

## SITTING TO STAY WITH THE TROUBLE

*Anna Ricciardi*

When flames engulfed Manchester Dogs' Home in Harpurhey late one night in September,<sup>1</sup> news footage showed the people of this small town rushing to the scene, bringing with them blankets and anything else that might help in the rescue effort. Despite the bravery of rescue staff, firefighters and local people, scores of dogs trapped in their burning kennels died at the scene.

A short time after, it was discovered that the fire had been started by a teenage boy, intensifying an already acute sense of loss within the community. While a church vigil took place in Harpurhey to remember the dogs, the need to come together in collective anger and sadness was reflected in messages of support and solidarity across social media networks. Donations to the shelter reached one million pounds in little over a day, a level of financial support that most animal rescue shelters might only ever dream of receiving.

What became apparent from interviews with people living in the area, was that the dogs' home held significance beyond mere sentimentality and that, far from being an institution behind closed doors, many people had some kind of active involvement and relationship with the place and its purpose. Some commented that they themselves had adopted dogs from the shelter or that they knew others who worked there. The loss of the dogs' home and of the dogs that died that night cut deeply into the affective ties that connected people there, dog lovers or not.

### STAYING WITH THE TROUBLE

Two years ago, Donna J. Haraway opened the paper, "Cosmopolitical Critters: Companion Species, SF, and Staying with the Trouble" at Senate House, University College London, with a proposition of sorts.

She asked, "What is it to write and think and act in a time of exterminations and extinctions, and what is the work of recuperation?"

Her reply? "Staying with the trouble."

Our time of global exterminations and extinctions is one marked by urgency, a fire fuelled by

<sup>1</sup> "Manchester Dogs' Home blaze kills dozens of animals," (September 12, 2014), *BBC News* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-29170371>

access to data, both factual and fictitious in parts. Looking around, trouble is everywhere, but are some exterminations and extinctions more news-worthy than others? Haraway has described her “multispecies storytelling” as being, “about recuperation in complex histories that are as full of dying as living, as full of endings, even genocides, the killing of kinds, as beginnings. In the face of unrelenting, historically specific, surplus suffering in companion species knottings,” she states, “I am not interested nor do I believe it possible to have reconciliation or restoration, but I am deeply committed to the more modest possibilities of partial recuperation and getting on together.”

Drawing upon Isabelle Stengers’ notion of “cosmopolitics” in her own philosophy of “becoming with” others, Haraway outlines a possibility of multispecies players as “enmeshed in partial and flawed translations across difference” that may “redo ways of living and dying attuned to the still possible finding flourishing, still possible/maybe, recuperation.” Here the creative arts, and especially fiber arts, provide Haraway with tangible models for thinking about the scope and shape of these relations within “multispecies worldings.” Yet, it is real life stories that are also and equally weighted as “speculative fabulations, speculative fictions, and scientific stories and scientific facts” within this methodology for exploring a creative approach towards, through, and across difference. The media footage of tearful rescue staff, emotionally decimated in the aftermath of the fire, is a kind of fabulation too.

Yet despite the elevated value placed upon authenticity of emotional display, especially in our highly mediated times, this flash of emotional vulnerability wasn’t simply a manipulative (or rather, manipulated) tug on the heart-strings.<sup>2</sup> Instead, these images elicited a profound need to respond in empathy with and in solidarity to such an event by *being there* or *doing something*. Being present in person, in thought or in action, is always reason for hope, for finding that possible kind of flourishing, and perhaps even for recuperation. The overwhelming response to the fire was, of course, a literal act of “staying with the trouble,” a reaction to a dramatic moment of crisis. But perhaps these events also underline how “staying with the trouble” might translate into other ways of tuning in, be that a lifetime commitment or a more fleeting affinity. It might well be that in those seemingly insignificant and perhaps inconsistent gestures, lay those partial recuperations and processes of getting along.

Just as I, like so many others, was touched by what happened, the fact that Harpurhey, currently one of the most economically deprived areas in the country, should have been so demonstratively moved that night, poses important questions around response and responsibility.

2 I am thinking about the televised public performances of grief and mourning in response to Princess Diana’s death in 1997.

