

Why Look to Canines in Eastern European film?

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Abstract

When looking to the representation of canines within cinema, academic studies are often concerned with how the canine is presented within popular cinema, commercially successful films that reach a broad normative audience. This study moves away from the exploration of canines within popular cinema to explore canine representation within Eastern European Cinema, in doing so this thesis aims to highlight the distinct rationale for exploring canine conversations within an Eastern European location, as the contextual history of the East's post-Soviet past creates a space where canine marginalisation and disparity is concentrated and readily visible. This thesis suggests the commonality of the treatment of dogs in post-Soviet nations produces the definition of Eastern Europe, placing an anthropocentric take on debates concerning the complexities of defining Eastern Europe. Through this approach I aim to undertake a filmic analysis of Eastern European filmic texts to further understand the interconnected nature of canine representation, canine possibilities, roles and functions, and human-non-human spaces as geographically charged.

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Introduction

Investigating Canines in Eastern European film

This study is a filmic analysis of three primary sources; *We Don't Deserve Dogs* (2020) directed by Mathew Saleh and Rose Tucker,¹ *Domestic* (2012) Directed by Adrian Sitaru,² and lastly, *White God* (2014) directed by Kornel Mundrucozo.³ I will explore these three films in relation to the overall objective to highlight Eastern European cinema as a key site of canine representational enquiry. I aim to suggest that Eastern European cinema is a significant space in which to make connection between canine representation and the geographical implications, as human assumptions and stereotypes are transferred between species lines, in turn placing differing regulations and restrictions onto differing canines depending on their possibilities, roles and jobs, defined by humans. The introduction will aim to situate key scholarships within Animal Studies, Non-human Representation and World Cinemas, as a means to understand human-nonhuman meeting-points as regulated by human ideology and the importance of exploring canines within representation and Eastern European identity defined as fractured and fragile due to post-Soviet pasts.

A key concept that runs through this thesis is the connection between Eastern Europe and its relationship to ideas of the post-Soviet influence within the fabrics of Eastern European

¹ Salleh, Matthew and Rose Tucker. *We Don't Deserve Dogs*. 2020.

² Sitaru, Adrian. *Domestic*. 2012.

³ Mundrucozo, Kornel. *White God*. 2014.

identity, although when we delve into explorations of post-Soviet pasts and Eastern European identity, we can see how neither are fully defined. Ewa Meziarska in the text *Eastern European Cinema* (2014) looks to the changing ways of conceptualizing Eastern Europe as a region after the political changes of 1989, as seen within the constant changes of titles.⁴ This thinking sets out conceptual parameters within Eastern European being the constant need to be defined. Within this thesis I propose that the commonality of the treatment of dog in post-soviet nations produces the definition of Eastern Europe, thereby flipping previous explorations of Eastern European identity by implementing a non-anthropocentric take on the debate of Eastern Europe's undefined definition.

Within everyday interactions humans are regularly utilising, looking, and consuming animal lives, through a wide variety of activities such as pet ownership, media consumption, and consumerism, through to nourishing our bodies and landscapes. There are many contact zones to which humans meet, flesh on flesh, with animals. Therefore, the very possibility of humans to be human is not possible without our animal counterparts. Consequently, when referring to 'I' and 'me,' we are never referring to us as singular, as, "we" is happening in real time. Animal species come in many forms and sizes, each with a differing capacity to meet with humans.

Although, within this thesis I aim to propose that there is one animal that stands apart from other nonhumans within representation and actuality, the canine. There are three key dimensions to the way the canine is conceptualised and understood today. First is their

⁴ Mazierska, Ewa. *Eastern European Cinema: Old and New Approaches*. 2014. Pg. 6.

biological state which hints to their evolutionary status from wild to domesticated; second is their aesthetic and outward appearance which sets individual dogs apart through differing sizes, colours, breeds and characteristics; and lastly, is the dogs semiotic and representational capacity, which is intrinsically connected to the imagining of the human-animal relationship, subverting their status as a singular ‘animal’ due to their multiple meanings that surpass their biological identification as an animal. These three components when joined amalgamate into core thoughts, feelings, and beliefs that humans have about dogs. I wish to explore these components, but to specifically focus on the representational capacity of canines as a distinct space of inquiry which makes human geographical stereotypes and assumptions more visible.

Within this thesis I suggest that the representational canine is defined within human terms, being a product of ideology, culture, and history. Ideology functions as a social system of ideals and beliefs which organise society.⁵ History is concerned with either a particular person or groups unique experiences which establish their ideological make up.⁶ Lastly, Culture is the manifestations of human ideas, histories and customs which create a collective sense of self.⁷ Situating the representational canine as a symbolic figure of the culmination of the self, placing canine inquiry within human-centric notions, where we do not look to canines for non-human realities instead, we look to canines to better understand the human.

The canine is one of the most important animals to explore to better conceive the human-animal relationship, due to their two-way dependency. This two-way dependent relationship

⁵ Cambridge Dictionary. *Ideology*. 2023.

⁶ Cambridge Dictionary. *History*. 2019.

⁷ Cambridge Dictionary. *Culture*. 2025.

acts in a circular collaboration, where both require each other while in-turn wanting to be needed, constituting in varied possibilities of human-canine meeting-points. Donna Haraway in the text *Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), encapsulates the foundational essence of the human-canine relationship as a “obligatory, constitutive, historical, protean relationship,” that is discussed in terms of ‘Companionship.’⁸ Haraway proposes that this relationship implies mutuality, where “there have to be at least two to make one,” thereby functioning to situate the distinction for looking to human-canine meeting points above any non-human representation.⁹ As, when humans and canines meet, they both give and take within nature and culture.¹⁰ Through this rhetoric, we can see the significant rationale for exploring canine representation as a signifier of human life, due to the canines deep-rooted nature within the fabrics of human history. Saying this I wish to build upon this thinking, but to position the human as the maker of all canine possibilities, moving away from mutuality to control.

Building upon the rationale regarding the importance of looking to canine representation, I propose that the human-canine relationship is a key site in which to explore the regulative nature of non-human spaces. When looking to Henri Lefebvre’s text, *The Production of Space* (1997)¹¹ we can understand space as a place where information is transferred, collected, and deferred to highlight the significant nature of comprehending similar objects in differing spaces. Through this thinking space is constituted not just within tangible locational borders, but as a mental, cultural, and ideological product which surpasses, landscapes, mountains and

⁸ Haraway, Donna. *The Companion Species Manifesto*. 2003. Pg. 12.

⁹ Ibid. Pg. 12.

¹⁰ Ibid. Pg. 12.

¹¹ Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. 1997.

oceans. Within this thesis I suggest that there are two key components on which to build upon when exploring the ideological make up of space. Firstly, this rhetoric enables the connection of Eastern European films as defined by their cultural and ideological connections. As by considering space not as an absolute, constituted within the earth's surface, we can see space as fluid and transferrable where cultural strings are easily connected through state lines. Leading us to the latter component, being the canine, I suggest, a key implication of humans being considered the apex of the canine's imaginary is manifested within human-canine meeting-points where the canine responds accordingly to the ideological and cultural constraints of differing locations and spaces. Thereby there is a doubleness enacted when considering the representational canines and the implications of space, where the representational canine is a product of Eastern European's social imaginary, being a signifier of anxiety. While also enacting on a granular level being where the symbolic canine is regulated and restricted within differing spaces depending on their identification and placement within human life.

Building upon the prior notion, this study intends to situate Eastern European cinema as a significant space of inquiry through highlighting its unique fractured and fragmented social imaginary. Ewa Mazierska in the text, *Eastern European Cinema* (2014), proposes that the main implication of post-Soviet pasts is the fractures and cracks within the East's collective memory, due the continuous changes of power, ideologies and legislation.¹² I build upon this rhetoric, to suggest that these fractures allow for ideologies and cultures to easily permeate

¹² Mazierska, Ewa. *Eastern European Cinema*. 2014.

through state lines and this permeation acts as a significant space to which to make connections between the representation of canines within multiple films in Eastern Europe. I intend to suggest that these ruptures in the self, manifest in particular forms of national anxiety within the East, whereby collective lived experience and memory, further pushes the cognitive organisation of an East-West Divide, manifested within an anxiety to become a homogenised state like the West, which is transferred onto the marginalised canine within visual culture.

Mazierska connects cinema as a product of ideological and political shifts by highlighting the communist effect onto Eastern European film industries, by stating that the post-Soviet past shaped the East's local film industries to be used as a tool to filter ideological teachings from a state-run perspective.¹³ Thereby from this we can understand within this thesis, that the use of cinema within modern day Eastern Europe as an ideological to move towards a depoliticized institution that emulates Western structures. We know this from Christina Stojanova's text, *The New Romanian Cinema (2019)*, where importance is placed on the industry's aim to move towards an artistic cinema which is dependent on the directorial vision, disjoined from state objectives, in order to better fit into the Western market with the aim to seduce foreign investment and considerations, by lowering of regulation and political control.¹⁴

Finally, Canines often are often encoded twice within film, being either a symbol of control, domestication and ownership or represented within wild, unbridled, and dangerous terms. This

¹³ Ibid. Pg.7.

¹⁴ Stojanova, Christina. *The New Romanian Cinema*. 2019. Pg. 213.

binary thinking is in turn often implemented as a human centric tool to re-position the human at the centre. Anthropocentrism is an important concept to understand humancentric notions within canine representation, Lori Gruen in *Critical Terms for Animal Studies* (2018) defines anthropocentrism as human centredness that makes humans the most important measure of everything.¹⁵ Often seen within canine representation as canine behaviour and attributed understood within human terms. I intend to look to the anthropocentrism within canine representation by means of exploring how we view films. I build upon ideas regarding Spectatorship, coined by Garry Marvin (2005)¹⁶ and the Gaze, proposed by Laura Mulvey (1975)¹⁷ to suggest it is significant to acknowledge differing way of gazing at canines, in order to better conceive the human-non-human power relations that are intertwined within the human-non-human relationship in film. This in turn will allow me to see the connection between, Eastern European films and the image of the Mutt/Stray dog, who are often demonised in order to move away from the identification as the ‘other,’ instead employing breed dogs to emulate the idealised human-non-human notions seen within the West.

Aims and Significance

This thesis has three interconnected aims focused on geography, representation, and the canine. The first aim is to examine how geography shapes differing understandings of canines

¹⁵ Gruen, Lori. *Critical terms of Animal Studies*. 2018. Pg. 47.

¹⁶ Marvin, Garry. *Seeing, Looking, Watching, Observing Nonhuman Animals*. 2005.

¹⁷ Mulvey, Laura. *Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema*. 1975.

within a particular focus on the Eastern Europe context. The second is to explore how differing canine possibilities are constituted in particular human or non-human spaces based on their value to humans. The third aim is to explore the role of film in representing canine possibilities and roles, suggesting film is a significant medium with which to understand the Eastern European canine as culturally charged.

Concerning the first aim, in Chapter One I look to Global Cinema to make a clear connection between the representation of differing canine possibilities and the locations they are represented within. These meeting points and locations are as followed:

- Working dogs within Romania
- Companion animals within Mexico
- Emotional support canines within Africa
- Service canines within Finland

These specific possibilities have been chosen to highlight the differing canine restrictions and boundaries, which are inherently affected by the geographical spaced they are situated within.

The second aim, within Chapter Two, is to explore human-non-human domestic spaces on a granular level within Eastern European Cinema. These differing meeting-points are understood by three differing ideological discourses, being where non-humans meet with humans, who allows/regulates these meeting points and how these meeting-points are valued. Through the implementation of these three theoretical strings, allows me to come to the consensus that differing non-humans are directly regulated by both the space they are within and the value they have within human life, thereby I propose their value is defined within their

extent of completing their function which either causes them to be permitted or not permitted within differing spaces. As a result, by understanding the value of the utility of non-humans allows us later in the thesis to consider the implications of non-humans that do not fulfil their function within human life.

Lastly, within Chapter Three a filmic analysis is implemented to understand the degree to which canines within Eastern European cinema are defined within 'otherness'. This analysis focuses on public/non-domestic spaces and how the canines within these spaces are represented to build onto assumptions that Mutt/Stray dogs are undesirable and often hidden within the public's gaze. As such, I make critical connection between canine representation and geographical spaces as a human regulative measure placed onto the canine counterpart.

Research Questions

This thesis has four key questions that drive the comprehensive filmic investigation as followed.

- How are canines represented in Eastern European cinema, and what is the context for the creative and ideological choices?
- When canines are discussed within Eastern European film, who is speaking for who and why?
- How does Eastern European cinema examine the regulation of spaces, being inside or outside, in which certain canines are/are not permitted to enter?

- What does Eastern European cinema inform us about the human-canine relationship within the context of the wider world?

Methodology and Sources

As mentioned previously, this thesis will analyse three primary sources; *Why We Don't Deserve Dogs* (2020) directed by Mathew Saleh and Rose Tucker,¹⁸ *Domestic* (2012) Directed by Adrian Sitaru,¹⁹ and *White God* (2014) directed by Kornel Mundrucozo.²⁰ These films have been chosen as they make a clear connection between non-human representation and the implication of geographical placements which build human onto assumptions and stereotypes, which in turn will allow me to make a distinct rationale for the exploration of canines within Eastern European films.

Textual Analysis

Textual analysis in its simple form is an activity whereby the audience takes an educated interpretation of the text at hand. A. McKee in the text *Textual Analysis* (2003) proposes that there are no correct or single ways of interpreting texts as different groups interpret different programs differently either consciously or subconsciously.²¹ Thereby, media texts are an

¹⁸ Salleh, Matthew. *We Don't Deserve Dogs*. 2020.

¹⁹ Sitaru, Adrian. *Domestic*. 2012.

²⁰ Mundrucozo, Kornel. *White God*. 2014.

²¹ McKee, A. *Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide*. 2003. Pg. 7.

important source to which to explore by means to understand the world around us but there we must understand our interpretation as not finale.

Consequently, when considering textual analysis of Eastern European films to understand canine realities we must acknowledge film as an inherently important text to which to understand life around us but not as a singular of decisive interpretation that all viewers will come to understand. Mckee suggests that to discover the interpretation of a text it is important to consider the text's context, being the texts that surround the text, which provide useful information for making sense of the text.²² Considering this thinking within this thesis, it is imperative to consider the contextual details surrounding the texts at hand, which I have sectioned into three main key scholarships being Animal Studies, Non-human Representation and World Cinemas, to make a likely interpretation of the three chosen films to highlight the significance of exploring canines within Eastern European films as a means to reveal important human-canine relations as defined by humans. Thereby, I employed the exploration of varying filmic signs being, lighting, set design, props, costume, performance, visual effects, and movement of each film to analyse the representation of canines within Eastern European cinema.

Filmic Analysis

It is important to mention that all these films take place in a transnational location, being the exploration of filmic texts that cross national borders while simultaneously having interconnections, in this case being the representational canine. The filmic analyses take place

²² Ibid. Pg. 14.

across various parts of Eastern Europe and the global sphere with differing languages, cultures, and characters, that are not in the English language. Subtitles have made this project possible, allowing me to better understand the subject matter being portrayed. This subject matter may vary in dictional clarity, due to the varied capacity to truly translate words and phrases in their entirety across languages. As well as the translation of academic text and reviews have allowed for significant enquiry into these films, extending the breadth of knowledge regarding Eastern European Cinemas.

Additionally, to this, the fundamental exploration within this thesis is a film analysis. It must be acknowledged that the very essence of filmic analysis is based within visual parameters, to understand canines within film. I have looked to each film to explore the characters behaviour's, dog, or human, to understand how they have been portrayed in film.

Canine Analysis

Human understanding of non-humans has been approached by means of representational analysis, the exploration upon canines has been made based on human-centric assumptions. Exploration of character positioning, camera placements, character interactions and dialogue, has been enacted to try to come to a better understanding of the human-canine meeting-points in film. Due to the nature of films, the pre- and post-production tactics of the narrative must be considered, thereby we must understand the human within non-human representation, being the director, who has specific aims, being economic, ideological, or personal and functions being educational or entertainment.

Representational analysis

The filmic analysis in the thesis is guided by the concepts of spectatorship, by building on academic expressions by Laura Mulvey, in her text *Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema* (1975),²³ and Garry Marvin, in the text *Observing Non-humans* (2005).²⁴ I suggest that when exploring film representation, diverse ways of viewing have differing implications on understandings and representations of canines. Therefore, deriving from Garry Marvin's teachings, I employ the terms, Looking, Seeing and Watching. To 'look' I suggest, is to passively gaze upon the canine as a collective group. To 'see' is to visually acknowledge the creature as present by means of seeing the granular aspects of the non-human. Lastly, to 'watch' is to gaze at the filmic canine over a period to consider the effect and impact onto canines. I intend to implement these terms individually in each chapter, to add to prior rhetoric regarding the differences in visual engagement to highlight the varying power discourses within Eastern European canine representation, specifically concerning differing canine spaces.

Geographical Parameters and Definitional Issues

There is a distinct rationale for focusing on Eastern European canine representation. One distinction that can be made is the significance of Eastern Europe's fractured national identity, which causes permeation of cultures, ideologies, and beliefs through state lines. These unique transnational borders which are blurred, act as a significant space to which to connect cross-

²³ Mulvey, Laura. *Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema*. 1975.

²⁴ Marvin, Garry. *Seeing, Looking, Watching, Observing Nonhuman Animals*. 2005.

species differences and similarities, in this case being the human and the canine. The second distinction for exploring canine representation within an Eastern European setting, is that space within the East acts as a heightened example of human-canine power relations due to the fragmented national identity of countries in this region, as the contextual history of Eastern Europe has created a space whereby canine disparities are concentrated and visible. I look to Eastern European canine representation in binary terms of East and West, to build on assumptions that the East is the 'other' to the West. I apply the term otherness not to denote Eastern Europe within a lesser societal position, but instead to highlight the power discourses wrapped up within Eastern European culture, as I suggest the concept of otherness is significant to the cognitive organisation of Eastern Europe. As a result, I connect the concept of otherness and canines to suggest canines' symbolic essence is used as a mediated tool to push for homogeneity and normality within Eastern European societies.

