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Postprint

This is the accepted version of a paper published in *Space and Culture*. This paper has been peer-reviewed but does not include the final publisher proof-corrections or journal pagination.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Holmberg, T. (2013)

Trans-species urban politics: Stories from a beach.

Space and Culture, 16(1): 28-42

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1206331212452365>

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-200396>

Trans-species urban politics – stories from a beach

This dog is a Labradoodle. Half poodle, half Labrador retriever, like most of the locals she too could claim French-Canadian roots. Either way, I'd like to see this dog like me as "from away," as they say here of everyone not born of Mainers. I'd like to think she shares my suspicion of their shifting notions of what's allowed. Worse, I've fast-talked and fast-walked her around the law for too long to stop now. On the beach, we see no fences, no markers, so we just keep going. (McHugh, 2010)

The small Californian city of Santa Cruz is one of the strictest in the US when it comes to dog politics, as regards restricting and regulating the movements of and spaces allowed for dogs. The city invests great resources in compelling dogs and their people to abide by the law. However, it is not surprising that although dogs are prohibited altogether in certain areas and dogs off leash are banned – and consequently there are some serious risks and punishments associated with breaking the ban – rules are continuously disobeyed; spatial restrictions only produce new forms of trespassing (see Borden, 2001: 254). This is the context of a controversy regarding an unofficial urban/suburban "dog beach", a place that people from different interest groups struggle to gain access to and to define using all possible means. Thus, the present article recounts some recognizable features of contested everyday socio-spatial relations, taken from, among other sources, studies of skateboarding (Stratford, 2002; Chiu, 2009), graffiti writing (Mubi-Brighenti, 2010), young street dwellers (Valentine, 2004) and punks (Hebdige, 1979). The case study will be analyzed as an example of a 'politics of place' (Franzén, 2002), in which several actors are trying to define of a certain location. The question is, in brief: Is this a beach for off-leash dogs or not? However, the article outlines an additional complication, namely the ambiguity of human/dog relations in the urban space. It is used as an example of the dialectics of everyday lives – of the bodies, practices and movement of people and dogs – and space: the liminal case of the beach. My expectation is thus that although, and perhaps because, trans-species urban politics presents its own specific dilemmas and counter-politics, the case can contribute to the general conceptual development within the field of micro-spatial urban politics. By bringing together spatial politics research and animal geographies oriented toward the nature/culture divide, I wish to demonstrate how everyday life is affected by politics, but also

constitutes a site for resistance (Lefebvre, 1996), and to discuss how the collective movement of dogs and people in urban space can be conceptualized as a trans-species urban crowd, threatening a certain public order.

[Prohibition signs, the wharf. Photo: Tora Holmberg]

Santa Cruz is located 115 km south of San Francisco in Central California, with a population of close to 60,000. The data presented come from fieldwork performed at Its Beach (belonging to the Lighthouse Field Park, by West Cliff Drive) during three weeks in April, 2010. I had heard of a conflict regarding the beach, and set off to observe and talk to people about their experiences of going there: Why did they go there? How did they feel about the place? How did the dogs and people get along? Did they experience any conflicts? When did they occur? Had they encountered the police or other authorities during their visits? These ethnographic accounts were then used as a means to start unfolding the controversy, through websites from involved neighborhood organizations, official documents from the State of California and the Santa Cruz City Council and blogs from people visiting the beach. The method is thus not a traditional ethnographic one, but inspired by the approach of ‘following the controversy’ (Latour, 1988). The analysis of the present conflict is performed in a symmetrical fashion, presented in the empirical section ‘A history of a beach’. The article ends with a more elaborate discussion of the complexities of trans-species urban politics, and an understanding of canine-human local, collective action as a trans-species urban crowd. Before getting to the actual case study, a theoretical positioning of urban human/dog politics is outlined.