After her lecture, Donna Haraway spoke to me about the “liveness” or “lifeliness” in the language we use with one another, especially in the case of pedagogical feedback. She said that there is something rare and precious about the performativity of ideas before the finality of print and publication. As an artist who writes, I left thinking about the “lifeliness” of language: the vital power of words to nurture, strengthen, and connect, or to weaken and destroy.

As a passionate advocate and carer of rescue dogs, in the lecture theatre, my mind had wandered back to the shelter kennels where I volunteer, preoccupied with thoughts of the dogs I’ve spent time with and that I’d grown attached to, at least in the interim.

I paid attention to the lecture, but thinking about staying with the trouble only led me, inevitably, to think of theirs. This kind of trouble is both actual and abstract, dealing in the present moment and those yet to come. It’s the trouble of the dogs in the shelter, the dogs already known to me, the ones that need a home and human affection in their lives. But it is also those who are yet to find shelter space, the dogs that will most probably die, anonymously, having been badly treated or abandoned. Their trouble has become my own.

Throughout the lecture, I wonder about the dogs and if they are doing ok. While I trust that they are being looked after at the shelter kennels, it occurs to me that dog memories differ wildly from my own. That is not to say that we are strangers in absence of each other. For the dogs that have been waiting to be rehomed for some time, even if weeks go by between visits, I remember them, and they remember me. To them, I am a scent profile. To me, they are a story. Are we all a collection of stories and scent profiles? Like good friends do, sometimes we can pick up where we left off.

Staying with any kind of trouble is one thing, but to understand the tensions of choice and motivation, that’s where the tangles get interesting. Haraway’s previous work has often discussed the consequences of cultural and ideological abuse that we have tended to leave dog bodies exposed to, from the ways in which certain breeds bear the evolutionary and developmental scars of our human-canine relationships, to the specificities of locality, like the Chilean homeless street dogs of the *Kiltr@* project, as documented by activist researchers, Lissette Olivares and Cheto Castellano.<sup>3</sup> Whatever the circumstances, dogs are dealt a rough blow by their very geographic and historical context, despite all the love supposedly reserved for their species.

Maybe it’s the love that confuses this relationship. In *Melancholia’s Dog*, a brilliant evaluation of how sentimentality is nothing but a troublemaker for academic analysis of human-animal relationships, Alice A. Kuzniar notes that scholarly approaches tend towards underplaying the affective bonds between humans and dogs. The dog becomes an object of shame in dealing with such difficult

3 Olivares, L. (no date) “Pintacanes: Becoming with the Kiltr@s of La Pintana,” *e-misphérica*, <http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/pintacanes-essay>

concepts as “intimacy, compassion, propinquity, and mourning over their death.”<sup>4</sup>

Although it has become widely acknowledged that in the task of thinking and writing critically about animals, death is always somehow present, in my experience of the shelter kennels, there’s little room for shame or sentimentality. Replacing these touchy affects, I feel something else entirely. It might be chest-bursting pride or, in an unfashionable disclosure for a contemporary artist, inspiration. After all, how is it possible not to be impressed and energized by people who turn a theoretical ethos of preserving and caring for animal life into an actual, thriving possibility, all against the odds? That’s not to say that this kind of “optimism of recuperation” is heroic, perhaps because of the complex and difficult emotional register involved in animal rescue. To rescue someone or something requires a hard facing up to the reality of loss or failure, and in doing so, meeting strife, pain, and disagreement at numerous points along the way. What if failure means death?

### HOW CAN I CARE?

Ten years have passed since the publication of Donna Haraway’s ground-breaking and pamphlet-like work, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*.<sup>5</sup> Retreading a question posed early on, my attention is captured again, and it is one that can only grow in resonance here. Haraway asks: “Beyond the simple, personal fact of joy in time and work with my dogs, why do I care? Indeed, in a world full of so many urgent ecological and political crises, *how can i care?*”<sup>6</sup>

She has since answered her own question, but in turn, I ask myself, how can I separate what is my personal joy from a wider sense of responsibility? When we are often urged to *make a difference* in global problems of magnitude—issues of ecological survival and coexistence—can there be an engagement that manages to interject in ways that are both influential and joyful? Caring for abandoned dogs will not save the coral reef, but why do I care? *How can I care?* As a volunteer dog walker, rather than a paid professional member of staff at the shelter kennels, mine is a strangely privileged position and vantage point, derived through the simple joy of being in the presence of dogs. But while care, like love, given freely and voluntarily, might be a pleasure, I’m not sure that it can ever be wholly idealistic or romantic. Caring comes instead with its own set of obligations and conditions.