This thesis does not seek to answer questions regarding how to define Eastern European identity, instead, I intend to use the titles of East and West not to provoke oppressive connections, but instead to highlight the differing parameters of otherness when exploring Eastern European histories, cultures, borders and anxieties. I acknowledge that Eastern European cultures and histories are complex and varied, although I aim to focus on the implications of post-Soviet pasts, as a foundational understanding to better comprehend the importance of Eastern European cinema and canine representation.

In this project I employ canine terms such as, Mutt, Stray, Pet, Companion and Counterpart, not to denote canines as lesser through anthropocentric notions but to acknowledge the power

relations wrapped up within the symbolic canine, as means to highlight the binary representation of these canines within Eastern European cinema. I do not wish to perpetuate negative canine stereotypes, instead I aim to bring them to the forefront to acknowledge the implication of such representation and categorisations within popular media.

Adding to this, when discussing human-canine relationships I often discuss this within the terms, ‘possibilities’ or ‘meeting-points,’ an obvious limitation with this rhetoric is the human-centred nature of canine possibilities and meeting-points. The term possibilities imply potential for changes and growth within the future selves, it is not a concrete fixture, thereby enacting as a significant encapsulation of canine roles which are always parallel within the margins of human life. Thereby I do not employ these terms to suggest canines have complete control of their possibilities, like human counterparts, instead I use this term to bring oppressive human notions to the forefront, whereby humans regulate canine possibilities for human needs.

Lastly, implementation of the term ‘Pet’ is used throughout. I build onto this term by means of Alison Popwell’s conception in the article, *Pets and the Pet Trade* (2024), where pets are defined as “companion animals and the industry in which such animals are bought and sold, whether legally or illegally.”²⁵ From this definition, I define pets as a consumer ‘product’ which is possessed by human counterparts. This definition is not intended to perpetuate negative human tactics onto non-humans, but rather to raise key hierarchal discourses which

²⁵ Popwell, Alison. M. *Pets and the Pet Trade*. 2024.

are revealed when looking to the pet, being humans as the controller and non-humans as controlled.

Chapter Outline

In Chapter One, I examine the film *We Don't Deserve Dogs*, as a foundation to comprehend human-canines meeting points in Eastern European contexts. I aim to explore this film by building upon Garry Marvin's visual term of "Looking," to suggest that to look is to explore with a collective purpose.²⁶ This purpose is suggested as human centred thereby denoting the canine as singular. Therefore, permitting us to only focus on the outwardly human-canine relationship, being the ways, humans meet canines and use them. Thereby the effect of understanding differing human-canine relationships leads us to comprehend the differing boundaries and restrictions onto canines depending on their uses. By understanding the boundaries of differing canine uses propels us to question the effect of those canines who are not situated within these rigid human restrictions, leading us to consider the 'other.' I propose that *WDDD* is a Significant film to explore as it informs readers about the unique human-canine power relations as defined within their geographical placements, allowing me later to highlight the hierarchal positioning within Eastern states compared to Western, as a space which is less developed, which in turn is represented through the symbol of the canine. I explore the question, where do humans and canines meet? And why are they meeting/on what

²⁶ Marvin, Garry. *Seeing, Looking, Watching, Observing Nonhuman Animals*. 2005. Pg. 6.

terms are they meeting? As by understanding who, where and why, to better understand the power relations wrapped up within differing human-canines' relationships.

Chapter Two explores the film *Domestic*, I analyse this film within the visual parameters of 'Seeing,' derived from Garry Marvin, which is the most basic visual engagement, where the object is registered as just visible.²⁷ This expression of visually acknowledging the non-human as present, I argue, we must also understand the pet within basic binary terms, whereby they are bought, cared for, loved, or neglected and pass away. I aim to implement this definition of pet as a foundation to build upon to better understandings the utility of non-humans within human society whereby pets are owned, animals are wild. I explore these non-human categories through the exploration of spaces, boundaries, and restrictions, to propose differing non-humans are permitted within differing spaces depending on the extent to which they complete their function within human life.

In the Chapter Three, I explore the film *White God*, to make a clear connection between Eastern European canine representations and actuality, to move away from a foundational analysis of general human-canine meeting-points to explore Mutts and Strays specifically. I will implement prior understandings of canine uses, power biases, and groups, to suggest that Mutts and Strays do not fit into any groups thereby being placed within an outside space in society. Therefore, leading to the suggestion that the negative stereotypes regarding Mutt and Stray representation has palpable effects onto real life canines, due to their identification as the 'other,' dangerous, dirty, and out of control. Therefore, by building upon Marvin's rhetoric,

²⁷ Ibid. Pg. 6.

‘Watching’ over the canines within *White God*, which is the process of looking over a period of time, reveals the human-centred nature of the human-canine relationship whereby if the canines do not fit into human standards they are seen as the other.²⁸

A conclusion then connects the key findings of the project, to highlight the gaps for future academic inquiry. The conclusion will come to suggest that Eastern European cinema is a significant space to explore due to the contextual history which makes canine disparities and marginalisation more concentrated and visible. As a result, this thinking makes a clear connection between canine representation and the geographical implications, where assumptions, stereotypes and beliefs are placed within the symbolic Eastern European canine, which in turn manifests within dual representations, one being breed dogs which are signifiers of domesticity, control and modernity being allowed within both private and public human spaces, the latter being Mutt/Stray dogs who are implemented as signifiers of the wild, dangerous and unbridled who are suppressed and hidden within all spaces.

²⁸ Ibid. Pg. 6.

Literature Review

Summary

This chapter outlines the relevant field of academic enquiry which provides a foundation to my thesis. Broadly these areas include non-human spectatorship, Eastern European identity, Eastern European filmic circuits, human-non-human spaces, and canine representation, with the intention to situate Eastern Europe as a significant space of canine representational inquiry.

Introduction

This thesis relates to the wider disciplines of Film, Cultural and Animals Studies. I will look to these key areas within three clear sections.

- To situate the understanding of Eastern European identity, through the rhetoric of A. Amin in, *Regions Unbound* (2008),²⁹ and Ewa Mazierska in *Eastern European Cinema* (2012),³⁰ to place the East's collective identity as defined by the other to the West, which in turn creates fractures and anxiety within the collective cognitive creation of the East, born from post-Soviet pasts.

²⁹ Amin A. *Regions Unbound*. 2004.

³⁰ Meziarska, Ewa. *Eastern European Cinema*. 2014.

- To implement Garry Marvin's text *Seeing, Looking, Watching, Observing* (2005),³¹ and Laura Mulvey's text, *Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema* (1975),³² to suggest differing ways of viewing non-humans reveals varied power discourses in relation to human-non-human relationships, to build on assumptions regarding the binary representation of Breed, Mutts and Strays.
- To build upon Mary Louise Pratt, *Art of the Contact Zones* (1991),³³ and Donna Haraway's *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003),³⁴ as comprehensive texts which situate the foundational understanding of human-non-human contact zones as a space of cultural transference, where differing non-humans are placed within differing roles and restrictions dependant on the human's needs. To highlight the differing canine spaces being, inside, outside, and in-between, depending on the categorisation of the canine in question.

I will outline the key scholarships to frame my own research and analysis. Thereby these fields act as key foundations, which will allow me to situate the Eastern European cinema as a key space of canine enquiry. Whereby I propose the East's fractured collective identity, propelled by post-Communist pasts, is transferred onto the representational canine. Thereby the canine is placed within anthropocentric notions, determined by human restrictions and either being permitted or not into human spaces, subject to their identification as either

³¹ Marvin, Garry. *Seeing, Looking, Watching, Observing Nonhuman Animals*. 2005.

³² Mulvey, Laura. *Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema*. 1975.

³³ Pratt, Mary Louise. *Art of the Contact Zone*. 1991.

³⁴ Haraway, Donna. *The Companion Species Manifesto*. 2003.

domestic or wild, Breed, Mutt or Stray, with the main aim to use the symbolic canine to re-install hegemony within the East's collective sense of self, as defined by the West.

I intend to position these scholars to better comprehend the chosen filmic texts, *We Don't Deserve Dogs* (2020), Directed by Mathew Salleh, and Rose Tucker,³⁵ *Domestic* (2012), directed by Adrian Sitaru,³⁶ and *White God* (2014), Directed by Kornel Mundrucozo.³⁷ I have chosen these films as they allow me to make clear connections between the geographical and locational implications of non-human representation, whereby the non-human, in this thesis the canine, is defined by anthropocentric ideology, beliefs and culture. Commencing with the exploration of Eastern European's historic, cultural, and sociological pasts that have built onto the East's social imaginary.

Defining Eastern Europe

To understand the Eastern European representational canine, we must first look to the complex history of defining the East, which historically has been complicated by its differing histories, laws, societal norms, and varying cultural strands. I adopt this sociological implication as a foundation to which to better conceive the representational canine within an Eastern European context.

It is proposed by A. Amin in the text, *Regions Unbound* (2004), that to understand the East we must acknowledge the West, suggesting that to explore either of these geographical borders

³⁵ Salleh, Matthew. *We Don't Deserve Dogs*. 2020.

³⁶ Sitaru, Adrian. *Domestic*. 2012.

³⁷ Mundrucozo, Kornel. *White God*. 2014.

we must acknowledge their connections, and without doing so we cannot understand either, “the East exists in the West and the West in the East.”³⁸ By highlighting the interconnected nature of the West and East’s collective identity, brings complexities to the forefront by means of defining the East.

K. Verdery in *What was Socialism* (1996) goes further by suggesting that the East is not just defined within geographical, economic, and cultural differences to the West. Instead, these binary assumptions East vs West are placed within East’s cognitive creation situated within the fabric of public and individual collective identities.³⁹ Verdery suggests that the East’s collective cognitive capacity is as a creation of post-Soviet pasts, whereby the “cognitive organisation of the world,” in this case being the East is situated within its similarities and differences compared to the West.⁴⁰ I intend to implement this thinking throughout the thesis, to suggest that the post-Soviet pasts perpetuate Western dominated rhetoric, which constitutes the East as what differs to the West. By means of suggesting the West signifies, control, domesticity and modernity and the East signifies lacking, wildness and backwardness. I adopt this rhetoric to suggest that by placing the East as the other to the West, being the norm, perpetuates an anxious societal need to move away from this identification, which I will later propose that the anxious collective cognitive creation is transferred onto the representational canine, often seen within anti-Mutt and Stray rhetoric.

³⁸ Amin A. *Regions Unbound*. 2004.

³⁹ Verdery. K. *What was Socialism and What Comes Next?* 1996.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

E. Garrison Walters' text *The Other Europe* (1988) points towards the critical discourse concerning the Eastern European identity, he suggests that "Eastern Europe is far more of a political expression than a geographical one."⁴¹ Walter's implies that there are few rivers and mountains which determine the boundaries, and lacking in physical differing attributes, cultivates itself within conflicting definitions concerning the term Eastern Europe.⁴² Thereby, as Walters states, "it is relatively easy to say what Eastern Europe is not, it is far more difficult and much more controversial to say what it is."⁴³ Exhibited within the undetermined geographical, cultural and religious boundaries within Eastern Europe, has been historically detrimental to its significance within geographical hierarchal terms, causing Eastern Europe to be coined the 'other' Europe.

Loshitzky Yosefa builds upon the ideological implications of being considered the 'other' Europe in the text *Screening Strangers* (2010) to imply that "the other or stranger is necessarily threatening to what is called fortress of Europe."⁴⁴ Causing the need for boundaries and separation between Europe and Eastern Europe, thereby building on our prior knowledge of the East-West divide.⁴⁵ By understanding the critical definitions or lack off within Eastern European discourse, builds onto prior assumptions that the effects of post-Soviet control have created an implicit societal anxiety which I will constitute as a key factor which has moulded

⁴¹ Walters, E. Garrison. *The Other Europe: Eastern Europe to 1945*. 1988. Pg. XI.

⁴² Ibid. Pg. XL

⁴³ Ibid. Pg. XI.

⁴⁴ Yosefa, Loshitzky. *Screening Strangers*. 2010.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

the representation of the Eastern European canine, to be placed within either good/bad, inside/outside, norm/other and wild/domesticated dichotomy.

Eastern European- Post-Soviet implications

The prior thinking clearly connects the East-West divide as a key dichotomy that is wrapped within Eastern Europe's collective memory. But we must understand why this fractured collective identity has come into fruition by looking to the Soviet-past.

Eastern European cultures, politics and histories, are multifaceted and complex in nature, with changing power relations, beliefs, and borders. Following the catastrophic events of World War Two and the fall of Nazism, Eastern European states gradually fell into the control of the Soviet Union, due to the vacuumed state of the Eastern European political system. By 1949, five out of nine countries within the Eastern European parameters founded the Comecon in relation to Stalin's desire to dominate Europe with Soviet ideals and beliefs. These beliefs originated from the ideology of philosopher Karl Marx in his text, *Manifesto of the Communist party* (1847), where he championed a classless society with shared benefits of labour, property, and wealth.⁴⁶ The Communist regime implemented these thoughts within their doctrine but with a repressive goal to limit workers to slow development, and thereby avoiding obstruction of the main Communist goal, to build socialism by means of forced collectivization and industrialization. Stalin introduced the "Five Year Plan," which was a process which significantly changed the cultural landscape of Eastern countries.⁴⁷ The most relevant

⁴⁶Marx, Karl. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. 1847.

⁴⁷ Lewin. M. *Society and the Stalinist State in the Period of the Five-Year Plans*. 1976.

characteristics of this plan were state control on production and ownership of all land, total control of national economy, and rapid industrialisation through factory reforms and forced labour.⁴⁸ By 1990 all former Communist regimes within Eastern European countries were replaced but left behind from the Communist regime was social and economic uncertainty.⁴⁹ I suggest that collective feeling of uncertainty is determined by the Communist aim to shape and control the collective self. As seen within Apor Balzs's text, *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe (2008)*, which highlights the Soviet's aim to restrict the public sphere to "ascribe roles for individuals and groups, and prescribing (...) attitudes, beliefs and behaviours."⁵⁰ Consequently, the break in post-Soviet control left a behind fractured sense of the self, whereby reinscribed social structures were now unsteady and undefined.

Thereby, these social conditions, fuelled by the Communist reign and later fall, have caused Eastern Europe to be in a fragmented and traumatised state, which can manifest in the cultural confusion between the old and young generation, institutional conflict between progressive and oppressive powers, and the spreading of marginalization to move away from the other. Consequently, the history of Eastern Europe, including the Communist regime, has created a societal, organisational, and institutional consensus which is fuelled by anxiety, manifesting within the need for nationalist states to be homogenised and defined, like Western societies, to move away from its Communist past. As a result, Eastern European collective identity has and is impacted by Communist sociological, political, and economic control, despite these

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Otrachshenko, Vladimir. *Double-edged Sword*. 2023.

⁵⁰ Balzs, Apor. *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe*. Pg. 2008.

thinkings being replaced, the effect of the past is intrinsically linked within the East's sense of self. In turn creating fractures in the East's social imaginary whereby the past and present meet within the individual but is never truly combined.

Leading to the thinkings of Ewa Mazierska in the text *Eastern European Cinema* (2014)⁵¹ who suggest that the undefined identity of Eastern European film, points to the wider struggle within Eastern European discourse which aims to have a definitive regional identity. Mazierska suggests that the shifting boundaries and titles concerning Eastern Europe, have not been configured due to positive influences, instead when we look within the shifting regional boundaries, we can see traumatic shifts caused by "fragmentations of spatial boundaries."⁵² These fragmentations have been manifested through the constant seeking of definitions and titles, to find a unified East. Mazierska, points to the ample number of varying titles, such as, East Central Europe, Central Europe, and Other Europe, all which Mazierska highlights have institutional implications.⁵³ Although, disregarding conversations of what term is correct, the varying number of titles informs us on the malleable nature of Eastern European borders. Mazierska suggests that Eastern European cinema acts as an important timeline where we can see changing identities, beliefs, and thoughts, caused by the fragmentations of spatial boundaries within Eastern European history. Whereby, cinema marks a shift in the politics of representation of nations and other/stranger/immigrant, issues that are central to new European cinema.⁵⁴ This thought informs us on key conversational issues within Eastern European

⁵¹ Mazierska, Ewa. *Eastern European Cinema*. 2014.

⁵² Ibid. Pg. 8.

⁵³ Ibid. Pg. 7.

⁵⁴ Ibid. Pg. 9.

ideology, which is readily generated through Eastern European cinematic representation, as Eastern European cinema acts as a mirror to perpetuate the East's societal need to be defined.⁵⁵

I will suggest that when we look to the film circuit of Eastern European Cinema, which lacks in definitional certainty, it will enable me to make new links concerning Eastern European canine representation and human ideology within the framework of otherness. One of the key thoughts that the fragmented boarder will aid, is the understanding of marginalization and the 'other' in relation to the West, which is deep-rooted within Eastern European history. I will propose that assumptions of the norm and the other, create restrictions and boundaries within canine possibilities, where they are either permitted or not within certain human spaces. To connect the concept of otherness and canines to suggest canines' symbolic essence is used as a mediated tool to push for homogeneity and normality within Eastern European societies.