Politics of urban human-animal relations

Urban theory is in essence anthropocentric, and the fact that humans are placed at the center of analyses is seldom reflected on. Urbanization has been theorized, as cultural geographer Jennifer Wolch points out, as a process that acts on ‘empty spaces’, not taking non-human inhabitants into account (1998: 119). However, the city is occupied by four-legged, non-legged and winged animals, contributing to the urban spirit – *anima urbis* (Wolch, 2002: 722). Human relations to other animals are part of the construction of the urban environment, identities and places, and society rests on the use of other animals (Philo & Wilbert, 2000). If one is interested in analyzing

animal/human relations in the city, the nature/culture boundary is a given starting point. While ‘society’ consists of humans and their interaction, institutions and cultures, animals fall into the nature category. In the urban context, the overall construction of the civilized and ordered city rests on the exclusion of nature (Kaika, 2005). Thus, the presence of other animals can de-civilize urban places, which in turn calls for normalizing strategies such as sanitization, to recall Mary Douglas (2002 [1966]). When they transgress certain boundaries, both wild and domestic animals can become vermin and thus the objects of exclusion or extermination (Griffiths, Poulter & Sibley, 2000). The boundaries may be geographical or numerical in nature, but they may also be a matter of being out of place, or time. Yet the wild, including urban animals, is also a source of desire, and thus calls for care, conservation and protectionist practices.

Thus, on the one hand, we have the nature/culture divide, the boundary work and cleaning of spaces, and on the other, the elevation of animal life, what Maria Kaika calls ‘the dual script of city-nature,’ as uncivilized and in need of sanitization (concrete jungle), *and* as a sacred, pristine inspiration for a better life (2005: 14-15). According to Bruno Latour, modernity works in this way because it is structured around two different levels or domains: purification and translation (Latour, 1993: 10-11). Since dogs along with other companion animals occupy what can be called a ‘liminal space’ (Fox, 2006), processes of exclusion and inclusion, when they occur, can be expected to be rather complex when the fine line between nature and culture is transgressed. Anomalies can be perceived as threatening the cultural order and sorting systems, and thus invoke closure and other normalizing strategies, but through their multiple meanings, they also work as potentially subversive actors and triggers of social change (Douglas, 2002 [1966]).

Historically, dogs inhabit several spaces in human culture with the longest history of domestication, and they are increasingly used both as companion, working, hunting and service dogs (McHugh, 2004). Some thinkers have viewed pet dogs as degraded animals, deprived of any natural traits, and as such as pure products of modernity and urbanization. Sociologist Adrienne Franklin (1999), for example, explains the increased popularity of pets in the Western world with the notion that they fill the void caused by a lack of human relations in the individualized, modern city, thus contributing to – following Giddens’ terminology – ‘ontological security’. However, as Erica Fudge points out, it could similarly be argued that:

...pets by their very nature challenge some of the key boundaries by and in which we live and thus they cannot provide ontological security, but instead undermine it.[...] Maybe it is because the pet breaches a boundary, not despite it, that pets are so important in the modern world. (Fudge, 2008: 19-20)

This is an intriguing question, and one can clearly see indications that pets, and particularly dogs, have become increasingly important in modern times. Dogs have also gone through an urbanization process, and lately, urban places such as dog cafés, kindergartens, spas, cemeteries and parks have been created. All over the Western world, dog parks as designated areas for dogs off leash are now emerging, and these are often contested sites (Instone & Mee, 2011). Increased dog ownership and changing pet relations, together with crowding processes also for non-human animals, lead to spatial conflicts.

Another liminal space, the place under study here, is the beach as a dog park. Cultural studies scholar John Fiske (1989) reads the beach as a cultural text, uncovering the ideological power structures (race, class, gender) that are spelled out at a particular beach. He also notices some general features of the urban/suburban beach, as opposed to the 'wild' beach. According to Fiske, it is an anomaly between nature and culture, where certain parts (lawn, parking lots, toilets) belong more to culture, while water along with waterfront (diving and swimming) is more nature (1989). In our cultural imaginary, the sea is often perceived as more 'nature' than anything else, and is often constructed as the last frontier: 'Provoking not only ideas of margins, exchange and openness, the beach, particularly in an Australian context, also represents a deeply contested site, suggesting struggles over issues of ownership, belonging, nationality and culture' (Brown et al., 2007).