Inside the kennels, practical duties are often physically demanding and can change at any time and usually in quick response to (always unforeseen) events. There are at least fifty dogs at any time that require daily attention. For all dogs that come into the unfamiliar surroundings of rescue shelter

4 Alice A. Kuzniar (2006) 3

5 Donna Haraway (2003)

6 Haraway (2003) 61

kennels, re-establishing positive connections and a sense of trust in humans is primarily a matter of bodily co-presence. Scheduled time for working towards this is known as “buddying” within the kennels. This process reveals a holistic consideration of care that extends beyond feeding, watering, exercising, and socialization.

Each dog has a particular range of needs, and these are taken into account during this type of interaction. However, the majority of dogs come into rescue kennels with no documented history. The time sharing kennel space with dogs is a pivotal stage for building these bonds of trust and developing confidence, especially for those that have suffered abuse or neglect, increasing the likelihood that dogs are successfully rehomed.

It’s during these moments of buddying, in between the more active duties of walking, that I’ve been making sketches, fleshing out ideas for writing or just sitting quietly reading, always at a distance from dogs. Here I give an indirect, partial attention, where reduced eye or physical contact is not only preferable but actually beneficial to their comfort and rehabilitation.

What has become noticeable is that a duty of kennel-sharing transforms my own relationship to contemplative time, and this activity is remarkably similar to the kind of creative attention one might usually associate with other kinds of spaces. Since dogs demand and respond to both our bodily presence and our very present-mindedness, my thoughts are taken away from the confines of the studio, to become part of the space and place of these kennels.

I’m ever mindful of how this duality of intention suggests some antagonism between my priorities as artist and carer, as if one could neatly slice this attention between the sketchbook and the dog neatly through its core like an apple. There is something intuitive about this time and presence together, though, which is physical, perhaps biological, and all about reading the signs we give to each other. Over the years, I’ve become adept at understanding where the emphasis should settle, how to switch focus and awareness in an environment that is both unscripted and unpredictable, defined to some extent by what is unknown and unknowable. By nature, these moments of co-presence are spaces left open for things to happen, for trust to emerge, for ideas to progress, with no prescribed timeline. Incrementally, but unfailingly, these moments deliver revelations—dog-related and otherwise.

Perhaps sharing kennel space in this way, then, might be likened to other liminal or transitional uses of space for therapeutic dialogue or contemplation: those spaces for ritual, psychoanalytical, or confessional practices, where vulnerability and transformation go hand in hand.

## THE COST OF CARE

Like a meditation on a problem, spending time in close proximity can bring an awareness which isn't always easy or comfortable to consider. Senses of perspective (along with humor) can be lost, while facts remain unaltered and unrelenting exposure to just how bad the situation is can result in a restless, frustrating kind of knowledge.

For several years now, rescue shelter kennels across the UK have been struggling with the demand to provide care for unwanted or mistreated dogs. Animal welfare and rescue organizations have been making conservative estimates lately that around twenty abandoned and stray dogs are destroyed at Local Authority pounds on a daily basis, for no other reason than a lack of space within rescue kennels.

With limited resources and a responsibility to provide for the dogs already in their care, shelter staff are forced to make crushing decisions every day, essentially having to choose which individual dogs will live or die when the kennels are full to capacity.

This interests me, because even when given with the best or most honorable intentions, "caring" is so often steeped in connotations of inexhaustible altruism. Deception is ingrained into the image of caring by the selflessness of the do-gooder, moving along nicely with other pillars of community. But caring, in reality, isn't all that cute, fluffy, or cuddly. This is a misleading approximation of what caring consists of, precisely because it is so far removed from the intensity and mobilizing forces of affect at work in these interactions. Instead, demonstrating one's care is so often rooted in the hardness of practicality and other enemies of fantasy or fiction.

Animal rescue shelters are often small-scale charitable organizations that rely entirely on donations and the support of volunteers. They inevitably remain external to the interests of politicians. While the existence and purpose of shelters is ostensibly to help animal life, other important notions of care come to the fore in practice, since the cultural and social bonds of kinship tend to make difference something to celebrate rather than treat as an inconvenience or anomaly.