Communist effect of Human-Canine relationships

Furthermore, there is a key link to be made when looking to the abundance of Strays and Eastern European Communist history, as when looking to the historical contextualisation of the East we can see the negative effect of the Communist aim to industrialize society onto the canine population. Like many other post-Communist countries, the Strays within their villages, towns and cities are constituted as the legacy and implications of the late Communist reign. This can be seen within a Romanian context, where Romania's late Communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu called for the systematization of Romania, thereby making a detrimental

⁵⁵ Ibid. Pg. 8-9.

decision to bulldoze pre-World War Two houses and villas to make way for overcrowded city flats, to industrialise Romania. Ceausescu then forced thousands of people to move from rural countryside's into urban environments, this change was detrimental to human life, forcing them into squalled conditions to better Romania's economic state.⁵⁶ Saying this, this monumental event not only changed human conditions it also forced people to leave their pets in the countryside, causing animal welfare to decrease to an unimaginable degree with thousands of pets and livestock left to pass away due to abandonment and starvation, but this also left dogs uncontrolled in rural environments causing a spike in uncontrolled breeding.⁵⁷ Therefore, following the later fall of Communism in Romania, the public moved back to the countryside, but found mass groups of uncontrolled, ill and unsocialised dogs. Unable to deal with this problem the government to this day condemn strays as a problem or infestation, to which they have either ignored or killed them in undisclosed amounts to deal with this epidemic, neither have positively affected strays in Romania.⁵⁸ Despite this historic example being Romanian focused we can see the effects of Communist reign on collective identity, which effects the symbolic and actual canine. This allows us to make connections between Eastern European states that transfer past geographical borders

When looking to the effects of the Communist reign on dogs, we can see the lasting effects this doctrine has on the canine condition, showing how canine lives are inequitable linked to human ideology, policy, and beliefs. As well as this, it allows us to understand the

⁵⁶ Wollaston, Sam. *They Look Cute, but Should We Rescue Romania's Street Dogs*. 2019.

⁵⁷ Eberlein, Franziska. *How Romania's Strays Became a Brutal Business*. 2019.

⁵⁸ O'Sullivan, Feargus. *How Bucharest Ended up with One of the World's Worst Stray Problems*. 2013.

representation and imagery placed on filmic Eastern European canines. Therefore, leading back to my prior assumption, that canines act as a symbolic mouthpiece which informs the viewers of human ideologies, thereby when exploring Eastern European filmic representations of the canine, it enables us to understand the representational powers behind the canine which seek to present rudimentary understandings of the Pet and the Mutt/Stray to symbolise the norm and the other, which manifests into abandonment/mistreatment of Strays/Mutts and consumption of Breed/Pet dog.

Viewing the Canine

In this section, I propose that it is important to revisit the ways in which we look to canines within film. Thereby in this section I will explore the self within non-human spectatorship, the power hierarchies within the gaze, and the notions of otherness determined by the self.

Looking at Canines

When looking to the importance of viewing canines within film we must understand the intersections of Animal Studies and Media Studies. Jonathan Burt in the text *Animals in film* (2002), makes a clear connection between animal imagery and film stating that audiences respond different to animal or animal related practices within film than any other imagery.⁵⁹ Burt proposes that there are two distinct reasonings for the magnified emotional response to animal imagery over other forms of imagery, one being that the response to animals is emotionally charged being straightforward and empathetic, the latter being that since the

⁵⁹ Burt, Jonathan. *Animals in Film*. 2002. Pg. 10.

arrival of film in the 1800's the animal has been increasingly constructed within the public domain.⁶⁰ Through Burt's text we can see the complex nature of understanding the audience's response to animals within film, as we question if audiences' responses to animal imagery are singular and emotional or culturally charged and changed by film. When considering audiences' responses to canines within film I suggest that we can see both reasonings happening simultaneously, canines within film elicit intensified responses due to their close-knit relationship within human life and this response is singular and happening in-real-time. On the other hand, audiences' responses to canines are influenced by their representations within film showing the influence of media onto the understandings of canines, as I propose within this thesis that understandings of Eastern European canines are interwoven within media representation, connecting media within actuality.

Claire Parkinson in the text *Animals, Anthropomorphism, and Mediated Encounters* (2020), questions the "how" within animal representation, as she looks to anthropomorphism as a key tool to explore mediated animal encounters. Parkinson proposes that the exploration of animal mediation should not be considered as singular and symbolic instead she suggests that mediated encounters as deeply intuitional, social, and industrial, which shape the nonhuman into commodified narrative agents, where the animal is placed into the human world.⁶¹

Through this thinking we can see clearer the risks of representing animals within film prosing that the employment of visual tactics, specifically anthropomorphism, which is a popular human tool employed with narcissistic motivations to serve only or primary, human interests,

⁶⁰ Ibid. Pg. 10.

⁶¹ Parkinson, Claire. *Animals, Anthropomorphism, and Mediated Encounters*. 2020. Pg. 3.

whereby when humanising animals we risk losing sight of them as beings in their own right.⁶² Despite these thinkings being concerned within the anthropomorphic representation of animals it raises key questions regarding the ethical mediation of animal encounters within visual culture, suggesting that when animals are presented within film the animal is placed within human conditions and regulations in turn effecting the animals reality. As I aim to highlight the importance of exploring the ways in which animals are represented within film, as the mediated encounters of canines, being the ways in which they are represented within Easter European film as deeply intertwined within human culture and history, eventually manifesting within the canine's real-life treatment and placement within society.

When looking to the relationship between Animal and Media Studies it is clear the conversations regarding how the representation of animals shapes the animal's true reality. Claire Malloy in *Popular Media and Animals* (2011), proposes that the cultural representation of animals informs and shapes public perceptions, bringing to attention the innate connection between how animals are represented and how they are treated.⁶³ It is evident that the representation of animals does not reflect the reality of animals, instead Malloy proposes that the process of representation only reconstructs animals within a set of human boundaries which limit them to visual and aural limits.⁶⁴ From this thinking we can further understand the foundational human-animal relationship whereby animals are easily placed within human culture, as Malloy suggests that the representation of animal stripes them of their moral worth,

⁶² Ibid. Pg. 1.

⁶³ Malloy, Claire. *Popular Media and Animals*. 2011.

⁶⁴ Ibid. Pg. 9.

placing them as property, objects, machines and things to be circulated within visual culture as and when by humans.⁶⁵ Consequently, this text highlights the foundational aspects within the human-animal relationship whereby the animal's value is determined by their use within human society even within visual culture.

Randy Malamud in *An Introduction to Animals and Visual Culture* (2012)⁶⁶ goes further by exploring the reasons why animals are easily changed within visual culture. Malamud proposes that animal conditions have been changed by commodity culture whereby animals are valued resources which are readily controlled by humans.⁶⁷ Therefore, looking to the human-animal relationship as a place of control we can further understand the malleable nature of animals within visual nature, as Malamud states this causes them to be “almost infinitely versatile (...) what-ever people want them to be.”⁶⁸ Malamud goes further to suggest the animal's malleableness within visual culture are made possible due to animals being enmeshed in human culture, as he states this is due to the fact “people are interested in them.”⁶⁹ This thinking acts a foundational rhetoric to further understand the human-animal relation within visual culture, whereby the animal's interwoven nature within human culture is a key factor for their malleability within visual culture. I intend delve further to propose that the canine is a significant animal to explore within visual culture, as their representational capacity which is controlled through human thought is significantly complex, as this thesis

⁶⁵ Ibid. Pg.9.

⁶⁶ Malamud, Randy. *An Introduction to Animals and Visual Culture*. 2012.

⁶⁷ Ibid. Pg. 2.

⁶⁸ Ibid. Pg. 3.

⁶⁹ Ibid. Pg. 3.

suggest there is no other animal than the canine who is so interwoven within human life, history and culture so closely.

An implication of the canines interwoven and malleable nature within human culture is the struggle define and understand the canine. Susan McHugh in the text *Dog* (2004)⁷⁰ suggests that the struggle to understand the dog within human culture has implications whereby actual dogs are affected by their conflicting significance.⁷¹ Despite these struggles McHugh places the understanding of the dog within their degree to proximity to humans thereby within this thinking we can further understand the interwoven nature of the human-canine relation where canines are understood as dogs only by their proximity to humans. Furthermore, McHugh proposes that dogs are unthinkable outside the context of human culture, as she states, “culture as we know it has been inseparable from their presence.”⁷² This thesis builds upon McHugh's definition of the dog, to propose that the canine's interconnected nature within human culture is both a positive and negative attribute, whereby canines are significant within human life, but this significance is not always concerned with the canines' best interest. In this thesis, I intend to explore the visual culture of Eastern European film as a key space in which to understand the canine.

In most everyday activities we are consciously or unconsciously seeing, looking, observing, and watching the world around us, but as Garry Marvin reiterates in the text, *Seeing, Looking, Watching, Observing* (2005),⁷³ there are many ways off seeing, and these have different

⁷⁰ McHugh, Susan. *Dog*. 2004.

⁷¹ Ibid. Pg.12.

⁷² Ibid. Pg.19.

⁷³ Marvin, Garry. *Seeing, Looking, Watching, Observing Nonhuman Animals*. 2005.

implications. Marvin makes distinction between ways of viewership, he suggests ‘see’ is to acknowledge an animal's presence, to ‘look’ at an animal is to actively engage with purpose and to ‘watch’ is to attentively look over a period of time.⁷⁴ The process to which Marvin strips back the meaning of each activity exemplifies the different viewing modes when looking to animals, therefore, highlighting that differing people view differing non-humans in varied ways depending on the interests, knowledge and aims of the subject.⁷⁵ This rhetoric informs us on the fundamental relationship with non-human exploration as a tool for humans to understand the self. I intend to use this rhetoric as a theoretical structure, being to ‘look,’ ‘see’ and ‘to watch,’ to acknowledge the differing power differences within the look, but to re-positing the Eastern European canine at the whim to the East’s sense of self.

When viewing non-humans within film and actuality, we are often looking not to the aspects that make them animals, instead we look to the attributes that make them human. Fundamental thought is categorically intersected within human-non-human theories, which acknowledge other species and histories but centre the human. I propose that the act of looking to the representational canine is defined within anthropocentric aims, where the non-human is categorically a tool which places the human, thoughts, beliefs, and attributes at the apex of non-human imaginary.

Through the analysis of the text, *The Mirror stage and a Formative of the I Function* (1949),⁷⁶ composed by Jacques Lacan, we can make a direct link between the cognitive

⁷⁴ Ibid. Pg.6.

⁷⁵ Ibid. Pg.6.

⁷⁶ Lacan, Jacques. *The Mirror stage as Formative of the I Function*. 1949.

creation of the self as significant human function which allows the human to understand the world. Lacan suggests that all humans in their early life have a monumental moment in their cognitive growth, where they recognise their “ideal I,” within themselves.⁷⁷ This moment of recognition of the self opens the understanding of culture, language, and ideology. Therefore, Lacan proposes that the act of looking is inherently concerned with the egotistical need to identify with the object being looked to. As the activity of recognition re-positions, the human as in control of all life and possibilities. This thinking will be implemented when we consider the act of viewing canines in Eastern European cinema to propose that canines are gazed upon to the degree to which they fulfil the idealised ‘I,’ thereby situating the canines who do not complete this egotistical function as ‘other.’

Furthermore, building upon the idea that the act of looking is an anthropocentric function to control the other, leads us to Laura Mulvey’s rhetoric in the text, *Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema* (1975).⁷⁸ Mulvey points to the importance of acknowledging the look as a key tool with which to understand both the spectator and the object, whereby the look is constituted within a voyeuristic separation where the spectator (male) is looking, to place the act of looking within masculine parameters, based on control which is used to manipulate and shape their marginalised counterparts. Mulvey goes further, to suggest that when the spectator examines the screen, they have a need to identify with the subject being shown, to further fuel their own ego. Mulvey suggests that the look is intermingled with curiosity as well as the

⁷⁷ Ibid. Pg. 95.

⁷⁸ Mulvey, Laura. *Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema*. 1975.

fascination of likeness.⁷⁹ Therefore, the acting of looking is fundamentally placed within self-serving purposes, to identify with the image being shown. Within this need to identify with the subject on screen, the onlooker manipulates and changes the object to best constitutes themselves and therefore denoting their essence and individuality. We can use these teachings regarding the look, within human-canine representational meeting points in film, due to the similar objective within the masculine gaze onto women, which includes the need to control the image for self-serving purposes to feel seen, be seen and to command. Consequently, Mulvey's theory of the gaze and Marvins' rhetoric regarding viewership, calls attention to the need to explore spectatorship within the gaze, specifically their intentions with consuming the media presented. This acts as a useful device to analyse the power behind representing Eastern European canines, as we question the representation of the canine, before, during and after the films presented. Considering this thinking within my thesis, I suggest that the chosen films have differing implication on the canine depending on the lens that gazes. Although, there is specific reasoning for differing representations of canine possibilities in distinct locations, as these examples build onto stereotypical transcultural assumptions, in this thesis, being the negative assumptions of Eastern European identity as other to the West.

Otherness: a tool to denote non-humans

One key function that places canines to the whim of human centrism within actuality and representation is their lacking nature. We can see this rhetorical expression from the thoughts of German Philosopher M. Heidegger in the text, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*

⁷⁹ Ibid. Pg. 807.

(1929), where he relates the hierarchal positioning between humans, animals, and nature. Heidegger describes humans as, “world forming,” animals as “poor in world,” and a stone as “wordless,” therefore encapsulated the power relations at play when consider human-animal studies.⁸⁰ Suggesting that the human is an active participant whose cognitive ability is vast, describing humans as “being-there,” whereas he denotes animal’s agency suggesting that “the extent and manner in which an animal is able to penetrate whatever is accessible to it is also limited.”⁸¹ Despite many in the field of the humanities disputing these claims, I propose Heidegger’s thoughts encapsulate the essence within the human-canine relationship, where the canines natural characteristics to survive and reproduce reduces their perceived cognitive range, differing to the human’s ability to perceive wider philological questions, thereby placing them within lesser and unworthier terms compared to humans.

Sabrina Tonutti in, *Anthropocentrism and the Definition of Culture* (2011)⁸² suggests that culture is one of the main causations for the human/animal divide. Tonutti suggest that the homogeneity within humans and lack of within animals, creates a clear-cut boundary marked by the expression of culture. Thereby highlighting the radical difference between humans and animals, where the animal constitutes, instincts, corporeity, and evolutionary past.⁸³ Thereby, if animals are understood within terms of a feral and evolutionary state, animals can be seen as a threat to human, “who risk falling back into a primordial beastly condition.”⁸⁴ Consequently, the foundation for what propels the animal into survival and their innate characteristics, is the

⁸⁰ Heidegger. M. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. 1929. Pg.177.

⁸¹ Ibid. Pg.193.

⁸² Tonutti, Sabrina. *Anthropocentrism and the Definition of ‘Culture.’* 2011.

⁸³ Ibid. Pg. 186.

⁸⁴ Gioacchino, Paparelli. *Feritas, Humanistas, Divinitas*. 1960.

very essence of what denotes their state as lesser to humans, thus creating two opposing poles which both are suspended within coined the human/non-human divide. Thereby the very essence of what a makes an animal an animal, is used to further place the non-human as other to the human, denoting them as tool to which human regulate in both representation and actuality, as seen within the Eastern European representational canine.

I propose that the canine's capacity to be considered other can be founded in their lack of ability to converse with humans. Therefore, when this is combined with the human's struggle to understand non-humans, in both representation and its real-life form, is forced to be malleable in essence where the human readily places notions of the self onto the figure of the non-human. The concept of otherness is an important notion we must understand to better analyse the canine in Eastern European Cinema. Themes of otherness are wrapped within many parts of this thesis, such as the canine itself, being the Mutt and Stray, the differing parameters within Eastern European history, for instance, migration, ideological beliefs, and economic and social disparities and lastly, within Eastern European Cinema.

Clive Hazell in, *Alterity: the Experience of the Other* (2009)⁸⁵ proposes that the concept of alterity, is a key term to consider when exploring themes of otherness. The term alterity is a multifaceted term which concerns multiple theories, Hazell suggest these are, autonomy, separation individuation, locus of control, enmeshment, differentiation, prejudice, and scapegoating.⁸⁶ I will suggest that the most relevant definition of alterity within the parameters

⁸⁵ Hazell, Clive. *Alterity: The Experience of the Other*. 2009.

⁸⁶ Ibid. Pg. XIV.

of this thesis, is the connection between the other and the self, proposing that these concepts run within a parallel line, neither can be without each other. Consequently, the otherness within this thesis, points to the canine whose lack of agency denotes them as other, and the self- found parallel with otherness- is the human's ego, where we find their ideological beliefs, histories, and culture, which are intertwined within the canine.

Therefore, I will propose that canine's innate lack of ability to converse strips the canine of their agency, thereby making them a signifier of the self. This is apparent when we look to canine representation in film, their character, unlike other animals, does not signify itself, instead I will suggest that the Eastern European representational canine, due to its interconnected relationship with humans, acts as a signifier for wider discussions, such as, immigration, migration social and political contexts and personal and social beliefs fuelled by anxiety. Thereby when we see the representational canine in Eastern European films, its image is easy to manipulate depending on human intentions, as the canine's lack of awareness of oneself makes it implausible for canines to project their own image.

Contact Zones: Human-Canine Meeting-points

Within the concluding section, the focus of inquiry moves from non-human rhetoric to looking to the canine specifically. This is achieved through the exploration of specific spaces and possibilities of canines, which situate them with binary groups of either domesticated/wild, Breed/Mutt/Stray or owned/abandoned.

Canine spaces

I aim to question the ways in which we view canine counterparts, by means of looking to the spaces in which we meet with them. Mary Louise Pratt in her text, *Art of the Contact Zones* (1991)⁸⁷ uses the term Contact zones, to refer to a social space where there is contact from transcultural collaboration. Pratt specifically coins this term with imperial eyes to understand the encountering of dissimilar cultures. We must understand that these zones, where varying subjects meet, are often constituted with differing powers and influence, therefore when we explore these contact zones, it is likely we are looking to marginalized groups and how they are influenced and changed by dominant circuits. To acknowledge the importance of the zones in which dissimilar subjects meet, is to understand that we must look at specific zones and spaces to better understand the cultures within these, including encounters with canine counterparts. Thereby, if we consider canines as a semiotic tool to educate humans on human culture, then we cannot denote the exploration of canine-human interactions and the zones to which they meet. I will suggest there is significant rationale for exploring spaces within Eastern European film, by means of cognitive organisation propelled by post-Soviet pasts, to reveal important non-humans' positions which permit authorisation or suppression into human spaces, being inside, in the home or in communal spaces, or outside, on the streets and in the wilderness.