In the present paper, I use an ongoing debate to uncover politics in action. Debates are fruitful entrances for getting at unspoken norms and values, along with taken-for-granted practices. Norms, ideas and identities are produced and reproduced through debate (Mulkay, 1997). By 'politics', I mean the discursive and non-discursive acts involved in struggles over priority of access, interpretation and recourses. In this case, it is more precisely the 'politics of place' that is

the entrance, meaning historical-cultural struggles to construct, define and settle the hegemonic meaning and function of a particular place, the question being who has the right to access, to sensing who belongs and who should be excluded (Franzén, 2002). In regards to a square in central Stockholm, Franzén writes:

As a place, Sergels torg is marked by the uncertainties and ambivalences of modernity, while both sides in this politics of place are seeking closure, trying to make the square into something unambiguous—either a cosy place, or a historical monument. (2002: 1123)

Similarly, it can be said that the controversy over Its Beach is one in which actors struggle to define and establish a definite meaning, a ‘sense of place’ (Feld & Basso, 1996).

A history of a beach

As stated in the introduction, Santa Cruz is a small city situated on the Central California coastline, on the northern tip of the Monterey Bay. It is predominantly a white middle-class city, where the percentage of the population consisting of other ‘races’ is significantly below the state average, while educational background shows the reverse pattern; the percentage of the population holding a bachelor's degree or higher is above the state average (City Data, 2010). The beach of interest for the present study can be reached from West Cliff Drive, flanked by the large villas and bungalows of the Lighthouse neighborhood. This 0.518 square mile neighborhood is a solid one, with a median annual household income in 2008 of \$72,195, compared to the Santa Cruz median of \$63,227, and the houses are significantly larger than average (City Data, 2010). The Lighthouse neighborhood surrounds the Lighthouse Field State Park, and the connecting Its Beach. It is a popular park and beach, enjoyed both by humans – not least tourists and surfers – and by sea lions, birds (such as the rare Black Swift) and dogs.

[West Cliff Drive. Photo: Tora Holmberg]

Almost 40 percent of all Californian households have a dog, but less than two percent of state and city parks are off-leash areas (Dog Park USA, 2010). In Santa Cruz, there are no fenced dog

parks, but a few parks and one beach allow dogs to be off leash during certain hours. Until recently, the Lighthouse Field Park and adjacent Its Beach were open for such off-leash recreation (between sunrise to 10 am and 4 pm to sunset), much due to the area's status as an undeveloped state park. The local interest organization Friends of the Lighthouse Field (FOLF) writes in a petition to state park director of a '50+ year tradition of voice control/off leash recreation', but also that 'the beach portion (Its Beach) has always been heavily used by the public, not only by people with dogs but also surfers, runners, sunbathers, dance and drummer circles, and many other recreational users' (FOLF, 2010). In May 2002, some of the dog accompanying visitors started to sense a threat to the tradition, and formed the FOLF group, with the aim to 'support the preservation of the beauty and recreation opportunities for people and dogs off leash at Lighthouse Field and Its Beach' (FOLF, 2005). All the neighbors and other visitors to the park were not particularly happy about the presence of dogs running around, and in connection with a plan update (lasting from 2001-2003), a group of people – calling themselves Lighthouse Field Beach Rescue – complained to the officials, asking for new and stricter regulations. Later, in 2003, a law suit was filed from the same group, demanding an environmental investigation regarding the canine impact in the area. In 2005, this law suit was partly approved, when the Santa Cruz Superior Court ruled that even though there was no environmental study of the effects of unleashed dogs, there was not enough evidence to force preparation of an environmental impact report for the park plan: 'Once the informational requirements of a complete initial study have been met, the city as lead agency may again determine whether a negative declaration, a mitigated negative declaration or an EIR is appropriate' (Santa Cruz Superior Court, 10 August, 2005).