In fact, in looking towards the institutionalized (and increasingly privatized and monetized) caring for people, we might glimpse something of how the problem of care is that it seems to imply a proximity of closeness and connection which, more often than not, is one associated with normative relations of blood ties, lineage and familial bonds. In the UK, "carework" is a term which is curiously euphemistic in essence. Unlike social work, for instance, carework relates to a manual involvement with the bodily care of others, with duties that transgress societal norms of physical contact with others to which one is biologically or socially unrelated and therefore has no "natural" or obligatory bonds of care. This type of work is extremely low paid, physically hard, and distinctly unglamorous.

If we look towards political conversations around adequate provision of care for those that society considers vulnerable, it's no coincidence that they tend to revolve around concerns of financial cost.

But the dominant question of who should pay for what conceals another: *why should we care?*

A question of care, then, spans the personal, cultural, social and political, and incurs residual costs, even if these costs remain hidden or absorbed, and especially so by those who can least afford it. Further to this, it perpetuates a vulnerability that impacts not only upon those people who might need extra care and support in society but can also be experienced as low status, both in terms of respectability and socioeconomic mobility, by the people who are poorly paid to provide it. This frames an interesting affective and material link between bodies and relations of power, which in turn goes some way towards illuminating expectations around human-animal bonds of care in the process.

Jessica Dolce has echoed similar concerns about balancing the invisible costs of care in her essay “Depression and Suicide In Animal Care Professions: What Can We Do?”<sup>7</sup> She remembers Dr. Sophia Yin, a veterinarian and pioneering animal behaviorist who gained international recognition for her research on the handling of animals and the benefits of positive reinforcement training, and who took her own life on 28th September, 2014. In light of Dr. Yin’s suicide, Dolce writes that “compassion fatigue,” (formerly known as secondary post traumatic stress disorder), is an occupational hazard associated with the emotional demands of professionally caring for animals. Dolce advocates seeking professional therapeutic help as an important act of self-care since veterinarians and those in the animal caring professions appear to display an increased risk of depression and other mental health issues. She maintains that “self-care is critical to doing effective, ethical, sustainable and joyful work,”<sup>8</sup> but again, shouldn’t we wonder who else cleans up all the mess associated with trauma and witnessing? And can they afford it?

Staying open and receptive to trouble would therefore seem to rely on maintaining strong boundaries and practices of resourcefulness, with understanding and patience required from oneself and others. Neuroscience has proven that the catalyzing effect of knowledge to create changes in perspective takes place on a physiological level, and I notice that my hearing has become sensitized in a particular way. My ears prick up to the trouble that rescue dogs supposedly embody. I am not a dog expert, nor a professional animal carer, but in being moved to care for rescue dogs, maybe I’ve become chemically changed<sup>9</sup> by my closeness with the dogs.

7 Jessica Dolce (October 1, 2014), “Depression and Suicide In Animal Care Professions: What Can We Do?” <http://jessicadolce.com/depression-suicide-animal-care-professions/>

8 Ibid.

9 Oxytocin and dopamine are my chemical rewards for contact.

## TROUBLING TYPES

The Dangerous Dogs Act of 1991<sup>10</sup> was rushed through Parliament in response to a series of high profile dog attacks that saturated the media and gripped the public imagination. Dogs prohibited by Breed Specific Legislation are described as being of a particular “type” rather than of a “breed” (since the breeds are officially unrecognized in the UK), reducing their identification to largely subjective identifiers based on appearance. In England, the most prevalent “type” of prohibited dog is the Pit bull terrier, a close relation of the Staffordshire bull terrier which gained notoriety in the US as a fighting or “status” dog. There are numerous reasons as to why this legislation is considered flawed by many experts, not least because it hasn’t made any great impact on reducing the incidence of dog bites (by any breed or type) and, arguably, has only succeeded in galvanizing fearful attitudes towards certain breed types. If anything, it has promoted misunderstanding around what constitutes “safe” dog ownership, shifting attention to appearance rather than action. What should concern us here though, is that under Breed Specific Legislation, it is illegal to rehome these certain types, meaning that they stand a higher risk of being destroyed.