Anna Batori in *Enclosed Spatial Formation* (2016)⁸⁸ highlights the importance of exploring the representation of space within films, which allude to the contextual and historical pasts which may not be explicitly stated. Batori explores Romanian and Hungarian films,

⁸⁷ Pratt, Mary Louise. *Art of the Contact Zone*. 1991.

⁸⁸ Batori, Anna. *Enclosed Spatial Formation*. 2016.

specifically looking to post-Soviet effects on spatial freedom and how this is represented through cinematic illustration. Batori explores the representation of landscapes and how this affects their national identity by establishing two aesthetic categories, horizontal and vertical enclosures. When looking to Romanian film, Batori suggests that claustrophobic illustrations of urban landscapes are inherently present, in turn creating a gaze of surveillance on screen.⁸⁹ I intend to make a clear connection between the representation of space and the representation of canine possibilities within an Eastern European context. As the symbolic claustrophobic nature of Eastern European spaces creates a vacuumed state where the non-human, specifically the canine, is utterly at the whim to human possibilities. This highlighting Eastern Europe as a key space of canine enquiry due to its heightened nature which makes canine's binary spaces more visible.

To better conceive the importance of exploring space within canine representation I wish add to Henri Lefebvre's rhetoric, in *The Production of Space* (1997), where Lefebvre proposes that previously within academic thought space had been considered within geometric parameters, "the idea it evoked was simply that of an empty area."⁹⁰ Although born from epistemological enquiry, Lefebvre highlights the revision of the concept of space to a "mental thing or mental place," which is alive and connected to everything it is surrounded by.⁹¹

Consequently, I will build upon the idea that space is a mental, social, and cultural product, to suggest that canines are unequivocally placed within human's curation of space. Whereas

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. 1974. Pg.1.

⁹¹ Ibid. Pg. 3.

breed dogs are often permitted inside due to their consideration as aesthetically pleasing or biologically manufactured to complete tasks. Muttt dogs can be permitted either inside or outside, dependent on the degree to which they complete their possibilities of becoming. And stray dogs are situated within outside spaces, if they are not a hinderance to human life, if so, they are placed within in-between zones neither domestic nor wild. As despite the differing terms of canines one function runs parallel, being the control and domination of humans.

Companion Species

To further understand the spaces canines are situated within we must further conceptualise the normalised roles of canines, as the roles canines are placed within are interwoven within ideas of space. A key space of human-canine meeting point is founded within domestication, Donna Haraway's comprehensive text *Companion Species Manifesto* (2003)⁹² introduces us to key terms relating to the human-animal relationship, being Companion Species.⁹³ Haraway suggests that the term Companion Species, constitutes four key components, biology, philosophy, semiotics meeting material and finally, class all these factors merge to create the heterogenous history of human-dogs' relationships. Although, I will suggest that the term, Companion Species, is not entirely about human-animal companionship, instead it is a term that suggests domination and ownership. The term companion suggests that both counterparts have equal agency, to state their needs, communicate their wants and to freely do as they wish. Despite the positive attributes of companionship, which is to care and to be cared for, this term

⁹² Haraway, Donna. *The Companion Species Manifesto*. 2003.

⁹³ Ibid. Pg. 15

when considering human-animal ownership I will suggest changes, as to have an animal companion implies that this animal is bought, purchased, and owned. Therefore, we can understand human-animal companionship as a zone which animals are bought and serve. Thereby, when considering the conflicting nature of the term Companion Species, I will aim to use this term as a foundational rhetoric, by which to understand differing meeting points, relationships and uses, Eastern European canines compromise. Within this thesis I suggest these canines comprise binary possibilities being, Pet, Breed dog, owned, Mutt, Stray, or wild. Moving from the focus of the spaces which these canines inhabit, I suggest another key oppressive factor that places restrictions onto canines is their aesthetical capacity. As I propose breed dogs are signifiers of human complete control of non-human life, whereas Mutt dogs are what humans fear that is canines being free from humans' control to look, act and do what they please, going back to the wild.

Caleb Chodish in the text *Canine Representation in Cinema* (2018), highlights readiness for canines to be signifiers of human assumptions and preconceptions, to propose that that they do not cohere to form a singular cultural meaning, but instead serves as a proxy “for what we fear and value in humanity itself.”⁹⁴ This rhetoric is extremely important to the task at hand, acting as an important example of why it is essential to look to differing canine representations. As Chodish suggests these breeds reinforce cultural stereotypes, acting as a symbol of a wider cultural context and can have an actual effect on dogs. Thereby further propelling us to consider the canines who do not fit into ‘breed’ terminology.

⁹⁴ Chodish, Caleb. *Good Boy: Canine Representation in Cinema*. 2018.

Breed dogs are a group of canines that result from selective breed, often within a modern-day context corner a select aesthetical characteristics to fulfil validation within the self. When looking to Human-Animal Studies concerning domestication, we can see there is a clear link between finding an animal cute and the need to mother the animal. E. Wilson in the text *The Human Bond with Other Species* (1894)⁹⁵ suggests that the cuteness response, founded within ethological thought, describes the human's compulsion to care for a counterpart when met with certain physical attributes and characteristics. This concept originates from the "Baby Schema," which is a set of infantile traits that appeal to the human, and therefore elicit caretaking behaviour.⁹⁶ Marta Borgi, in *Baby Schema in Human and Animal Faces* (2014), suggests that the need to be a caretaker surpasses the human need to care for another human, instead, humans have a natural interest in other species, coined by E. Wilson as Biophilia.⁹⁷ Suggesting that this biophilic feeling is elicited through the most common domesticated species, dogs, and cats, due to their natural ability to, "exhibit morphological and behavioural infantile characteristics."⁹⁸ The cuteness response influences the human need to domesticate canines, with attributes of round eyes, small body, round face, and small nose, to have an infantile appearance, which elicits the viewer to want to care and look after the animal.⁹⁹ The cuteness response is a key concept to consider when looking to human-canine relationships, where concept acts as a foundational place to understand human motivations behind domestication, as well as understanding the consumer society behind pet breeding, purchasing,

⁹⁵ Wilson, E. *Biophilia: The Human Bond with Other Species*. 1984

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Borgi, Marta. *Baby Schema in Human and Animal Faces*. 2014

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Archer, J. and S. Monton. *Preference for Infant Facial Features in Pet Dogs and Cats*. 2011.

and labour. Saying this, when we look to Eastern European representation of the canine, we must question the capacity for the cuteness response to be a motivational aspect. It is apparent when we look to representations of breed dogs, which are considered pets, that there is a clear link with infantile characteristics and domestication. Consequently, it further places Mutt and Stray understandings within what differs aesthetically from breed/pet dogs, further propelling them within outside spaces due to their identification as the ‘other.’ I will suggest that the cuteness response depends on geographical and ideological perspectives, if the canine fits within the social norms, infantile and domesticated, then it is often associated with positive representational tactics, such as being cute, fluffy, well trained, and intelligent. Whereas when the canine delves into the representation of otherness, such as Strays and Mutts, then the compulsion to care is reduced, due to popular biases that consider them as dirty, wild and dangerous, showing how the cuteness of the object is interchangeable depending on public and personal opinions. I will suggest the degree to which Stray/Mutt dichotomy is discussed within parameters that differ to cuteness, is highly dependent on the media’s representational curation. As evident within rhetoric discussed within popular media circuit, ABC News, which discussed strays as dangerous and conquering of cities.¹⁰⁰ Thereby building on the notion, that the Stray/Mutt dog within Eastern European representation is a signifier of otherness.

Conclusion

¹⁰⁰ ABC News. “*Dog Attacks*” *Romania to Put down Thousands of Strays*. 2013.

My work looks to the connection between canine representation and spaces, suggesting that differing canines are permitted within differing spaces, depending on their possibilities within human life. I redress the conceptualisation of space to place it within non-human context, whereby we can further understand the binary dichotomy within non-human possibilities, whereby human-canine meeting points are culturally moulded by human life.

This project uses foundational teachings surrounding the 'I' to propose that canine representation is deeply concerned within human notions. I build upon this idea to suggest there is significant reasoning for looking to canine representation within an Eastern European context. Research on Eastern European cinema has often been denoted in its placement as a popular media circuit, although studies concerning the importance of looking to Eastern European has been denoted when consider popular media circuits, but I suggest this forgotten notion is what makes this field of study so critical. I propose the fractured nature of Eastern European social imaginary, whereby the fear of otherness is placed onto the representational canine. The field of Eastern European cinema studies has enabled me to conceptualise the connection between cinema and canine representation. I also question the degree to which spectatorship effects the canine perception and I propose power discourses are wrapped within the viewing of canines. We can acknowledge the symbolic and visual representation of the canine, how they construct questions of, class, race, consumerism. As well as this, when considering the epistemological capacity of the canine it helps to understand breed, treatment, effect, and individual standard.

Chapter One: Looking at all Canines

Contact with Canines

Beings do not pre-exist their relating's. 'Prehensions' have consequences. The world is a knot in motion. Biological and cultural determinism are both instances of misplaced concreteness.

(Haraway, Donna. *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dog, People and Significant Otherness*.

2003)

Introduction

This chapter aims to make a distinct connection between the representation of canine possibilities, regulations and restrictions and the geographical location they are placed within.

I aim to do so through the implementation of Garry Marvin's expressions regarding viewership in his text, *Seeing, Looking, Watching, Observing Nonhuman Animals* (2005),¹⁰¹ with the intention to redirect his conceptualisation of the 'look' in order to 'look' to canines within the film, *We Don't Deserve Dogs* (2020) directed by Mathew Saleh and Rose Tucker.¹⁰² I will use Marvin's concept to look to the fundamental elements of the representational canine, being the outwardly meeting points between humans and canines, to question where we meet canines and how we value these meeting points. Thereby, this thinking will act as a foundation by which to highlight Eastern European cinema as a significant space of canine inquiry later within the thesis.

Why are Human and Canines able to meet?

This chapter will analyse four differing locations with distinctive human-canine meeting points being, Working Dogs in Romania, Companion Animals in Mexico, Emotional Support Companions in Uganda and Service Canines in Finland within *We Don't Deserve Dogs* (*WDDD*), to suggest these differing locations represent the charged capacity of canine spaces which have meanings that transcend the capacity of film. Whereby, the canine's represented and their interactions with the human counterparts act as a wider signifier for human-animal conversations particularly within a multi-locational context. I will explore the choice of

¹⁰¹ Marvin, Garry. *Seeing, Looking, Watching, Observing Nonhuman Animals*. 2005.

¹⁰² Saleh, Matthew. *We Don't Deserve Dogs*. 2020.

locations paired with the human-canine relationship to propose that each example builds onto preconceptions regarding human hierarchal biases within differing geographical spaces, as each representation is charged with cultural constraints.

I aim to look to the fundamental visual aspects of the locations represented, exploring the differing objects within the scene, the differing uses of lighting and tonality and the perceivable binaries of canine products, to propose that there is a doubleness enacting within the representations of varied locations. In one capacity these representations enable connections in the human-canine relationship to be discerned that surpasses locational context, suggesting that the human-canine relationship transcends locational pre-conceptions. Whereas these binary examples also highlight readiness of humans to see meeting-points as more or less desirable depending on the locations presented. This will enable us to build on the scholarship from A. Amin's *Regions Unbound* (2004)¹⁰³ and K. Verdery's *What was Socialism and What Comes Next* (1996),¹⁰⁴ to suggest that the representation of human-canine relationships within Eastern European film are wrapped within binary dichotomy being, the other or the norm and the East vs the West.

I will analyse the differing meeting points within *WDDD* by means of building upon Garry Marvin's definition of the act of looking, whereby the viewer focuses their attention on the object, with a gaze that is general and does not indicate specific purpose within the look.¹⁰⁵ Through this thinking I propose that the viewer can acknowledge the canine as present by only

¹⁰³ Amin A. *Regions Unbound*. 2004.

¹⁰⁴ Verdery. K. *What was Socialism and What Comes Next?* 1996.

¹⁰⁵Marvin, Garry. *Introduction: Seeing, Looking, Watching, Observing Nonhuman Animals*. 2005. Pg. 1.

registering them within a generalised understanding which denotes the canine as lacking in individual essence. As a result, this informs us on the spectator's capacity and readiness to place the object within categories illuminated by preconceived oppressive notions, built on human centrism. Thereby, I aim to 'look' to the canine, in order to aim to understand the representation of canine categories, by exploring these groups by analysing representation of canines by means of focusing on temporal, locational and symbolic positioning of canines compared to human counterparts, through examining camera framework, character interaction and character generation.

I intend to build onto prior understanding relating to the visual nature of human-canine power relations by expanding upon Laura Mulvey's text, *Visual Pleasure, and Narrative Cinema*, to further understand the effects of spectatorship when representing canines and the power relations at play.¹⁰⁶ Mulvey's conceptualisation of the Gaze allows us to develop understanding regarding agency, ownership, and domination within human-canine meeting points, through the comprehension of the gaze. Thereby acknowledging Mulvey's theory regarding visual engagement, allows us to better understand the politics of the gaze, whereby the representational canine is not an object on screen, but a semiotic being which informs us on human life, functions, society, and culture.

It is significant within this thesis to understand the capacity to which canines have multiple meanings, as mentioned within the text *Canine Representation in Cinema* (2018), written by Caleb Chodish, whereby canines are seen as complex beings due to their variety of

¹⁰⁶ Mulvey, Laura. *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. 1975.

placements, representations and placements within human life.¹⁰⁷ This thinking is further evident when looking to the chosen human-canine relationships with *WDDD*, where it is evident that canines can be owned, loved, used, abandoned, cared for and mistreated simultaneously or independently. Thereby, building upon the theory that canines have multiple meanings, we can see that when looking at differing canine possibilities and roles, as a service dog can be loved and used, an emotional support companion can be family member while being a tool for mental stability, a working dog can be used for economic gain while being valued in a varying of ways. I propose that the canine's complex possibilities and roles within human life is caused by their culturally intertwined nature, as Tonutti proposes in her text, *Anthropocentrism and the Definition of Culture* (2011), that canines are culturally charged being, which surpass beyond just body and flesh, camera and object.¹⁰⁸ As such this shows the significance of looking at a direct connection between canine spaces and representation, to reveal differing human ideological, cultural and sociological strings.

The significance of looking to the documentary film lies within its perceivable 'honest' depiction of differing human-canine relationships in a multi-locational context including, Uganda, Mexico, Spain, Scotland, Nepal, Romania, Peru, Vietnam, Finland and India, where in each of these locations the audience hears from direct individual perspectives how individual dogs have intersected with their lives. The representation of human-canine reality was achieved through the implementation of a two-person filmic approach, with Rose Tucker controlling sound production and Mathew Salleh as the cameraman, in order to create an

¹⁰⁷ Chodish, Caleb. *Good Boy: Canine Representation in Cinema*. 2018.

¹⁰⁸ Tonutti, Sabrina. *Anthropocentrism and the Definition of 'Culture.'* 2011.

essence of entering a private world by means of using dynamic and flexible filmic techniques that allow for personal spaces to be permeated that may not be possible with the use of heavy stubborn apparatus. Adding to this, the post-production tactics applied, seen within the story curation where we look to individual human-canine meeting-points, adds to the feeling of absence of fabrication, as the directors wanted the personal narrative accounts to stand alone, without location or character titles. Therefore, these pre and postproduction approaches intend to bring the viewer closer into a world unseen where the viewer is permitted to permeate private spaces which are not readily aware to them.

When looking to film reviews we can see the varied opinions regarding the complexities of aiming to represent ‘true’ canine reality. Cary Darling in the film review, *A Tribute to Our Canine Companions* (2021), calls attention to Mathew Salleh’s camera operation that attempts to centre the canine, stating that this “is a documentary about dogs. After all there is a dog in about every frame, and the lovingly made film’s entire purpose is to champion our four-legged companions.”¹⁰⁹ Consequently, *WDDD* undoubtedly acts as a tribute to canine counterparts through the visual spectacle of entering the canine’s focal perspective. Although, this opinion can be challenged when considering the complex nature of film. Cary Darling adds to his rhetorical expression regarding the human-centrism within the representation of the canine by stating, *WDDD* is “less about dogs in particular than the broader human-canine relationship in general and how individuals all over the world (...) have bonded with their dogs.”¹¹⁰ Within this statement, we can understand that despite the director’s apparent use of production

¹⁰⁹ Darling, Cary. *We Don’t Deserve Dogs: A Tribute to Our Canine Companions*. 2021.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

techniques to create the effect of representing canines without human interference, the canine never stands alone without humans in both, actual and semiotic terms. Consequently, stressing the importance of understanding the exploration of canines in film, not only within visual parameters, but to acknowledge that these representations as actual meeting-points, which can both inform and teach us about human-canine boundaries.

We can further comprehend the human as the apex of canine representation through Australian Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's thoughts in the text, *Philosophical Investigations* (1968), where he famously stated, "a dog cannot be a hypocrite, but neither can it be sincere."¹¹¹ This philosophical thinking can be transferred to a filmic purpose as the representation a canine's physical body is true, they represent themselves in real time, body, and flesh. Although, running parallel to the canine's physical form is the politics of the gaze, whereby the canines' innate innocence is transcended into the symbolic. Thereby, the moment the canine is noticed within film and generated through human comprehension the canine is transcended into a symbol of history, culture, and society. Thereby, highlighting the importance of comprehending spectatorship when viewing Eastern European canines within film, as it reveals more about the human than the canine. Whereby, despite the intended purpose of the filmmaker, once the symbol of the canine transcends to the spectators' visual control the image of the canine is no longer just body and flesh.

Consequently, I will look to differing human-canine meeting points to suggest that within *WDDD* there are two distinct ways in which humans meet with canines, through the human

¹¹¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Philosophical Investigations*. 1968.

control on the canine's emotional or physical capacity. As such by defining the human-canine meeting points within the categories of emotionality of physicality, brings into question the implications of canines who do not fit into these fundamental human categories and no longer needed within human culture, society and life, which I will later suggest are seen within the representational Mutt and Stray.