The plan update controversy almost exclusively regarded off-leash dogs, and there were numerous public hearings, environmental studies (looking at, for example, the effect of dog feces on water quality and the effect of dogs on wildlife), petitions and surveys in the years between 2001 and 2005 (however, the controversy is still ongoing). After the court rule in 2005, the city council finally decided to drop the update, which meant leaving the rules unchanged. Then suddenly in October 2005, the State of California overruled the city's decision, and stated that 'continued off-leash dog use of Lighthouse Field State Beach cannot be reconciled with the statute's current mandate that any animal brought into a state park must ... be under the

immediate control of the visitor or shall be confined...' (Torgan, 2005). One consequence was that the park (and the connecting Its Beach) now fell under the same unconditional off-leash ban as the rest of the state's parks, a ban that came into force in November 2007. Now, how did the parties argue for and against in this case?

Safety/risk

One strong theme evolved around the issue of safety versus risk. FOLF, on the one hand, states that the presence of dogs and their people at all times of the day make the Lighthouse Field Park a safer place for everyone. This is contrasted by the current situation, in which the park is either not used at all, or by homeless people and drug users. On their webpage, we can also read that off-leash exercise leads to more 'socialized' dogs that are less likely to be aggressive in other environments (FOLF, 2010). In essence, dogs who are trained in being around other dogs learn how to behave in a pack. Overall, it is stated, that the park and the beach is a very safe place for people and their dogs, and only one incident of a dog bite has ever been reported. This is confirmed by Todd Stosuy, a Santa Cruz Animal Services Field Supervisor, who in a hearing arranged by FOLF in 2007 states:

I've been working here for four years, and I would say no. I've been responding to that location for dogs falling off rocks, being in areas where they are not supposed to be, falling from cliffs. [...] But no. I know about three years ago, I did a lot of patrol in that area, out of uniform, trying to catch people not picking up their [sic] defecation and in that time I probably logged about 80 hours of controls, and only caught one person not picking up defecation, so... (Stosuy, 2007)

The hearing and its testimonies are available through YouTube and, together with other PR activities, demonstrate the cultural resources of this group; they know how to mobilize public awareness and they use a range of available channels: t-shirts, stickers, petitions/letters/phone calls to officials, Internet broadcasting and local campaigns.

On the other hand, there are complaints about the threat of dogs to human safety, and thus, a call to control their whereabouts:

I have been chased and bitten by off-leash dogs while minding my own business. I don't care to ever encounter dogs off-leash. [...] I support the creation of dog parks away from where I might encounter them. I loathe irresponsible dog owners and I vote. (Rescue Santa Cruz Beaches, 2004)

In this statement, the speaker presents himself as a good citizen, someone who, in contrast to the 'irresponsible dog owners,' is responsible, minds his own business and votes. Note how the author wishes the dogs, or perhaps rather the opponents, were somewhere else, a common rhetorical strategy in this and other urban, spatial conflicts (Elias, 1965; Wieszkalnys, 2007) and one used by both sides of this debate.

There is no clearcut divide between dog owners and non-dog owners when it comes to taking sides in the debate. In fact, some people testify that they are 'good' dog owners to make a stronger case for a ban:

I am a dog owner who feels strongly about keeping my dog on leash for both her protection and the protection of the environment. I let her run free only when I am certain it is safe. I am in favor of a fenced dog park where all of us who go there understand it is a dog's place to roam. (Rescue Santa Cruz Beaches, 2004)

Here, safety is a key sign, 'protection' in the name of the dog and the environment, and off leash only 'when I am certain it is safe', meaning that the area is fenced.