Breed Specific Legislation highlights a broader problem related to appearance that makes this an interesting visual cultural question. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has stated that there is “no evidence to support the notion that some breeds or types of dog are, by their nature, more dangerous than others. BSL punishes certain types of dogs for the way they look and fails to consider a dog’s individual behavior when determining whether or not they are dangerous. As a result, dogs whose behavior poses no risk are branded “dangerous” just because of their appearance.... Despite many of these dogs being friendly, well socialized and perfect candidates for rehoming to responsible owners, the law doesn’t allow them to be rehomed. This causes much heartbreak for our staff, who form very strong bonds with these dogs, particularly as many of them have only ever known violence or neglect from their owners.”<sup>11</sup>

One of the original purposes of the law was to eventually eradicate these types of dogs, to address the threat of dog attacks stirred by media reportage of vicious and out of control “devil dogs.” However, the introduction of Breed Specific Legislation only succeeded in amping up the desirability of banned breeds for owners who encourage aggression in their dogs.

Banned breeds such as the Pit bull terrier are still considered by many (mostly through ignorance of the history of the legislation and the dog) as extremely and inherently dangerous. By association, the Staffordshire bull terrier has come to be regarded as interchangeable with the Pit bull and just as emblematic of all kinds of societal troubles. All breeds and types suffer to some extent on account of popular reputations or misunderstandings of their traits. Collies, Greyhounds and Husky dogs are

10 Dangerous Dogs Act, 1991 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1991/65/contents>

11 “Don’t Believe the Type,” RSPCA <http://www.rspca.org.uk/getinvolved/campaign/dogownership/bsl>



just a few to have their own cultural-historical entanglements to contend with. However, a pattern has emerged around bull breed stories that is too fatal to ignore.

Notably, desire and suffering are heavily intimated in the Staffordshire bull terrier's rise and decline in popularity. Many dogs of bull breed appearance have to wait considerably longer to be rehomed, if they are rehomed at all. In UK local authority pounds, where time is very much of the essence, stray and abandoned dogs have only seven days to find a space in a re-homing shelter. If dogs remain unclaimed or have not been found kennel space elsewhere by that time, they are euthanized. Bull breed type dogs, but especially Staffordshire bull terriers, are therefore destroyed with alarming frequency and more than any other.

Invariably, those who regularly work with rescue dogs know that a vast number of dogs in pounds and rescue shelters are not there due to innate aggression or behavioral problems. Of all the breeds rehomed by the organization that I volunteer with, I am reliably informed by senior rescue staff that Staffordshire bull terriers are the breed least likely to be returned due to behavioral problems in a new home. This goes some way to emphasize the discrepancies between representations of breed or type perpetuated by the media, and characteristics that only come to be known through an experience of knowing—that is, through shared proximity.

Speculative fabulations come in all shapes, sizes, and temperaments. The tales that circulate about how “good” dogs inexplicably turned “bad” in the heart of the family home, supposedly without prior clues or form, stir up base fears and primal instincts to predict and protect from danger, literally to keep that fabled wolf from the door. Dogs frothing at the mouth make for more sensational headlines, but this is nothing new. A fear and fascination with monstrous animality is in stories as ancient as our DNA.

Less lupine, the English Staffordshire bull terrier, ancestor of the banned Pit bull terrier, shares cultural history with that of the English urban working classes. Bred as the perfect fighting dog, the bull terrier's physical attributes, a muscular frame, strong jaw and locking bite meant that it could inflict serious injuries upon other dogs, but equally important traits were it's capability for forming strong bonds with its owners. Conversely, the very same dog was also once nicknamed the “nanny dog” because of an older and recently forgotten reputation for being gentle around children. Nevertheless, a problematic association with violence and city-dwelling endures in stereotyping bull terriers and their owners today.