To understand the importance of looking to the representational canine within Eastern European film we must explore the reasons why canines are readily placed within human life. Donna Haraway in her influential text, *The Companion Species Manifesto (2003)*, highlights the canine's innate characteristics which allow them to maintain their place within human society and spaces, stating that, "being a pet seems to be a demanding job for a dog, requiring self-control and canine emotional and cognitive skill matching."¹¹² Through Haraway's rhetoric we can understand the important components which allow canines to be within human society, unlike any other animal. This is the canine's possession of skillsets which can be easily capitalised for certain uses, or as Haraway states 'jobs.' Haraway's rhetoric places the control and power within the canine counterpart, by using authoritative terms, such as, job, self-control, and skill matching, which place the canine in command. I propose these regulative terms are seen as a guise of canine control but are instead employed for the human's moral justification of controlling canines. In turn bringing into question the complex nature of human-canine power hierarchies, suggesting that despite the differing canine roles/jobs the possibilities of becoming are only made possible if the human grants it.

¹¹² Haraway, Donna. *The Companion Species Manifesto*. 2003. Pg. 38.

I intend to build on Haraway's notion regarding the canine's distinct skill set which permits them to readily meet with humans, through the exploration of the *WDDD* as a key film that implements self-reflective tactics, to force the audience to look inwards at their own connections with canines to highlight the canine's interwoven capacity within human life, history and culture. I propose these tactics can be seen within the poster of *WDDD* where the lack of objects, locational context and narrational information is implemented as a space of curiosity which draws the viewers' attention in on the essence of the film, the human-canine connection. As a result, I suggest the lack off within the poster and trailer highlights the canines' innate capacity to be interlinked within human life, disregarding of the locational parameters, thereby emphasising the canine's essentialness within the human world.

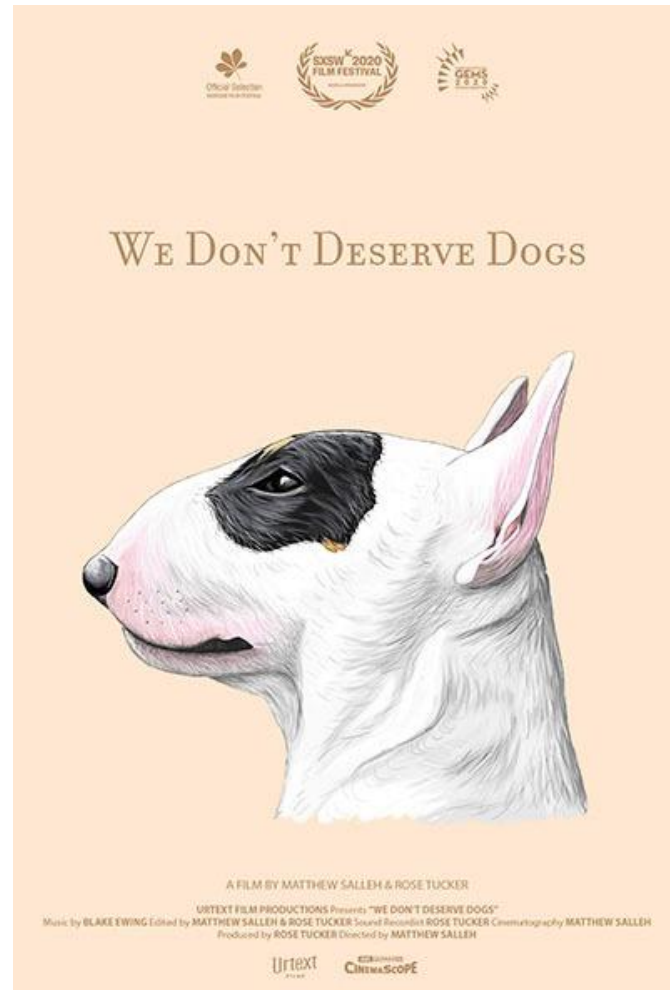


Figure 1. Poster (Salleh, Matthew and Rose Tucker. *We Don't Deserve Dogs*. 2020)

When exploring the poster created for advertising *WDDD*, the poster doesn't give away much information about location, narrative, or style, all the viewer is informed of is that the film is involving dogs.¹¹³ This is evident as, centre stage on the poster is the side profile of a

¹¹³ Salleh, Mathew. *We Don't Deserve Dogs*. 2020

English Bull Terrier, the viewer does not know what the dog is looking at or what the dog has to do with the narrative, the dog is not surrounded by any background, patterns, object or character title. I suggest the simplicity within the curation of the poster is designed for the purpose to draw the viewers' attention to the dog and the thought-provoking title "*We Don't Deserve Dogs.*" Within *WDDD* the title does not just act as a snippet of details instead it opens the dialogue which follows. Thereby, the directors employ the title as a significant tool to implement self-reflective tactics, which force the viewer to look inwards to consider their own meeting points with canine counterparts.

When considering the self-reflective tactics within *WDDD* I suggest that these filmic implementations bring to the forefront the troubled nature of the idealised 'I' when considering canine representation. Lacan's suggests within the text, *The Mirror stage and a Formative of the I Function* (1949), that the human has an innate need to look to an object with recognition to fulfil an egotistical need within.¹¹⁴ By conceptualising this theory when considering the representation of human-canine meeting points within *WDDD* I propose the viewer is made to feel uncomfortable and alien when they do not take recognition with the meeting points being portrayed. As a result, I propose the viewer tries to re-position themselves as the centre of canine possibilities by means of resituating control and resemblance with the human-canine relationship being represented within *WDDD*. I will later propose that this theory encapsulates the foundational essence of the implications of the lack of self-recognition within human-canine meeting-points, as if the human does not recognise the relationship being portrayed,

¹¹⁴ Lacan, Jacques. *The Mirror stage as Formative of the I Function*. 1949.

they feel a lack of control thereby placing the meeting-points within otherness. I suggest that by building on Haraway's rhetoric regarding the canine's certain skillset to be within human life, thereby we can see *WDDD* as a film text that intends to situate a distinct rational of looking to the human-canine connection within visual culture.

Although, I go further to suggest that within *WDDD* the canines interwoven nature within human life is situated within their lack off perceived cognitive capacity, which propels them to be a product within human life. This thinking is built on Garry Steiner's text, *Anthropocentrism and its Discontents* (2005), where he suggests that the non-human's lack of reasoning, language and self-awareness creates a void to which humans readily place the self within the non-human.¹¹⁵ Ultimately this causes a human-non-human divide whereby the human is at the centre of all non-human possibilities. Thereby, through this thinking we can see the human-canine relationship, being the roles, they fulfil and the spaces they inhabit, as made possible through the canine 's animality whereby they are not able to create their own reality. As a result, they are placed within restricted and regulated human spaces which allow humans to easily place conditions and human assumptions onto them, perpetuating the canine as a signifier of human life, whereby the human determines the canine's possibilities. Thereby, from this thinking we are informed on the distinct self-reflective tactics within *WDDD* which aim to encapsulate the viewer within the idealised 'I' where they either do or do not take recognition with the human-canine meeting points being represented and this is only made possible due to the canine's lack off cognitive capacity, as constituted within human terms,

¹¹⁵ Steiner, Garry. *Anthropocentrism and its Discontents*. 2005.

situates them as a symbol of human life, allowing me in the next section to connect the symbolic canine as a product of space.

Where are Humans and Canines able to meet?

I aim to explore four differing human-canine meeting points within *WDDD* being, Emotional Support Canines in Uganda, Service Dog's in Finland, Working Dogs in Romania and Companion Animal in Spain, in order to lead us to a better comprehension regarding the charged capacity of human-canine meeting points, in which differing geographical spaces are situated with differing human preconceptions and judgements. I intend to achieve this by looking to the differing proximity of space, by means of camera-canine distance and human-canine positioning, in order to differentiate human-canine relationships within the conceptualisation of space, being either closeness, dependence and proximity, or distance, control and detachment, as a direct implication of the locational contextualisation of the human-canine meeting-point.

I intend to look to varied human-canine meeting points mentioned in *WDDD* by building upon Mariko Yamamoto's text, *Providing Guidance on Psychiatric Service dogs and Emotional Support Animals* (2018), where it is suggested that every canine role is concerned within different varieties of control, companionship, work and rights.¹¹⁶ As such, this thinking will allow me to suggest that there is a clear distinction made by the directors in *WDDD*,

¹¹⁶ Yamamoto, Mariko. *Providing Guidance on Psychiatric Service Dogs and Emotional Support Animals*. 2018. Pg. 77- 101.

implicitly or explicitly, between the representation of human-canine possibilities and the location they are within, which build upon locational stereotypes and assumptions.

Emotional Service Canines

The first example of human-canine relationships I will focus on is the location of Uganda where the audience is met with human-canine relationship which functions within the meeting points of *Emotional Service Canines*.¹¹⁷ I will explore this filmic representation to suggest that the director's choice of camera-object proximity creates the effect whereby humans and canine share space, thereby being within an equal setting. This lacking off distance between human-canine counterparts shows a lack in restrictions and borders between cross-species lines. Within the example in Uganda, we see readily the image of human and canine counterparts sharing their domestic space and their personal space, thereby, this lacking boundary acts as a symbolic hint regarding the lack of human-canine regulation, in turn building onto negative locational assumptions regarding Uganda as a society of lacking compared to the idealised West. I will explore these close representations of space by means of building upon Mary Louise Pratt's conceptualisation of Contact Zones as space where oppressive and oppressed subjects meet to create a zone which have differing power disparities.¹¹⁸ I place this thinking within the focus of canine exploration to understand the representation of space within *WDDD* as a tool to regulate and suppress the canine within human spaces. Thereby we have to consider the director's choices of representing the emotional service companion as a meeting point

¹¹⁷ Salleh, Mathew. *We Don't Deserve Dogs*. 2020. 00:07:06.

¹¹⁸ Pratt, Mary Louise. *Art of the Contact Zone*. 1991.

within Uganda, as despite Uganda's aim to be identified within terms of stability and prosperity the troubled pasts within Uganda act as an underlying context which allows for negative preconceptions within popular rhetoric, being undefined and lacking.¹¹⁹

The viewer is introduced to a simplistic scene through the implementation of an establishing shot; at the forefront of the image there are long, slim trees that spread out to the horizon, the foreground is encapsulated by a dry, orange, floor and the scene is illuminated by the natural light of the sun, which in turn highlights the rawness of the scene, whereby we are met with warm hues of sun rays, as well as dark shadows.¹²⁰ After the establishing shots, the spectator is met with a medium close up where the camera brings us closer to the people and their canine counterparts, thereby, acting as a symbol of entering their personal space and each individual's bond with their canine counterpart. The location moves from a wide-open space, filled with differing people and dogs, to the secluded and personal environment of the home. The viewer is then permitted to enter three differing homes, all with the same commonality, using the unconditional love and support of the canine to be able to live and survive with PTSD. As a result, we can understand that the point of connection within Uganda is determined within parameters of emotions and feelings, whereby the presence of the canine is significant to the human's mental stability. The viewer looks to three different individuals, who sit on the floor with their canine counterparts sitting next to or behind them, there is no differing levels to their canine companion, when they stand their canine stands, when they sit the canine sits.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ N/A. *Uganda Country Profile*. BBC News. 2023.

¹²⁰ Salleh, Mathew. *We Don't Deserve Dogs*. 2020. 00:07:18.

¹²¹ Ibid. 00:08:14

All these individuals permit the canine to be within their domestic space, their garden, their living room and their kitchen, all spaces which are controlled human environments.¹²² The directors have specifically chosen to situate these individual examples, which are connected by emotions and comfort, within intimate spaces of 'home' and 'domesticity,' to create an effect of equality within the human-canine relationship where human spaces lack in control, permitting both humans and companions at any time or simultaneously.

By understanding the representational relationship within Uganda through the theory of Companionship coined by Donna Haraway,¹²³ we can understand the human-canine meeting-point within equal human-canine terms, but I propose this relationship is opposite due to its transactional capacity, where the canine gives emotional support and the human takes it. As such, we can see this relationship not as a symbol of human-canine mutuality, instead this representation acts as a signifier of the blurring between the human-canine divide, which later within the thesis, is at the crux of the human-canine relationship, where the human fears that the canine will stand alone without human interference taking back their space in the human world. Thereby, the location, being Uganda, is significant as its historic contextualisation allows for the refraction in film where the human-canine meeting-point is seen within terms of lacking where the human-canine divide is blurred.

Service Dogs

¹²² Ibid. 00:10:34

¹²³ Haraway, Donna. *The Companion Species Manifesto*. 2003. Pg. 15.

Next, we are introduced to the human-canine meeting-point situated within the connection of service within the location of Finland.¹²⁴ Unlike within the sequence within Uganda, which represents the Emotional Service Canine within close proximity with humans being permitted into the domestic sphere of human life, we are introduced to a Service Canine which is placed within restrictions of control to re-positing the human at the centre. I suggest that despite the uplifting and caring human-canine connection being represented, whereby humans old and young connect in gentle compassionate moments, there is a clear shift in power differences between the human and the canine, portrayed through the use of camera angles, which focus on individuals separately. I propose there is a specific rationale for representing a clear divided line between human and canine within the location of Finland, as within popular rhetoric regarding Finland's national identity is often seen as stable, free and safe.¹²⁵ As a result, this governed state is manifested within controlled human-canine meeting-points, being Service Canines, which is determined within human-centrism.

Sally Lindsay in a systematic review titled, *The impact of service dogs on children, youth and their families*, highlights the spaces in which Service Dogs are permitted to be within compared to differing canine counterparts, through their access to public spaces, which are controlled, human-centric settings due to their function to improve humans physical state.¹²⁶ Thereby, through this expression we can further comprehend the regulation placed onto the

¹²⁴ Salleh, Mathew. *We Don't Deserve Dogs*. 2020. 00:46:03.

¹²⁵ N/A. *Finland Country Profile*. BBC News. 2024.

¹²⁶ Lindsay, Sally. *The Impact of Service dogs on Children, Youth and their Families*. 2021.

service canine, whereby they are controlled within human settings depending on the degree to which they better human life.

Within the representation of the Service Canine in Finland, the viewer is led to feel distance between the human and the canine, whereby the meeting points are placed within a controlled environment. The audience views moments of love, and compassion, but instead of being within mutual emotional connection the viewer is introduced to humans' ability to manipulate canine attributes to better human life. The viewer is met with an establishing shot which informs them on the location of the human-canine meeting point, being within a communal space. The camera is placed within a distant medium shot allowing the viewer to be able to scan the scene taking in all differing locational components leading the spectator to finally view the canine at the bottom of the screen laying down.¹²⁷ By placing the camera further away from the individuals, allows the audience to establish an understanding of the importance of the human-counterparts within the scene. The public setting is placed at the forefront above the canine who submissively sits beneath the audience's focal viewpoint.¹²⁸ Consequently, this opening sequence, unlike within the example of Emotional Service Dog within Uganda, places the importance on the human counterparts compared to the canine due to the use of distance of the camera. Following this, the camera moves from a distant shot to medium close-ups of human-canine interactions.¹²⁹ Within each interaction the camera focuses on the humans' reactions rather than the canine it-self. This is evident as the audience sees

¹²⁷ Salleh, Mathew. *We Don't Deserve Dogs*. 2020. 00:46:07.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 00:46:11.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 00:47:01.

differing reactions to the canine with the focus on the human. We are met with a medium shot of a middle-aged woman politely stroking the canine, then a man playfully holds the canine's face in a joyous moment, and an older gentleman smirks as the canine places his head on his shoulder.¹³⁰ These are a few examples of the heart-warming moments within this locational example, but each of these examples places the importance on the human's reaction to the canines rather than the canine itself. Although the example of human-canine meeting points within Finland is filled with moments of compassion, there is a distinct distance of space being created between the human and the canine, where the representation of distance perpetuates human-centric control onto the representational canine.

I add to this rhetoric by understanding this scene through the theory of the Gaze conceptualised by Laura Mulvey, where we can further comprehend the power discourse wrapped within this scene, through the suggestion that the Gaze is used to manipulate marginalized counterparts to either identify or dominate the subject.¹³¹ If we conceptualise this scene within a Westernised gaze we can understand the degree to which the human-canine relationship being an Service Canine, based on control and regulation, is represented within the location of Finland as it fulfils geographical assumptions where Finland is seen as a modern location, compared to Uganda who is seen within binary terms within the oppressive gaze. In turn adding to geographical biases whereby non-human domination and separation elicits responses of safety and control whereas, the opposite perpetuates anxiety and fear.

¹³⁰ Ibid. 00:47:06.

¹³¹ Mulvey, Laura. *Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema*. 1975.

Working Canines

Moving from examples whereby the human-canine relationship is situated within the act of emotional well-being and service, we can see a completely new human-canine relationship which is situated within the meeting-point of work. The viewer can see this relationship within the location of Romania, whereby distance and seclusion are fraught within the scene through the example of a Shepard, his sheep, and his dogs.¹³² Unlike the prior scene, which places human-canine distance as a point of control, I suggest this example attempts to place seclusion within Romania as a point of traditionality and lacking, compared to modernity. This thinking is indicative of negative media rhetoric whereby despite Romania's rich history they are seen within "aggressive" and "lazy" terms stemming from prejudice built within Romania's post-Soviet past.¹³³

James Serpell in the comprehensive text, *The Domestic Dog (2017)*, questions why dogs behave in the ways they do to come to a better understand of dog possibilities within contemporary society.¹³⁴ From Serpell's rhetoric we can better understand the functions of Livestock Guardians, which are represented within *WDDD* in Romania. Serpell suggests that Livestock Guardians have an innate capacity to protect, stating that, "They display non-predatory motor patterns towards the livestock."¹³⁵ Thereby, Serpell suggests that their protective capacity places Livestock Guardians in adjunction to the pastoral community as they, "work continuously without command and there's not need to even name them; their

¹³² Salleh, Mathew. *We Don't Deserve Dogs*. 2020. 00:51:34.

¹³³ Gadwalladr, Carole. *Romania: hellhole or country of romance and mystery*. 2016.