Risk and safety are interesting dichotomies in many regards. First, what is perceived as risky is clearly a contested matter. While one person sees dogs on the run as a threat to personal and bodily safety, another views them as a guarantee for communal safety, both in the park and elsewhere (dogs become less aggressive). Second, the genre of personal testimony is used to argue for more safety. While one has been bitten, another states that there have never been any incidents in the area. Clearly, the past is expected to determine the future. However, because there is no agreement on the nature of past events, the future is likewise a contested site.

Disturbance

One of the arguments for banning (unleashed) dogs in the area is the concern for natural resources. Parties agree that the area is the habitat for a number of protected or otherwise special species that people should be concerned about. But, if and how the presence of dogs disturbs such wildlife and the extent of the protectionist agenda are debated issues. For example, in a petition filed to the Superior Court of California in May 2003, it was stated that the environmental studies performed by the City of Santa Cruz were insufficient, as they did not take into account with sufficient seriousness how the – in the complainers' view – increased presence of dogs would have an impact on wildlife.

Among other environmental issues raised were the inconsistency of the Plan with resource and wildlife management, the unstudied intensity of uses at the Beach and its environs, conflict of uses, impeded use, conflict with the stated goals of the General Plan, noise, dog waste, aggressive dogs, health and safety, aesthetics, impacts on riparian habitat, impacts on native grasses, interference with migratory and resident birds, nesting and wildlife nursery sites, traffic, water quality, exposure to feces-borne bacteria, parasites and communicable disease, transfer of canine distemper to marine animals, and impact on Monterey Bay Marine Sanctuary. (Brandt-Hawley, 2003: 6).

This list of problems is exhaustive and persuasive. It covers 'health and safety' for humans and other animals (including bacteria and disease), dog movement (including 'noise' and 'waste'), and impact on birds and marine animals. Perhaps most interesting is the point called 'aesthetics'. Is it that canine companions disturb the environment and thus the aesthetic value, or are they just plain ugly (see below under *Dogginess*)?

The FOLF version is that although wildlife species should be protected, dogs mainly 'chase after balls' and play with each other, and that there are only rare instances of dogs chasing after or killing other animals. Instead, the canine presence may counteract the presence of cats, which do threaten wildlife, especially birds:

Birders generally acknowledge that cats in an urban area are a significant cause of bird mortality. We could find no information estimating the numbers of cats in and near the Field, but the presence of dogs in the park may actually act to somewhat discourage cat activity. (FOLF, 2010)

This is an attempt not only to counter the accusations, but to widen the argument to include other species. Thus, dogs appear as a solution to a problem not yet articulated. Through this exchange of arguments, one can detect how the ecological matter or concern is being negotiated and contested.

Excrements

If one spends any time watching people walking with their canine companions, one will note the colorful plastic bags that are carried along; attached to the leash, in pockets or in specially designed bags. Dog bags come in various sizes and colors, in traditional plastic or biodegradable versions. ‘Dog poop’ is perceived as a big problem in any urban environment, often debated in local newspapers and managed through, for example, containers designated for disposal. It is also a topic that both sides of this particular controversy engage with in what would appear to be great detail:

Because dog owners flagrantly ignore the leash and “clean up” ordinances, the place is practically unbearable for bodysurfers and walkers. Maybe this will wake up the dog owners to keep better control of their dogs. (Rescue Santa Cruz Beaches, 2004)

FOLF, on the other hand, stresses that the problem is minor, because the compliance rate, in comparison with usage frequency, is high (see also quote from the animal police above). The organization also engages in regular clean-up days, when all members of the public are welcome. It is stated that on such days, they also clean up trash from other visitors and tourists. ‘This includes both trash and dog feces, including what is left behind by our many out-of-town visitors, who are often unfamiliar with the regulations and expectations of the Santa Cruz

community' (FOLF, 2010). Through this statement, the problem is widened to include not only dog dirt, but all kinds of waste, meaning that dogs are not the whole problem. All in all, Friends of the Lighthouse Field presents itself as a law abiding, community servicing, environmentally aware and responsible community. However, this is not the full picture, as will become clear later on.