## “IT’S NOT THE DOGS THAT ARE THE PROBLEM BUT THE PEOPLE WHO OWN THEM”

The language used in making definitions that matter is of huge importance, to the point of life and death. How do we speak to each other or of one another? The prominence of bull breeds as the type of dog most likely to be in pounds and rescue today should raise questions around a responsibility in how their story is told. Which stories should we pay attention to and what is at stake in the definition between facts and fictions? Storytelling becomes a form of protection, a method for either closing or creating distance across difference, perimeters to avoid contamination and danger, or for shoring up certainties and rounding up collective truths. Comparisons may well be readily made between distinctions of social class and genetic breeding, but it seems that companion species relationships cannot escape similar judgments of taste and moral characterization. Fear and ignorance combine in a prejudice towards dogs of a certain (bull breed) “type” and of what perceived social dangers they represent. But these are also subtly expressed in a sentiment I have heard uttered many times: *“it’s not the dogs that are the problem, but the people who own them.”*

During any casual discussion of Staffies, this solution to the problem of irresponsible ownership is repeatedly offered. Indeed, it is a valid statement. Of course the dogs are not the problem, it *is* the people who own them. Except that this statement, in any variation, functions to put distance between the speaker—as of greater moral standing, as law-abiding, respectable etc. —and those who might be perceived to be a “problem.”<sup>12</sup> It is rare to hear the same moralizing discourse about Labrador or Spaniel breeds or their owners, though they’re just as capable of showing aggressive behavior.

In *When Species Meet*, Donna Haraway makes mention of Beatriz Preciado’s discussion of the French bulldog’s historical significance, namely the breed’s uses for showing off displays of social status. This wasn’t for acquiring a status of classy respectability but in the mode of rebellious, flamboyant deviance from norms. These were the dogs of choice for those that shared the transgressive outskirts of society, those “marginal monsters,” the intellectuals, prostitutes, criminals, artists, and so on. The French bulldog, Preciado notes, represented “the so-called dangerous classes” in that “the scrunched up faces of the bulldog, as those of the manly lesbians, were part of the modern aesthetic turn.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Solutions to the ‘problems’ presented by the poor and their visibility have a history of codification or typing. From the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor, and the subsequent containment and ownership of bodies in 19th century workhouses, to the visualization of the lower classes as degenerate/criminal “types” in Victorian theories of physiognomy.

<sup>13</sup> Donna Haraway (2008) 304

A very similar use of the heightened visibility of the dog's body is demonstrated throughout feedback loops and critiques within popular culture,<sup>14</sup> with the bull terrier used as a totemic animal image of resistance, authenticity, and style.

Interestingly, where Staffordshire bull terriers were all the rage in recent years, French bulldogs are enjoying a fashionable moment in the UK, a reminder that tastes change and that these shifts in cultures of display are as much a driving force in the evolution of human-canine relationships as hunting or herding, food or fleece.

The desirous image of bull breeds is intriguing. Just as in Preciado's consideration of the French bulldog, the physical appearances of both the Staffordshire bull terrier and the Pit bull terrier somehow conflate with dangerous transgressions of sexuality, ownership, and power, signaled by the visual conspicuity of muscle and stature. Color plays some part too. White or lighter colored Staffordshire bull terriers<sup>15</sup> are highly prized in illegal dog fighting circles, standing out in grainy low-res recordings destined for the internet, and making the money-shot conclusion of a fight more pronounced and easier to view. In this mediated image, the bodies of these dogs serve to aestheticize an intersection between undesirable behaviors and appearance.

Even if dogs are not encouraged to fight in competition, practices of dangerous ownership still include forcing dogs to wear weighted collars so as to bulk up the muscle around the neck and shoulders, or teaching dogs to leap up and hang from tree branches to strengthen the grip of the jaw. It is not unusual to see that dogs to show status are kept un-neutered, in spite of veterinary advice that recommends otherwise, conferring upon the owner, by association, a hyper-sexualized heterosexual masculinity, or perhaps hinting at the protection that is expected to come from it. All of these meanings, though, are conflicting, unstable, and anything but culturally neutral.

Over on the dog walkers' path in the rescue shelter, I stop to have conversations across the fence with owners of well-trained and socialized Staffordshire bull terriers who care about their dogs and how vilified the breed has become. Dog owners tell me of how misunderstandings and fears around their

<sup>14</sup> US rapper Armando Christian Pérez reportedly chose the stage name Pitbull to reflect his own sense of struggle for recognition as a rapper, since pit bull's "bite to lock. The dog is too stupid to lose. And they're outlawed in Dade County. They're basically everything that I am. It's been a constant fight". While Pérez identifies with the sense of integrity and 'fight' that the bull terrier is assumed to embody, the overt sexism and machismo in the rapper's music is parodied by South African "zef" rap-rave group Die Antwoord. Their video for the track, *Pitbull Terrier*, exploits the excessive imagery of the dog to comic and sensational effect. In one scene, a man who looks very much like Pitbull the rapper is mauled to death by a grotesque Pit bull terrier/ werewolf figure who goes on to hump and bite anyone in his way.