¹³⁴ Serpell, James. *The Domestic Dog: It's Evolution Behaviour and Interactions with People*. 2017.

¹³⁵ Ibid. Pg. 45.

genealogy is not important.”¹³⁶ Through this rhetoric we can see different point off human-canine connection than those mentioned prior, as these interactions being based on either emotions, mutuality and service, the Guardian Livestock Canines are examples whereby human-canine relationship is based on survival and income.

I suggest that the directors implement camera tactics to create the essence of alienation, to explicitly highlight the secluded work and lifestyle that the Shephard entails, as well as implicitly hinting to the detached nature of human-canine meeting-point which are determined by a working relationship. The camera placements within the location of Romania, are distant from the canine counterpart, as the camera object proximity has shifted from focusing on human-canine interactions to placing importance on the environment and job at hand, by means of denoting the canine counterpart’s physical gaze. Throughout the sequence the viewer is never met with the face of the canine, at points the viewer sees parts of the canine, such as the ears of the canine as it pokes out from the long grass,¹³⁷ the belly as it is being stroked,¹³⁸ the dog’s legs as it follows the Shephard and the flock,¹³⁹ and the side profile of the canine as it traverses up the hill.¹⁴⁰ By moving the camera from the visual focus onto the human and the job rather than the canine, creates alienation from the viewer whereby the viewer learns little about the canine counterpart on screen. Thereby, placing the canine within the parameters of

¹³⁶ Ibid. Pg. 45.

¹³⁷ Salleh, Mathew. *We Don't Deserve Dogs*. 2020.00:51:47.

¹³⁸ Ibid. 00:52:01.

¹³⁹ Ibid. 00:52:25.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 00:55:17.

worker rather than companionship highlights the differing power disparities within the human-canine relationship depending on the meeting-point that's being enacted.

Adding to this, when exploring the example of Romania in relation to earlier examples, we can see the lacking within this location as a tactic to draw the viewers' attention to the human-canine relationships. Although, I suggest there is another charged implication for the locational simplicity within the outside space. Outside spaces are often considered within terms of wildness and danger, thereby considering the human-canine relationship within Romania to be determined within these terms, build onto Western biases that Romania is archaic and lacking.¹⁴¹ Where wildness seeps into human spaces, and non-human borders are fragile. As by building on Chodish's rhetoric regarding the canine's multiplex of meanings,¹⁴² allows us to understand the fear of the fragility within cross-species boundaries whereby the undefined and fluid nature of canine roles, spaces and places, fuels the human's need to dominate and suppress the canine in both representation and actuality.

Companion Canines

The Companion Canine in a modern sense is the most prevalent human-canine meeting point within human life, it is the canine that shares our homes, hearts and lives within the power discourse of owned and owner, this is no different than within the example in *WDDD* in the location of Spain.¹⁴³ I propose that within this human-canine example we are shown varying camera shots and locations being, on the sofa, at a park, in the bedroom, highlighting the

¹⁴¹ Melenciuc, Sorin. *Why are the two sides of Romania so different?* 2018.

¹⁴² Chodish, Caleb. *Good Boy: Canine Representation in Cinema.* 2018.

¹⁴³ Salleh, Mathew. *We Don't Deserve Dogs.* 2020. 00:18:00.

companion's canine entwined nature to be permitted within the domestic sphere. Although I go further to suggest that the human-canine proximity within this scene is mixed, where we see varying shots of individual canines, individual humans and them together, in order to act as a signifier of the dual power disparities within companion canines, who can be both owned and cared for, alone and together.

Chiara Mariti in the text *Dog Attachment to Man* (2013), highlights contemporary societies want to consider canines as companion animals stating that, "in countries the majority of dogs that live with people are classified as companion animals."¹⁴⁴ Mariti goes further to propose the reasoning for the need to place canines within companionship, suggesting that, "companionship is among the main reasons motivating people to own a dog," due to the canine's capacity for love and affection which relieves stress which has a "positive effect on the owners psychological welfare."¹⁴⁵ When considering interactions within canine companionship the points in which these interactions take place differ considerably depending on the individual context, meaning the ways in which humans treat canine companions differs, being different training, treatments, needs and care, thereby highlighting the complex nature of pet keeping. Although, saying this all human-canine meeting points which are situated within companionship are placed under the restrictions of owned and owner.

When exploring the opening sequences within Spain, the viewer is met with two different human-canine relationships, both owners are women between 25-35 years old, one woman

¹⁴⁴ Mariti, Chiara. *Dog Attachment to Man*. 2013.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

owns a white, fluffy Bichon Friese, while the other women own a medium, brown spaniel.¹⁴⁶ All prior examples of human-canine connections are placed within mostly singular parameters being either, a close bond due to emotional ties, a restricted relationship of service and a distant need of survival, although, when exploring the power relations within human-canine companionship the conditions are considerably complex. I suggest that the companion canine is a dual being who can be both owned and loved, cared for, and mistreated, and these binary assumptions are evident within the representation of *WDDD*. Unlike the other examples, which places importance on establishing the location, the first sequence the viewer is introduced to is uninformed and ambiguous. The viewer is brought in close, through the implementation of an extreme close up, to the face of a white fluffy dog, this dog is being groomed and pruned, having jewels and hair bands placed on its head, we don't see the human which is grooming the canine, only their hands which manipulate the dog's hair.¹⁴⁷ Thereby creating an effect of complete focus on the canine counterpart, although saying this the enacting of grooming does not gain the attention of their viewer through tactics of self-reflection, heartwarming moments or wonder, instead the viewer feels fascinated with the scene as we look to the canine as a spectacle on a pedestal. This scene is used to highlight the binary uses of Companion Canines within society by blending a use of shared screen space of human and canines, zoom in shots of canines, medium shots of individuals by them self to show the complex nature of human-canine companionship, which is indicative of the differing power discourses within canine companionship being owned and owner. As a result, the

¹⁴⁶ Salleh, Mathew. *We Don't Deserve Dogs*. 2020. 00:18:00.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 00:17.53

sequence may focus on the canine, but only how the humans treat and provide for canines yet again placing the human at the centre.

Building upon the theory of Biophilia coined by E. Wilson in the text *Human Bond with Other Species* (1894), we can understand direct connection between domesticating canines and the fulfilling of human-centric ideals, where the human manipulates the aesthetics and characteristics of canines to elicit the need for humans to get companion canines.¹⁴⁸ This idea further situates the human-canine relationship of companionship within the terms of consumerism, whereby the motivations of purchasing and breeding canines is not to better canine life but to better the humans. Saying this, at a foundational level this human-canine connection is grounded within self-serving tactics, but despite this representation of human-canine companionship within *WDDD* does not illicit negative feelings, instead it grounds this location, being Spain, within locational assumptions of Spain being modern and defined.¹⁴⁹ Thereby the impact of placing this example within Spain, a central European location, implicitly builds upon personal biases, which consider differing locations as lacking or undefined.

Locational Implications of Human-Canine Meeting-Points

Moving from an analysis which focuses on the locations of Uganda, Finland, Spain and Romanian as individual entities, I intend to compare these locations as pairs, which build on preconceptions regarding the perceived adequate and appropriate care for canines, by means

¹⁴⁸ Wilson, E. *Biophilia: The Human Bond with Other Species*. 1984.

¹⁴⁹ N/A. *Spain Country Profile*. BBC News. 2024.

of human-canine representation. Consequently, I aim to question why have these specific illustrations of human-canine relationships been chosen and what implications does this have on the locations represented?

I intend to explore the binary visual components, differing objects, locations, characters dialogues and canine products to suggest that, in spite of the director's aim to represent images disconnected from their personal rhetoric, it is apparent that the placement of locations within the structure of the film have been edited together to highlight the locational differences. Consequently, the implementation of visual binaries through establishing shots, heightens the effect of cultural and economic disparities. I intend to explore these differing examples within the gaze of Western idealised values; by doing so, it will build onto binary assumptions of canine practice, thereby highlight the culturally charged nature of canine representation. Consequently, this acts as a foundational understanding of binary assumptions of canine representation, which I will build upon in the later parts of the thesis to suggest Eastern European canine representation is regulated within binary terms of, norm vs other and West vs East.

Barking Mad Canines: Uganda and Spain

When looking to the narrative construction of *WDDD*, each location has been placed next to the other with specific reason, thereby I have chosen these four locations due to their structure, being one after the other, allowing for binary assumptions to be easily made. When considering Uganda and Spain I suggest that the objects in the scene, character representation

and differing locational portrayals are used to place judgment on human-canine meeting points which do not fulfil consumerist society's perception of adequate canine care.

Uganda's locational representation is situated within a barren, lacking space which in one regard highlights the intimate human-canine relationship. By exploring this location within a Western gaze make further assumption on the lacking within the scene. When zooming in on the canine products and dialogue within the scene creates a rudimentary assumption of the canine care that's occurring. Firstly, the scene opens with a foundational dialogue where an African woman calls out, how to vaccinate, clean, feed and care for their dogs.¹⁵⁰ Through a normative gave the viewer feels judgment towards the individuals in the scene due to the basic instructions, which would seem foundational within Western ideals of canine practices. Consequently, moving from the focus of the character dialogue to the representation of canine products in the scene these negative preconceptions of canine care within the scene is strengthened. This is evident when exploring the individuals in the scene, the viewer is met with a crowd of 20+ people all standing in both lines and groups, then by zooming in on these groups of people we can see individuals holding ropes which are tied around the canines' necks, very few dogs have collars or tags, there is no water in sight, dogs are sitting in direct sunlight and visibly young children are holding puppies in uncomfortable ways.¹⁵¹ Consequently, the representation of the lack of canine products combined with the basic instructions creates an image of a foundational knowledge regarding safe canine treatment. Thereby building on negative assumptions regarding the location of Africa compared to

¹⁵⁰ Salleh, Mathew. *We Don't Deserve Dogs*. 2020. 00:07:47.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 00:07:30.

Western ideals, which would permit these canine practises as lacking. It is important to acknowledge the choice of location and the human-canine examples, as there are millions of examples of human-canine meeting points within Uganda and wider Africa, allowing us to consider the implications of representing human-canine relationship which lacks in education, within the location of Africa.

Moving from a location which can be viewed as simplistic, and barren, we are introduced to the consumerist side of canine ownership within the location of Spain. The viewer is met with an almost comical scene, with a countless amount of small, pruned dogs in outfits, dresses and tiaras, barking and playing in a park.¹⁵² This sequence, which is filled with large amounts of people mirrors the previous scene within Uganda, where groups of people huddle with their dogs. Although unlike the prior scene, which highlights the lacking in canine care, we can see the opposite within Spain which is as an image of complete canine commodity culture. To add to the spectacle of the scene, we are met with a long zoom in shot, which focuses the viewers' attention to a white dog sitting on a throne with presents, people and dogs surrounding them.¹⁵³ It is evident that these polar scenes, being Spain and Uganda, are used to comment on the differing capacities of canine treatment which in turn creates either positive or negative personal opinions regarding the locations being portrayed. By placing binary opposite cultures, individuals, and human-canine relationships consecutively within the narrative placement is used to emphasise the locational differences. As building on Lacan's theory of the

¹⁵² Ibid. 00:20:16.

¹⁵³ Ibid. 00:21:15.

‘I,’¹⁵⁴ we can see the location of Spain as fulfilling the human’s egotistical need to recognise the object being portrayed, compared to the location of Uganda which represents the human-canine meeting-point as alien and archaic. Thereby, when focusing on the location of Africa we are confronted with barren scenes, perceived impoverish areas of shacks and basic canine products which would be shocking to a Western gaze. As such, when looking to the location of Spain which portrays a contemporary society, with clean large homely domestic spaces, natural green outside parks and consumeristic canine products which are extravagant in nature, are implemented as parallel scenes to build upon the audiences’ pre-conceptions regarding the locational spaces whereby within a Western gaze the viewer takes recognition with the space to fulfil the idealised ‘I’s egotistical need, propelling the location of Uganda within the identification of otherness.

When we look to film, to understand the characters, locations, and cultures, within a foundational level we are understanding how the audience readily places these rudimentary understandings as true. In this example, these binary canine representations build upon the stereotypical idea that Africa is lacking, poor and corrupt,¹⁵⁵ whereas Spain is seen as successful and affluent.¹⁵⁶ The impact of these representations not only create separations in geographical borders but also have a tangible effect onto canine perception, whereby, differing canines have differing places and possibilities, depending on their generation as worthy or lacking, wild or domesticated. Consequently, by specifically choosing different

¹⁵⁴ Lacan, Jacques. *The Mirror stage as Formative of the I Function*. 1949.

¹⁵⁵ Kimeu, Caroline. *Negative Stereotypes in International Media Costs*. 2024.

¹⁵⁶ Hedgecoe, Guy. *How Spain’s Economy Became the Envy of Europe*. 2025.

locations, one which is bound in acentric commodity culture and the other which is rudimentary, to be represented back-to-back is used to implicitly build upon locational biases by means of the symbolic canine. These examples couldn't be any more different, thereby, these polar examples highlight the tangible tension within the representational canine, which is human centric binaries being, good and bad, rich, and poor.

Traditionality and Modernity: Finland and Romania

Furthermore, I propose that the representation of the human-canine relationship within Romania and Finland acts as distinct examples to compare as the human-canine meeting-points portrayed within these locations have clear spatial disparities, which build on geographical assumptions and stereotypes. I suggest that the Service Canine seen within Finland is represented within controlled public spaces, which creates a perception of the location being modern and worthy. Whereas, within Romania the representation of Livestock Guardian Canines, have a opposite effect where the viewer sees this relationship within archaic terms, due to its unequivocal placements within the wilderness. Thereby these locations are separated through the binary terms urban or pastoral, being either inside or outside spaces, which are used to hint to the hierarchal positioning of humans at the centre, in order to either restore or break the domestic equilibrium, where spaces are either controlled and safe or wild and dangerous. Thereby I intend to understand the binary meeting-points within canine representation through the thinkings coined by Jessica Ullrich in the text *Where*

Dogs and Humans Meet (2018), that canines are doubly encoded being first animals, wild and unbridled, and second culturally formed, controlled and trained.¹⁵⁷

As mentioned before, the human-canine meeting point within Finland explores the representation of canine services with the purpose to better humans' cognitive ability and state. When exploring the representation in the location of Finland each space portrayed is clinical, clean, and bright, thereby straight away the viewer builds an assumption regarding the location fitting with modern and contemporary standards. Firstly, the sequence begins within the location of a surgical, bright, and clean room, the tonal lighting within the scene has hues of white rays which fill the screen forcing there to be no shadows within the setting. Within this location the audience sees nine people all sitting on wooden chairs in a semicircle, these people are evidently older with even some people sitting on a wheelchair, creating an effect that we are placed within a care setting.¹⁵⁸ This location builds upon the prior suggestion that the location combined with the human-canine relationship creates an image of modernity, whereby the canine practices are developed and advanced. I suggest that within this scene we see a complex human-canine relationship which resides within the connection of service, thereby highlight the restricting nature of service canines within human society is heightened by the clinical locations within the scene.

Furthermore, the representation of Finland as developed and modern is highlighted when exploring the following scene within Romania. The viewer is met with distant human-canine

¹⁵⁷ Ullrich, Jessica. *Where Dogs and Humans Meet*. 2018.

¹⁵⁸ Salleh, Mathew. *We Don't Deserve Dogs*. 2020. 00:46:18.

relationship, as I suggest, building onto Western negative pre-conceptions of Eastern states regarding their elementary society that differs from Western ideals and beliefs. The viewer is met with a variety of medium, long, and close-up shots whereby we follow through the focal perspective of the Shephard, enacting on a journey with no apparent destination or direction. The location is in total seclusion, apart from the Shephard, the sheep and his dogs, there is no buildings, no landmarks, or any other sign of life, jut vast green fields, trees and hills that fill all parts of the screen.¹⁵⁹ Through the representation within Romania, the spaces in which the viewer is portrayed lack in contemporary buildings, objects and surroundings, the scene is only situated within nature where their life is determined by the elements. I suggest that this visual move from contemporary society to a pastoral society is used to empathise the differing spaces canines are situated within. Consequently, I suggest Salleh and Tucker place human-canine relationships which are determined by emotion and service within inside domestic spaces which are shared community locations to highlight the intimacy and control between human-canine counterparts. Thereby, highlighting the secluded and distant relationship which is established within work, survival, and necessity. As a result, calling attention to the analysis of space within representations due to its charged capacity to build on human comprehension regarding canine counterparts and their possibility within human society. Consequently, through this rhetoric we can see *WDDD* as an inherently important text to understand the importance of exploring differing human-canine relationships, as well as the effect on understanding the locational parameters within these meeting point.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 00:51:50.

Conclusion

Exploring the film, *We Don't Deserve Dogs*, allows for foundational understanding on differing human-canine relationships and consequently the parameters within these meeting-points. Although, I suggest that these differing examples act as important images for implicit human pre-conceptions regarding differing judgments depending on the locations being portrayed. Thereby, I suggest the despite Saleh and Tucker's intentions these examples create a charged space where the audience is able to build on preconceptions on these geographical locations; by doing do so it places differing human-canine relationships within binary terms, good vs bad, modern vs traditional, adequate vs insufficient. Consequently, by understanding the binary nature of canine representation will better allow us to understand the representation of the canine within Eastern European representation. As I suggest that Eastern European canine representation is constricted with binary assumptions of, East vs West, Mutt vs Breed. Therefore, looking to *WDDD* better allows us to understand where canine and humans meet, their jobs uses and relations, as well as how humans and canine can meet, through better comprehension of power discourses, restrictions, and conditions.

Chapter Two: Seeing the Pet

Inside-Outside Spaces

“I hope to bring my readers into the kennel for life. But I hope also that even the dog phobic- or just those with their minds on higher things will find arguments and stories that matter to the world we might yet live in.”