It is important to note the historical and cultural context of the dog dirt phenomenon. Susan McHugh writes that, following a report in 1979 on free ranging dogs, there was a general turn in city policies across the US (2004: 178). The report highlighted the many health hazards these dogs presented in terms of flees and other parasites, germs and feces. Fear of contamination led to a new trend of leash and pick-up regulations (McHugh, 2004). However, the fear of dirt and feces is generally an urban one, with roots in the civilization process (Sennett, 1994: 262). Matthew Gandy (2006) writes about the 'bacteriological city', and discusses how public health has become the new institutional form of population control, leading to, following Foucault, hygiene and cleanliness becoming the new moral discourse and practice, as a means of bio-politics. Moreover, as Haraway notes in her *Companion Species Manifesto* (2003: 16), it is the human end of the trans-species couple who takes care of the dirt and thus is the prime object of this bio-politics.

"Dogginess"

It is not just the consequences of dogs that provoke involvement, whether one is on the 'for' or 'against' side of the debate. There seems to be something about the nature of dogs that triggers human emotions. As a telling example, in a petition to the Superior Court of the State of California, Santa Cruz, the LFBR writes this description of the nuisances that dogs on the beach (and in part their owners) present:

Dog behaviors explained as incompatible with the recreational use of the Beach included constant barking, yowling, fighting, hunting for prey, chasing, digging, sniffing, begging for food, stealing food, running over people, shaking off water next to people, chasing and disturbing wild animals, marking of territory on towels and sand castles, defecating on the beach, owners kicking a thin layer of sand over

the feces that lead to people stepping, sitting and playing in fouled areas, facing off against children who are playing at eye level, intimidation of children and other beach goers, and chasing skim boarders. (Lighthouse Field Beach Rescue, 2003: 7)

The complaint is that dogs do not behave properly. They sniff and shake off water, they bark and fight. One blogger notes that, 'I also don't appreciate their crotch sniffing, barking, and abandoned [sic] excrement' (Rescue Santa Cruz Beaches, 2004). In fact, it is their perceived 'dogginess' that seems to be mostly disturbing. It also appears to be a matter of number, as one witness cited states that; 'on a typical sunny day during the summer it has not been uncommon to see as many as 60 dogs running loose on the beach throughout the day' (Lighthouse Field Beach Rescue, 2003: 7).

If the above statements frame dogginess as negative, other personal stories accessed through blogs tell a different story. They are, among other things, about dogs' joy and motion:

I swear dogs do smile. Famous Amos has a smile on his face right now just thinking about it. The people are really cool and great with their dogs. I've seen over 25 dogs on the beach without a single incident. The dogs are so happy. (Yelp, 2006)

By far and away my favorite dog park to take Bella to! Want to go to the beach, or to the dog park? Hey, why not both?! As much as Bella isn't a water dog, she loves the sand, so letting her run around while sitting on a blanket is a fabulous way to kill an afternoon. (Yelp, 2008)

Control of animal movements is clearly also about letting them move (Lulka, 2010); this is a counter-politics and a strong component to take into account if one wishes to understand why the unofficial 'dog beach' can be maintained.

An ongoing controversy

The Its Beach controversy is not just ongoing at the discursive and official level, but the stories also contain information about local face-to-face incidents. The FOLF website, which is a very rich one, encourages people to actively work for a revised plan for the Lighthouse Field area, stating that, ‘it’s time to balance the calls from the disgruntled anti-dog fanatics with a larger volume of calls from concerned citizens’ (FOLF, 2010). This could be done by calling a senior State Parks official, by participating in ‘cleaning the beach days’, donating to the organization and, by acting *as if* the ban did not exist. ‘FOLF encourages you to continue to use Lighthouse Field State Beach (LFSB) for off-leash recreation during the traditional compromise hours (before 10am and after 4pm) regardless of the State’s misguided new policy’ (FOLF, 2010). This civil disobedience appeal is paired with a strong focus on the importance of being good citizens, of behaving properly and acting politely when encountering officers and officials, to pick up dirt and to instruct others to do likewise. Moreover, their website displays hands-on suggestions for how to behave when confronted with a state park official.

