyes open, disturbed from a nap. My left eyebrow instinctively raised at the question. This is the very ethical dilemma that she discusses with me

⁴³ (Boisseron 2018).

⁴⁴ “There's no such thing as a hypoallergenic dog breed” (Mayo Clinic).

⁴⁵ There is little evidence that there is a “specific temperament” that is held by dog breeds. Rather some dogs have been bred for specific tasks and they are more or less oriented to those tasks based on their environment and cultural surroundings. Overall, traits that dogs possess are mostly based off their inherent individuality and environment. (Iliska et al.) (American Veterinary Medical Association)

over and over again. Although my response may not seem grounded in the way she communicates, I do have forms of communicating with her. I remember when we first met, how incredibly *difficult* it was to communicate with her. Truthfully, I'm not sure I would have worked that hard to form a relationship with anyone else. My vocalizations continually puzzle her. My body language puzzles her. My *lack* of vocalizations puzzles her. Years into our relationship I have established somewhat of a communication. But I am still unable to unequivocally answer - *yes I want to create with you or no, have I not done enough for you already?*

Although our relationship is undoubtedly one-sided, for with language comes power and without a strong, English speaking voice many will silence you, when she asks me *Esperanza do you love me?* I can answer her with a look and she knows. Just like I know that she loves me despite her humanness. Throughout her ethical dilemma I am there. I do not persuade her one way or another. Rather, I am a consistent presence by her side, at her feet, in her heart. This I know.

I stretch in my chair as she watches me, typing on her computer. A full bodied stretch that comes with a vocalization, a groan. My head is lifted high, my nose reaches the ceiling, before I look at her, present, and once again settle comfortably in the chair, making myself as small as possible to nap.

2020 & 2021 In Captured Moments





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