(Donna, Haraway. *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant of Otherness*, 2003)

Introduction

In Chapter Two, I aim to make a link between the contextualisation of Eastern Europe and canine representation within a process of spatial differentiation, whereby a canine is either welcomed, suppressed or regulated within human domestic spaces, through its consideration as a Pet, Mutt, or Stray. I will suggest there is significant rationale for exploring non-human spaces within Eastern European film, by means of cognitive organisation propelled by post-Soviet pasts, to reveal important non-humans' positions which permit authorisation or suppression into human spaces, in order to create order and hierarchy between humans and

non-humans, whereby humans are re-centred. I aim to build onto non-human granular assumptions, specifically considering binary non-human positions within human society, being pets as owned, animals as wild. I intend to build upon Garry Marvin's theory of 'Seeing' non-humans from his text *Seeing, Looking, Watching, Observing Nonhuman Animals (2005)*,¹⁶⁰ in order to 'see' non-human-human meeting-points at a granular level within the film, *Domestic (2012)* directed by Adrian Sitaru.¹⁶¹ This film has been specifically chosen as it is located within Romania, an Eastern European state, and represents key human-non-human discourses.

Seeing non-human spaces within Eastern European film

Garry Marvin suggests in *Seeing, Looking, Watching, Observing Nonhuman Animals (2005)*, that human understanding of the non-human is not through our direct experiences/encounters, instead it is built on how they are represented.¹⁶² 'Seeing' animals, Marvin suggests, is the most basic level of visual engagement, where the object is registered as visible, thereby by introducing Marvin's rhetoric regarding the differing capacity of viewing non-humans. Consequently, by building upon this expression of visually acknowledging the non-human as present, I will explore the outwardly human-meeting points being the spaces they permit within a rudimentary understanding of differing non-humans within *Domestic* at a granular level to enable us to better understand the superficial nature of consuming animals, whereby they are visually registered but within basic terms, while also highlighting the similarities and the differences when considering animals within Eastern European spaces compared to the

¹⁶⁰ Marvin, Garry. *Seeing, Looking, Watching, Observing Nonhuman Animals*. 2005.

¹⁶¹ Sitaru, Adrian. *Domestic*. 2012.

¹⁶² Marvin, Garry. *Seeing, Looking, Watching, Observing Nonhuman Animals*. 2005. Pg. 1.

West. I will propose that in both Western and Eastern terms non-humans are often only ‘seen,’ consequently effecting the places in which animals are allowed to permeate through, as well as the conditions in which they are held.

I will build upon Anna Batori’s thinking in the text *Enclosed Spatial Formation (2016)*, in order to link the importance of seeing non-humans and space as an interconnected unit within an Eastern European filmic location, due to the representation of space being implicitly connected to Eastern European contextual and historical pasts.¹⁶³ Batori explores Romanian films, specifically looking to post-Soviet effects on spatial freedom and how this is represented through cinematic illustration, by means of exploring the representation of landscapes by establishing two aesthetic categories, horizontal and vertical enclosures. I aim to propose that post-Soviet authority, which is based on control, suppression and repression, has manifested in a gaze whereby the public are supervised and subdued. Batori suggests that within capitalistic architecture transparency and fluidity are essential functions, whereas objectives within socialist architecture differs through the aims to create enclosed buildings which suppress visibility to control the gaze, to see and to be seen.¹⁶⁴ In turn this constricting spatial environment has created a controlled space, where there is no place for animals within the domestic equilibrium and when they do penetrate this controlled space there is charged tensions where the non-human is either controlled and subdued or destroyed and hidden. Consequently, Batori highlights the importance of exploring space within cinematic representations, as she suggests that space is not passive and stagnant, its status is fluid

¹⁶³ Batori, Anna. *Enclosed Spatial Formation*. 2016.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. Pg. 144.

depending on the cognitive organisation of the environment surrounding it, being “a mechanism that is constantly flowing (inter) connecting other space, events and manifestations.”¹⁶⁵ I intend to build upon these academic expressions, when exploring *Domestic*, to propose that there is a deliberate use of space which invokes feelings of claustrophobia to highlight humans’ control over non-human spaces which canines are only authorised to inhabit if it is permitted so by human counterparts. As a result, I will propose that Sitaru employs granular non-human themes of, death, domestication and claustrophobia to highlight the problematic relationship in Eastern European states, whereby certain non-humans, who fit humans needs, are accepted within the domestic sphere, and others, who do not fit in, are hidden, culled and ignored. Consequently, through a mix of filmic representation and academic enquiry I will aim to answer the following questions, what cultural and societal aspects are revealed when looking to Romanian human-canine meeting points in film, such as consumption, consumerism, and abandonment? What spaces are non-humans allowed to permeate and why?

Seeing ‘Domestic’

Domestic gives a direct fictional depiction of how personal and individual opinions affect the non-human’s state. First released in March 2013 in Romania by 4 Proof Films, *Domestic* is a Comedy-Drama that represents the inner workings of an apartment block, by connecting a series of individual stories through non-human and human interactions. The viewer is presented with a narrative focus set within the household of three men, Lazar, Mihae and Toni

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. Pg. 144.

who in differing capacities within the narrative are interconnected with non-humans being a chicken, a cat, a dove, a rabbit, and a dog. This film focuses on the intersections of these non-humans within the domestic sphere, and how differing non-humans fit or don't fit into these spaces. Whereby we see the impactful nature of human centrism within non-human possibilities, being how the individual's "self" affects the animals.

The film throughout mixes perfectly mundane, normal, family units with chaos, action and crisp conversations using witty, satirical moments which are comedic and dramatic at the same time to keep the viewer intrigued throughout. Not only does this film mix comedy and drama intrinsically, but the viewer is also approached with a mix of bleak, colourless environments and colourful busy settings, combined with fast paced conversations within the family unit, lacking in non-diegetic sound, as Sitaru aims to portrays modern Romania to the wider public. Therefore, this film acts as a concentrated version of Romanian cultural and sociological make-up acting as a foundation to understand the Romanian General Publics troubled and varied relationships with domestic animals. By exploring *Domestic* through this understanding enables us to truly comprehend the impact of spectatorship upon non-human counterparts, by means of the film's unique focus on human-non-human spaces. As Ronnie Scheid proposed in the film review, *Domestic (2013)*, the film highlights "the intrusion of different animals into domestic spaces (...) – sets off rapid fire arguments, negotiations, recriminations and reconciliations."¹⁶⁶ This shows that there is specific rationale for exploring spaces in which

¹⁶⁶ Scheib, Ronnie. *Film Review 'Domestic.'* 2013.

humans and non-humans interact within Eastern European cinema, as it acts as a space where the ‘self’ is questioned.

Domestic is a strong basis from which to comprehend the canine representation within an Eastern European context, as it sets out parameters within public opinion regarding animals and pets, whereby they are either allowed or unauthorized to permeate the domestic sphere, which causes them to be treated in differing ways. As, seen in the article *Geographically Apart, Attitudinally Very Close* (2018), written by Alina Rusu, which builds upon comprehensions of Romania’s complex public opinion regarding pets and stray dogs.¹⁶⁷ On one hand, it is evident the general public have self-awareness regarding non-human treatment, whereby, they both acknowledge the positive impact of pet keeping due to the degree to which, “pets bring many benefits.”¹⁶⁸ Although, we can see a clear disparity regarding non-human opinions and actuality as despite the acknowledgement of the positive attributes of pets within human life, there is a disjointed capacity between opinion and reality. As Four Paws, a charity NGO suggest, “a rough estimate of up to 500,000 dogs,” on the streets in Romania.¹⁶⁹ This shows a difference between non-human understanding and non-human treatment within the contextualisation of Eastern Europe and as a result of this tension I propose a major impact between the disparities of non-human treatment lies within binary understandings of non-human, as seen within the representational canine as good/bad or domestic/wild defined by their degree to be Pet, Mutt or Stray.

¹⁶⁷ Rusu, Alina. *Geographical Apart, Attitudinally Very Close*. 2018.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. Pg.7.

¹⁶⁹ Four Paws. *Stray Animal Care in Romania*. 2023.

Claustrophobia and the non-human

In this section I propose through the exploration of the film *Domestic*, that there is an inherent connection between the effects of the post-Soviet past on the general public's sense of self and the spaces non-humans are either permitted or not permitted within. I intend to achieve this by connecting the visual representation of space within *Domestic* and contextualisation of Romania's history and cinemas, to suggest that the representation of claustrophobic spaces, caused by post-Soviet pasts create controlled human spaces where the non-human is either suppressed or hidden or utterly controlled by the human dependent on the value they provide within human life.

Romanian Cinema

Firstly, this chapter claims to make a connection between Eastern European cinematic space as deeply affected by the changing power structures through the focus on exploring Romanian Cinema, where we can trace back ideological fragments and breaks through the exploration of stylisation within Romanian Film. This thinking will allow me to highlight the relationship between visual culture and actuality, through the assumptions that *Domestic* is a concentrated signifier of non-human hierarchal positions within human life.

When looking to Romania's cinematic industry we can see that it has undergone dramatic change from 2000's onwards, with the Romanian New Wave being hailed by Christina Stojanova in *The New Romanian Cinema (2019)*, as a fresh, intellectual and emotional air

which has been introduced into the global sphere.¹⁷⁰ This institutional change is seen as propelled by the changing of power structures within Eastern Europe, leading to aesthetical and ideological changes within cinema. This thinking is evident when looking to the text *Romanian New Wave Cinema (2014)*, written by Doru Pop, who states that the Romanian film industry pre-2000's was constituted by self-containment, due to the Communist reign, where the film industry was ruled by established directors who had allegiance to the ideological rules of Soviet filmmaking. Although, after the year 2000 there was a drastic shift within the film industry, which was hailed as a "rebirth."¹⁷¹ With the emergence 3-4 young directors (at first) such as Cristi Puiu, who is known for his influential film, *The Death of Mr Lazarescu (2005)*,¹⁷² which is arguably his most influential film that awarded him the winner at the Cannes Film Festival in 2005, for the Un Certain Regard Award. Thereby this shift of filmmaking caused Romanian films to start to emerge in Western film competitions, showing the popular circuit taking Eastern European film more seriously than previously considered. Consequently, the ideological shift from state run films to auteur artists caused an aesthetical and industry change, where individual auteurs attempted to come to a defined and unified sense of self. As seen within the chapter *The New Romanian Cinema (2010)* by Rodica Ieta, where Ieta proposes that the Romanian Cinema industry was deeply affected by the fragmentation of collective memory, born through post-Soviet pasts, causing the new generation of Romanian director to resort to using realist techniques that undermine their

¹⁷⁰ Stojanova, Christina. *The New Romanian Cinema*. 2019. Pg. 23.

¹⁷¹ Pop, Doru. *Romanian New Wave Cinema*. 2014. Ibid. Pg. 9.

¹⁷² Puiu, Cristi. *The Death of Mr Lazarescu*. 2005.

“masters” by “wrapping it in layers of philosophical speculation, undertones and encoded meaning,” thereby having revelational potential to re-establish “experience and memory.”¹⁷³

Prior to this refreshing exchange of identity, Romanian Cinema was controlled and defined by the political authority of the Communist regime. Dziga Vertov in the text *Kino-Eye (1984)*, coined the history of cinema as a suppression, stating that the intended purpose of the camera was to “penetrate the deeper” to not forget the past, but instead he proposes a ‘misfortune,’ that the camera’s time of invention was manipulated by the state political power.¹⁷⁴ Where the “Bourgeoisie’s hellish idea consisted of using the new toy to entertain the masses, or rather to divert the workers attention from their basic aim; their struggle against their masters,”¹⁷⁵ thereby suggesting a tragedy within representation, to educate and reveal, as well as, to suppress and control. This can be said about the history of Romania’s film industry, as artistic expression, real life depictions and freedom had been repressed out of all aspects of production and post-production experiences, due to the rigid political control regarding ideology, traditions, and culture.

I propose within *Domestic* we can see post-Soviet implications by exploring the representation of space by means of juxtaposing inside/outside spaces which propel the inside spaces as claustrophobic controlled. The opening scene is placed through the narrative perspective of Toni’s peripheral lens. The camera is pointed directly at a foreboding post-Communist apartment building, where the rigid symmetrical lines and brutalist architecture is

¹⁷³ Ieta, Rodica. *The New Romanian Cinema*. 2010. Pg. 24.

¹⁷⁴ Vertov, Dziga. *Kino-Eye*. 1984. Pg. 60-79

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. Pg. 60-79.

unavoidable the viewer's eyes. Toni slowly approaches the post-Soviet apartment building, where the economical state of the area is evident by the graffitied walls, the overgrown shrubberies and the general neglect of the area.¹⁷⁶ The tone of this scene emphasises the bleak post-Soviet surroundings, the lighting is dark, with a few warm hues radiating from the streetlights. Although rather than these lights creating a warm atmosphere it instead emphasises the banal post-Soviet surroundings. The viewer's eyes are drawn to a medical, white light which is in the apartment foyer, where the narrative unfolds. These contradictory lights create a binary tone of warm, cold and dark, are used draw the viewer's gaze onto the claustrophobic inside space which is trapped within the foreboding post-Soviet bloc.¹⁷⁷ These binary locations are explicitly represented to set the narrative location, but when we implicitly explore this chosen location, the viewer can understand the constricting and claustrophobic nature of the film where both the characters (human and nonhuman) and the viewer are enclosed and controlled. This is apparent when looking to Batori's text as she states, "the disciplinary constellation of the buildings that enable one to have a good view of the apartment and their inner spaces," which thereby contribute to the "sense of being under constant surveillance."¹⁷⁸ Thereby, the combination of the camera positioning through Toni's focal perspective, the slow camera movement towards the block, and the daunting and inescapable visual aesthetic of the apartment Communist building and the juxtapositional tone of the lighting creates a foreboding atmosphere where the viewer feels total and utter domination by the Soviet structures. Consequently, despite Romania moving away from

¹⁷⁶ Sitaru, Adrian. *Domestic*. 2012. 00:02:00.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. 00:01:50.

¹⁷⁸ Batori, Anna. *Enclosed Spatial Formation*. 2016. Pg. 144.

Soviet control the Communist regime's doctrine, lifestyle and ideology can still be seen interconnected within the fabrics of Romania's culture and cognitive organisation of the individual/self.

Romania's Communist history

When looking to the contextual history of Romania we can make a clear connection between the suppression of non-human spaces and post-Soviet pasts. Following World War Two, the state of Romania transformed into an industrial nation through the directives of the Soviet Union. The traditional aspects of Romanian life where people lived off the rich landscapes, with a slow-paced life in vast open fields and tightknit communities, were replaced by focus on the manufacture and sale of consumer goods and suppressing agricultural production a shift underpinned by political objectives of economic gain, political power and self-sufficiency. As a result, the traditional aspects of Romanian life were disrupted, and many people had no choice but to move from rural landscapes to city environments, which were crowded with big city blocs with hundreds of small apartments within. This mass displacement allowed the government to ensure ultimate control through economical suppression. As Dimitri D. Demakas in *The Romanian Economic Reform Program* (1991) states, the Soviet Romanian government systematically stressed the economic structure, by means of state-run production, regulation of prices to be marked-up disregarding of market fluctuations, foreign trade was managed exclusively by the state and lastly, the collectivisation of individual land being placed in collective ownership and control.¹⁷⁹ Therefore, allowing for constant supervising of

¹⁷⁹ Demekas, Dimitri G. *The Romanian Economic Reform Program*. 1991

the public. Not only did this displacement affect the individual, but it also changed what people knew of their domestic sphere, their lifestyles, families, and communities had been destroyed, and within this reshuffle of the domestic equilibrium, the pet had no place within this space.

In *Domestic*, when the viewer is finally shown the inside space of the apartment bloc, the viewer is met with a small foyer, a cramped hallway and three different apartments sparse in space, all aspects of all locations function to create a claustrophobic space, where the viewer can gaze upon the domestic space, involved within the action but unable to control the narrative string, creating a constricting ambience.¹⁸⁰ Throughout the narrative the camera placement is stagnant and distant with little angle changes and movement and sparse editing components to cut up a scene. When we are first introduced to Lazar's family, the camera is placed at a medium length, where the viewer is able to see the kitchen, dining room table and bathroom door, for 10 minutes this scene runs without a single change of angle, as the viewer watches the narrative unfold, between Lazar, his wife, the daughter, a chicken and a cat from the detached view where they survey the narrative.¹⁸¹ The use of stagnant camera angles and lengthy scenes is used to give the impression that the viewer is permeating through the private domestic sphere by looking upon the intimate happenings of the family home, although only ever being permitted to gaze. Consequently, Sitaru's constant use of distant camera angles to make the viewer feel alienation within the scene gives the impression of claustrophobia, whereby the viewer is not comfortable within the scene but also cannot escape viewing the

¹⁸⁰ Sitaru, Adrian. *Domestic*. 2012. 00:02:00.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* 00:04:57.

narrative, instead they are under complete control by means of human interception. I propose that the rigid camera angles and movement are implemented to mirror the non-humans cramped space within the domestic sphere, and like the non-human's within the narrative, the viewer is intruding into the characters' lives, thereby breaking up the domestic equilibrium.

Furthermore, from the analysis of the prior scenes we are introduced to the characters, the location, and the narrative themes, but when exploring the implicit functions of these introductions, we can see the historic and cultural contexts which stem from Romania's Communist past. The claustrophobic Soviet structures, traditional masculine oriented family units and small flats, inform us on the importance of considering Communism as a crucial factor for modern Romania's cognitive organisation. As, even though modern Romania is a post-Communist society the effects of this history are still evident through the structures of family units, which is evident through the cinematic representation in *Domestic*. Although, Sitaru goes further to not only show the effects of Communism on the public domestic life, but also on non-humans, whereby there is no space for the non-human within the domestic equilibrium. Consequently, the societal shift from rural to industrial, caused by Communist powers, suppressed the non-human within the domestic sphere. Thereby, when we as viewers gaze upon these non-humans, we must keep in mind the historical constraints, as it is not plainly important to explore how the non-humans are portrayed in the film, but also to understand how we consume and look to them.