Interestingly, Its Beach is still understood by many visitors – connected or not connected to FOLF – as a dog beach, and talked about as one (filled with happy memories and harmonious encounters):

One day I speak to Anthony, a young man from Santa Cruz who regularly visits the beach along with his three year old “pit-bull-like” Sally, and he tells me how he got a ticket when Sally was only two months of age. He fought the ticket, and in the end, he got a reduced one, but the original fine was, according to Anthony, 300 USD. But he still sees this as a dog beach, and the ticket has not prevented him and Sally from visiting on a regular basis. I ask him why, and he says it is because Sally thinks it is fun, and when watching her play with five or six other dogs on the beach and into the waves, one can easily see why (Field notes 14/4/2010).

Today the weather is lovely, and an amazing amount of dogs in all shapes and sizes play around adults and children. There are no fights or conflicts to be found. I talked to a couple, Dave and Dianne, and they had no clue that dogs were not

allowed off-leash. This is also true for many other people I have spoken to, most people seem to think of this as a space for dogs, and often call it “the dog beach”. (Field notes 16/4/2010).

[Prohibition sign, West Cliff Drive. Photo: Tora Holmberg]

There is something left to say about the technologies of spatial control, and of social disobedience. First of all, the prohibition sign, visible at the entrance from West Cliff Drive, can be read as an expression of power, in which social control over citizens is asserted (Fiske, 1989: 50). Interestingly, the text about dogs has been erased, so that it is impossible to discern from the sign what the rules are. Similarly, the dog leash can be understood as a technology of power and control over dogs. However, as sociologist Mike Michael points out, the leash is not only a device for handling the dog, it also controls the human’s movement. The leash works as a technology to keep the cross-species bond intact (Michael, 2000). In cases where there are no physical boundaries such as a fence, these technologies become more important (Instone & Mee, 2011).

To sum up, this section has highlighted the emergence and continuation of a spatial conflict, leading to the creation of local interest organizations, involvement of city and state authorities and regulations, local news and social media, and not least, park visitors (both humans and dogs, but also wildlife and cats). Through the debate, positions for and against dogs being off leash were consolidated, and I have pointed at several salient themes in the data: safety/risk, disturbance, excrements and ‘dogginess’, meaning the perceived nature of dogs. Moreover, the section has shown how the controversy seems to be an on-going one, and that even though there is now a ban, there are actions being taken at various levels to try to restore the former regulations.

Discussion: Trans-species urban crowd

People engaged in the interest organizations seem to be well equipped with capital, both economic and cultural. They know how to move around in the bureaucratic machinery and how to maximize the use of social media. The reason for the controversy described here cannot easily

be placed ‘outside’; it is not social class, gender, race or even dog ownership that can be used as an explanatory force. Instead, I have argued that understanding should be sought in the context of the debate. In this discussion, I will develop the idea of local, collective action as trans-species urban politics, by focusing in more detail on disorder and the movement of bodies, through the notion of the crowd.