<sup>15</sup> The risk to dogs of being stolen for use as bait in dog fights makes this a concern for owners of all breeds, not just those of bull breeds.

potentially “dangerous dog” have reached such a fever pitch that they are hesitant to walk their dogs in certain parks and public spaces. They fear people, including other dog walkers, will presume that their Staffordshire bull terrier is a threat to them, their children, or their own dog’s safety. Not only do banned breeds like the Pit bull terrier suffer as a consequence from Breed Specific Legislation, but so too do all dogs with an appearance that may put them at risk of being identified as a particular type or of being reported to authorities as a dog that simply looks as if it might be dangerous.<sup>16</sup>

Their suffering comes via the speech, or muteness, that continues to be an interesting problem for critical animal studies scholars in terms of agency and attachment. However, the ownership of certain narratives to determine who gets to speak falls within the scope of a more nuanced failure to recognize and voice where value is given or taken away from bodies of either species. Some are reticent to acknowledge how class difference plays out, albeit contradictorily, throughout culture. Speaking about this kind of difference and its histories, or even allowing others the space to do so, is uncomfortable. Therefore, while the prismatic effects of racialized, gendered, and class-based judgments of moral value influence opinion of what makes a dog “good” or “bad,” this makes for a darker violence contemporarily acted out on the bodies of bull breeds through both legislative and subjective categorizing or “typing.”

Theirs is an extermination, obscured from view. Rather than apportioning blame to those who give care to the dogs while they’re in the temporary provision of the pounds, surely it is a timely visual cultural challenge to consider not only a Harawayan multispecies ethics of living and dying, but in speaking about who pays the price for the telling of these stories? A week after the fire, a statement issued on the Manchester Dogs’ Home website read:

“We continue to mourn the loss of dozens of our dogs—vulnerable animals whom our staff and volunteers had known, loved and cared for. The loss of one dog in this way would have been terribly sad; to have lost this many, and in such a way, is incomprehensible.”<sup>17</sup>

The dogs that died in the Harpurhey fire were deemed newsworthy—raging fires tend to demand urgent response and attention—and rightly so. A mental image of charred remains, by stark contrast, makes the cold clinical death administered by injection seem more merciful for these surplus, useless dog bodies. In the drama of the crisis, the news coverage of the fire omitted the fact that the fate of all of these dogs had been sealed some time prior to the fire, by the moral legitimacy of their disposal.

<sup>16</sup> Breed Specific Legislation hinges upon measurable traits in appearance rather than genetics. For instance, if a Staffordshire bull terrier (a legal breed which shares the same box-shaped head as the prohibited Pit bull terrier) has a muzzle measurement falling just millimeters outside of the regulation standard, it may be deemed ‘type’, seized by authorities and destroyed, regardless of history or temperament.

<sup>17</sup> “Newx,” Manchester and Cheshire Dogs’ Home (Accessed December 1, 2014) <http://www.dogshome.net/new/>

The dogs saved from the fire had most likely been rescued from a local authority pound with moments to go before the final injection. They would have been predominantly bull breed mixes, the type of dog that is harder to rehome, because of taste, appearance, and misconceptions around safety and protection.

The dogs that had been successfully rescued, rehabilitated, cared for, and loved by the people there could have easily been the ones that didn't make it, the ones for which there weren't enough kennel spaces when they needed them. They might not have been chosen for adoption because they were no longer puppyish enough or because of the way they looked. This would have been the brutal context for a very particular experience of sadness and loss felt by the staff and volunteers at Manchester Dogs' Home. Staying with the trouble there, against the tide of grief and shock, will mean rebuilding the kennels from the ground up--alongside morale--and in accepting hope and encouragement from knowing that others wholeheartedly support what they are doing, every day, because there is nothing more urgent than asking not why *should* I care, but rather *how can I care?*

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