First, I will expand on the notion of disorder, which is not understood as the opposite of order, but an integral constituent. The beach in this case is a liminal space, where disorder can be expected. However, there is a particular disorder that is not tolerated. It is not the children playing, or the surfers boarding, or even the birds noising that is sensed as disorderly, but in this story it is the dog/human nexus that creates concern; it is either perceived as wrongfully or insufficiently regulated. Furthermore, the disorder verbalized is overshadowed by the apparatus of ordering – the legal dispute, the prohibition signs, the hour regulations, the cleanup days – and the accounts from both sides bear witness to how ‘order and disorder are but flip sides of each other’ (Weszkalnys, 2007: 224). In the case under study, order/disorder is about cleanliness and matter out of place (dog dirt), but also about who belongs (people from the neighborhood, law-abiding citizens, dogs-on/off leash) and who does not (drug users, homeless people, un-leashed dogs, cats). In fact, the disgust that can be read in some accounts echoes the racialized discourse that sometimes is vocalized in talk about other urban strangers: suburban youngsters, punks, skate-boarders and homeless people (see, e.g., Borden, 2001; Weszkalnys, 2007). Richard Sennett notes that the emergence of modern city life – with fewer contact points and social arenas, along with suburban trends – has ‘eclipsed something of the essence of urban life - its diversity and possibilities for complex experience’ (1970: 82). He argues that people need to feel some discomfort and ‘to experience a sense of dislocation in their lives’ (1970: 160), and that disorder will ultimately lead to new structural changes. What is needed is not for the conflicts to be ‘solved’ in any simple sense - following Sennett perhaps one can speak of *anarchy in dogland*. Because dogs are certainly different, the other to humans, and still the same (human companions), their ambiguous presence is open to a number of interpretations and experiences, inclusions and exclusions, that are not always comfortable or controllable.

Second, reading carefully the appeals and complaints, the matter of movement becomes a crucial factor. For the canine followers, dog feces and the well-being of ducks are seen as superficial excuses for restricting the animals from moving freely. Likewise, people who are afraid of dogs find themselves restricted in the presence of running and moving dogs. The movement of animals – animals in motion – as the dogs in this case, sometimes makes people feel disgust or causes fear, while for others, it is a source of positive emotions such as joy or happiness. Action and movement are important dimensions in the urban production of meaning (Lefebvre, 1996), and restriction of movement needs to be attended to by considering moving bodies and urban politics together. Sennett (1994) discusses the connection between various ideas of the body and the city in his historical account of Western civilization, where the fear of the horde and of uncontrollable collective behavior created a number of preventive technologies. I am tempted to interpret the dogs and their humans in this case study as a ‘trans-species urban crowd’ that moves freely (well, within a few square acres) and is feared by some more order-inclined citizens. The crowd, here understood as the spatial quality of a collective, is a figurative trope that I use in order to capture the understanding of the uncontrolled and transformation of individuals by “crowding”. Thus, the number of arguments and the technologies used to control this trans-species crowd can be understood as following the Western tradition of managing collective bodies in the city, preventing riots through various forms of crowd control. Moving bodies in groups, including social movements, can be perceived as potential threats. Furthermore, dog/human crowds, similarly to crowds of skateboarders, challenge the consumer-oriented culture, in that such crowds are neither consuming nor producing anything, but playing around only for the sake of pleasure (Borden, 2001: 231). The beach is of course very much a site for play, and watching the action and movement of dogs and people at Its Beach is a reminder of the unruliness and bodily surplus energy that often comes out of spontaneous play. This particular urban crowd also brings colorful plastic bags to the beach, the humans being polite to authorities and socializing with other visitors across the species barrier. Thus, the crowd portrayed in the present case study does not resemble the riots of the ‘badlands’ that Mustafa Dideç (2007) analyzes, in which poverty and violence are key ingredients, but rather constitutes a ‘goodland’ riot, fought at the beach, in courtrooms, and in social and other media by actors well equipped with various forms of capital.

[Its beach. Photo: Mara Miele]

Although the present article can be read as yet another story of a spatial conflict, it is also specific enough to not count as any history of urban spatial practice (cf. Borden, 2001: 265). It is the story of a particular urban beach, where the dogs inhabit a contested role as liminal creatures, roaming in a liminal place and thus, forming a crowd together with their people, working both as potential threats to the social order, and as subversive actors who can potentially change norms and practices concerning our relations to other animals and the city.

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