The Chicken, the Cat, and the Domestic space

In *Domestic* Sitaru uses the representation of the cat and the chicken to highlight the fragility of the domestic equilibrium, which can be destroyed easily by non-human intrusion. I propose that Sitaru determines these non-humans by means of their value to human life, re-positioning the human within non-human possibilities disregarding the non-humans' thoughts, feelings, or welfare. Here, I intend to set a foundational understanding of the non-human as a Pet, to understand the implication of those who do not fall into these categories within the consideration of the representation of non-human within Eastern European spaces.

Looking to non-human roles

When understanding the human-non-human relationship, the concept of what it means to be a pet, and the perceived differences between pets and animals, have continuously been revisited within academic study to come to a better comprehension of the beings that share our homes. Erica Fudge in *Pets* (2008), defines the concept of the pet within a Western context, as she looks to domestication, ownership, consumption and domination as indicative of being a pet.¹⁸² Through these understandings we are to see the power discourses wrapped within the Pet as a signifier of human domination, through this thinking it brings to question the implications of non-humans who do not fit into these rigid restrictions, whereby they are a danger to humans' domestic sphere. This thinking brings into the forefront the importance of

¹⁸² Fudge, Erica. *Pet*. 2008. Pg. 2.

non-humans' utility whereby they must fulfil their role to have purpose within human life, in this case being defined within the degree non-humans are seen as a pet.

Within *Domestic* we are introduced to Lazar's family home as a key space by which to understand the connection between the value of non-human roles and the space they reside within. The camera within this scene is placed within a medium wide shot of the apartment, central to the scene is the dining room table, to highlight the communal family space. The apartment is clean but also messy, with lots of objects such as, coats, plates, cutlery, candles, tissues and pens, to name a few, on display.¹⁸³ But despite the busy setting, it highlights that this space is a homely, lived-in environment, thereby hinting to organised chaos. The location is used to create a foundation of domestic normality which is controlled and overseen by the masculine family structure. I propose that the domestic equilibrium is represented within fragile terms, as the mere presence of a Chicken within this controlled space creates a catalyst whereby all normality, control and peace is destroyed, as, within the scene the characters try to re-instore peace through the act of hiding the Chicken, causing them to place the Chicken within the bathroom, a space where the audience is never permitted within.¹⁸⁴ When considering the Chicken within *Domestic* we can see its intrusion within the domestic space as a disturbance at first, as its presence was able to create domestic chaos, but this is soon resolved after the Chicken completes its bodily purpose within human normative definition to be food. As a result, I go further to explore the representation of the Cat within the scene as a true signifier of the underlying fear within the human-non-human relationship, whereby the

¹⁸³ Sitaru, Adrian. *Domestic*. 2012. 00:04:46.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. 00:05:42.

pet does not fulfil their function within human life, instead becoming a danger to the human. Thereby I aim to build on Fudge's foundational understanding of the pet to understand how the character of the Cat does not fulfil its function within human life, to be domesticated, owned and dominated, as the cat's intrusion within the domestic sphere acts as a catalyst for the tragic death of Lazar's daughter.

The Cat from the start is discussed in terms of disturbance, despite the cat being a companion of Lazar's daughter the parents still have a distain for it. The Cat, a gift from Toni, is not wanted within Lazar's domestic space, as the mum exclaims "why did you give him the cat back?" the cat then is discussed within negative terms, creating an image of a dirty, unruly animal which they cannot control in a cage, thereby intruding within their domestic bliss.¹⁸⁵ Although, while the parents rant and rave about the Cat, we see a juxtapositional image of the daughter cradling a cat lovingly.¹⁸⁶ Showing the parents concern for the Cat is riddled in self-serving purposes, using it as an excuse for their domestic chaos, which was not created by the Cat, but the cat is used as a scapegoat for it. Although, fast-forwarding to the middle of the narrative the viewer discovers the child's death, in a tragic car accident after chasing her cat.¹⁸⁷

When exploring the differences between the Cat and the Chicken we can see the differing status of these animals within society. The Chicken is a non-human that can be both pet and food, in this context the Chicken is food, thereby fulfilling its intended purpose within human society, to be killed and eaten. Whereas the Cat is placed within the rudimentary status of

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. 00:13:50.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. 00:14:18.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. 00:37:36.

companion/pet, as suggested within Donna Haraway's text, *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), that Companion Animal's function in human life to be cared and to care for,¹⁸⁸ in this context the cat failed its intended function, as its presence hindered human life. Although saying this, I will propose that even though a pet's rudimentary purpose is to be a companion, the Cat's intended purpose within the film *Domestic* is to highlight the domestic fragility within Eastern Europe. Mr and formally Mrs Lazar were quick to blame their domestic chaos on the Cat, but in a self-reflecting scene they conclude it was never the Cat's issue instead it was theirs.¹⁸⁹ Set within the once shared family apartment, which was colourful, busy and full of life, the viewer is now confronted with a cold and depressing environment, with cold tones, dim lighting and character positioning that highlights the separation of the family unit. In a moment of emotional breakdown, Mrs Lazar cries out, "did you ever love her?" and "you use to say you couldn't stand her (...) because she sheds hair and makes a mess on the balcony."¹⁹⁰ In response he states, "at first I couldn't stand her making a mess (...) after she ran away, I suffered dreadfully."¹⁹¹ The previous characterisation of the cat was one of annoyance and disruption, but now the cat is used for emotional support, in replace of the daughter. Thereby, the Cat's presence at first created a spiral of domestic chaos, but this was always present, the parents placed their feelings of frustration and lack of domestic control on the figure of the cat, later realising it was never the cat's fault instead it was theirs

¹⁸⁸ Haraway, Donna. *The Companion Species Manifesto*. 2003.

¹⁸⁹ Sitaru, Adrian. *Domestic*. 2012. 01:11:13.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 01:11:50.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. 01:12:02.

From the prior scene we can understand how the pet, the self and the home are intrinsically linked units which affect each other. I propose that the concept of the home is incredibly important to understanding the self, as Fudge highlights, “home is vital to many orthodox conceptions of human-selfhood.”¹⁹² When exploring Western expectations of the home, often the pet is interweaved within the fabric of modern domestic spheres. Yi-Fu Tuan in *Dominance and Affection (1984)*¹⁹³ points to the nineteenth century being an inherently important period for the pet to permeate the domestic sphere. Tuan proposes that the effects of industrialisation in Western society propelled pet development, as he states, “humans needed outlets for their gestures of affection as this was becoming difficult to find in modern society as it began to segment and isolate people into their private spheres,”¹⁹⁴ thereby indicating modern pets as a product of industrialisation. Tuan suggests that the Western movement from rural to industrial had created a stronger human-animal bond whereby the human actively chooses the pet to share their domestic space, thus interweaving the pet within human life. Although, when exploring Eastern European’s industrialisation and the effects onto animals, the opposite causation can be seen. Where mass industrialisation has led to mass animal abandonment, which in turn creates a distance between the human-animal relationship where humans can no longer control non-humans, due to mass breeding, despite humans causing the issue. Thereby, unlike within Western society, the isolated domestic spaces of the post-Communist apartment blocks have suppressed the human-non-human relationship where there is no room for the pet. Due governmental lack of support, individuals cannot control the ‘pet’

¹⁹² Fudge, Erica. *Pets*. 2008. Pg. 13.

¹⁹³ Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Dominance and Affection*. 1984.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.* Pg. 112.

outside of their homes, so instead the control is placed within the individual concerning who and what they allow into their homes. Therefore, when looking to Western societies the pet is a sign of control, affection and companionship, within this film all the animals portrayed are symbols of the opposite, as the representational non-humans are used to show how non-humans can disrupt the home within an Eastern European context, if they break the human-non-human divide.

When exploring the connection between Eastern European cinema and non-human realities, we are permitted to understand the capacity for non-humans to be of disturbance within private spaces through the thinkings of Edmund Leach in *Anthropological aspects of language* (1966).¹⁹⁵ Where it is suggested that pets should be coined “man-animals,” as pets are unlike any other as they break the boundaries of inside/outside.¹⁹⁶ This theory is evident when exploring the depiction within the *Domestic* as the animals within the narrative are clear symbols of permeation of the human boundaries, and thereby the destruction of normality. Erica Fudge adds to the notion that pets break the boundaries of human society by linking pets to the notion of ontological security, she states “one form of security that we give ourselves (...) is, after all, the firmness of the boundaries we erect.”¹⁹⁷ These boundaries Fudge suggest are as followed; Inside not outside, humans are not animals, self is not the other, these boundaries can be seen in all cultures and contexts. Although, when we explore the concept of ontological security in relation to pet ownership, Fudge suggests that the lines are blurred

¹⁹⁵ Leach, Edward. *Anthropological Aspects of Language*. 1966.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Fudge, Erica. *Pets*. 2008. Pg. 18.

between animal and human, the home itself symbolizes security, privacy and boundaries, but when animals permeate the home, thereby outside in the inside, they can be seen as a marker of insecurity.¹⁹⁸ Consequently, in *Domestic* Sitaru specifically chose a mundane Romanian apartment block, with an ordinary narrative and normal family unit as characters, to highlight the disruptive effect of the animals within the narrative. Thereby, in this scene the lack of control shown by Lazar on his family unit caused by the permeation of animals into his home highlights how fragile the domestic space is, the cat was a gift, the chicken the wife bought, yet despite Lazar not choosing these animals each effect his life negatively, thereby highlighting the loss of control and thus his masculine power.

Consequently, Sitaru implements the characters of the Chicken and the Cat to highlight the fragility of the domestic space; this space is often conceived within claustrophobic and controlled tactics to maintain normality and the status quo, although when these spaces are permeated without granted access the equilibrium is destroyed inciting chaos. As Mary Douglas states in her text *The Idea of a Home* (1991), the home is a space under control and pets can be interpreted as a “destructive rather than a productive presence.”¹⁹⁹ The non-human in an Eastern European context highlights the lack of rather than fulfilment and companionship like seen within Western societies, animals are often considered within terms of wildness, ungovernable and unruliness caused by post-Soviet history of mass internal

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. Pg. 19.

¹⁹⁹ Douglas, Mary. *The Idea of a Home: A Kind of Space*. 1991. Pg. 289.

migration to city landscapes. Thereby, if the animal is concerned with free reign, and the pet is a symbol of control and companionship, then what does it mean to be an unwanted pet?

The Canine and the In-between Space

I suggest that within *Domestic* the lack of seeing the canine is indicative of the broader limitations of animals in the domestic spheres of Romanian society, I intend to explore this through the analysis of the canine within *Domestic* to suggest that the canine's lack of space within the domestic is determined by the degree to which they are denoted as 'other,' thereby being suppressed and hidden in in-between spaces. As a result, I will be able to link non-human spaces with the contextual history of Eastern European past, where the animal has been replaced by a technological society, due to Eastern European's Communist and industrial history whereby animals were sidelined from humans' everyday life, through means of commercial farming, and mass abandonment.

The lack of looking at the canine

John Berger in *About Looking (1980)*, suggests that integral thought within animal studies, which is anthropomorphism, was once a way to connect human-animal lives, is now doubly uneasy by the slow disappearance of animals within modern life.²⁰⁰ As Berger states, "the internal combustion engine displaced draught animals in streets and factories, cities growing at an ever increasing, transformed the surrounding countryside into suburbs where field animals,

²⁰⁰ Berger, John. *About Looking*. 1980.

wild or domesticated became rare.”²⁰¹ Consequently, by implementing Berger’s academic rhetoric regarding the disappearance of working animals by means of technological replacement within the human world, we can understand the effects of mass industrialisation within Romania on the status on the animal, being the animals little or no space within the domestic sphere.

Garry Marvin builds on John Berger’s text to propose that animals have not disappeared from the modern world, but instead the zones in which they meet humans has diminished in immediacy.²⁰² Apart from travelling to see animals (zoos) and ownership of pets (homes), animals who do not fit into these zones within Western society are not paid much attention within academic studies compared to animals who fit into the category's wild or pet.²⁰³ Marvin proposes that we can see non-human possibilities only being made possible depending on the species we are visualising, stating that, “a peasant does not look at his pig in the same way that a zoo visitor looks at a lion, nor does a hunter look at a deer in the same way that a companion guardian looks at her dog or his cat.”²⁰⁴ These differing possibilities come with differing tasks, restrictions and boundaries, showing the explicit connection of the way we view and non-humans and the spaces they are permitted within. When exploring pets within the geographical placement of Romania, the zones in which humans encounter animals differs to the rudimentary human-animal zones within Western parameters. Although, as Marvin

²⁰¹ Ibid. Pg. 11.

²⁰² Marvin, Garry. *Seeing, Looking, Watching, Observing Nonhuman Animals*. 2005.

²⁰³ Ibid. Pg. 2.

²⁰⁴ Ibid. Pg. 4.

proposed, if we better understand the differing capacities of the look, when humans meet animals, then we better understand why these animals have this specific placement.

I propose that within *Domestic* the lack of seeing the non-human is more important than seeing them, as it highlights the characters egotistical concerns with themselves rather than the non-human's state. This is evident when exploring the representation of the Canine within a fast-paced passionate scene which concerns the disturbance of the Dog within their space, but despite the scene being focused on the canine the viewer does not visually see the canine until the end. The lack of seeing is more important in this scene, as the characters are more concerned with their own perspectives and encounters regarding the Dog, their language and demeanours create an horrific image of the canine, while also highlighting the fact that they only see the canine within their perceptions defined within the degree to which the Canine is an inconvenience to them, as a result disregarding and denying any agency, individuality and rights the canine might hold.

In *Domestic*, after the viewer understands the location, a Communist apartment bloc, the narrative moves from outside the apartment building, to inside, where the viewer is met with a group of people, mixed in gender and age.²⁰⁵ In this opening scene the camera is mobile, moving with the narrative discussion, but this fluid camera movement is soon stopped after we enter the domestic sphere of the individual apartments. The change from fluid to rigid camera motions is used to lead the viewer into a false sense of security whereby at first, they feel a part of the domestic sphere but soon they will be alienated like the non-human counterparts

²⁰⁵ Sitaru, Adrian. *Domestic*. 2012. 00:02:10.

within the narrative. Through Toni's focal perspective we enter the room, where everyone greets him until the moment is interrupted by the conversational topic, animals within their domestic space. The topic which surrounds the fast paced and passionate conversation, concerns a neglected dog who lives in the apartment hallways. The debate is brought to the narrative forefront as a worried tenant states, "Mr. Lazār, that is not enough. Were animal lovers but"²⁰⁶ this statement, which is stated in a serious tone, is used as a satirical assertion, as this group of people who claim to be morally just, when they are considering the dog's welfare, do not consider the dog's actual welfare. The group's unjust moral viewpoint is affirmed after they state their primary reasons for wanting to remove the dog from their space, these points as follows; the hair on the carpet, its barking, its breaking into their spaces, peeing on their doormat and sleeping on their doorstep (twice), all points which are human-centred and egocentric, whereby they denote the Canine's welfare to be lesser than the small inconveniences to their domestic equilibrium. Suddenly the camera angle changes as the viewer can see the Canine which is such an inconvenience and detriment to their lives. The camera changes to a low close-up, a small white and tan dog lies barren on the hard cold floor.²⁰⁷ This image takes the viewer a back, previously the dog was described in negative terms, but instead the viewer observes a lonesome and neglected animal. This image, of the Canine, is the first change of camera positioning, the viewer is positioned distantly from the Dog, there is no movement or change of angles, the only action we see is a person's legs walking up the stairs and disregarding the dog as they walk by, and as they do so the dog looks

²⁰⁶ Ibid. 00:02:10.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. 00:03:10.

longingly to them.²⁰⁸ This scene is satirical, used to poke fun at the superficial tenants but it also affirms the conditions which animals have to abide by, only being allowed into domestic spaces if authorised too and placed within claustrophobic control, or neglected if humans deem there is no space for them. Consequently, I propose that due to the Communist and Soviet past, we can see a cognitive organisation which places the importance of surveillance and control over freedom and privacy onto the non-human.

Furthermore, the Canine acts as a key signifier to explore within *Domestic* as, like the Cat, the canine does not fulfil its function to be a pet, instead the Canine is seen within undesirable and disruptive terms due to the canine's identification being in terms of Mutt and Stray. This thinking makes a clear connection between how we see non-humans and where they are permitted, as I suggest that when the non-human is seen within terms of otherness, made increasingly visible through the context of Eastern European Cinema, they are perpetually suppressed and hidden due to their aesthetic and lacking attributes.

Jacques Derrida in *The Animal that therefore I am* (2002), highlights the benevolent nature of understanding the animal, to question "how can an animal look you in the face?" This statement brings to question the cognitive capacity of animals as he continues to state, "you can speak to an animal, to the cat, said to be real inasmuch as it is an animal, but it does not reply."²⁰⁹ This lack of considered cognitive ability is determined by the non-humans lacking ability to complete a human task, to speak. Thereby highlight how non-humans are measured

²⁰⁸ Ibid. 00:03:20.

²⁰⁹ Derrida, Jacques. *The Animal That Therefore I am*. 2002.

by their capacity to be human. I suggest the animality of the non-human situates non-humans in terms of the other. furthermore, I propose there is no other significant non-human to explore than the representational canine, as the symbolic canine acts as a microcosm to which to build onto human-non-human hierarchal relationship. Through the binary understandings of canines as either, breed dog, owned and controlled and Stray/Mutt dog, free and unruly.

Like children, animals possess inherent innocence, which is both a positive and negative attribute, as the animal's innocent nature can fuel the human's need to protect, feed and love, but it also leaves the non-human unprotected within ideology, thereby permitting humans to place restrictions and regulations onto them, where they are measured by their value to fit within human categories. Philosopher Steve F. Sapontzi's essay *The Moral Significance of the 'Innocence' of Animals (1987)* builds upon the concept of innocence to propose that since animals are not criminals, we are not justified in inflicting suffering and death on them.²¹⁰

Sapontzi adds that when considering animal exploitation, no justification is placed within the parameters of criminality and punishment, in a matter-of-fact statement he professes that no one looks to chickens and states "those chickens are vicious little beasts and de-beaking is just what they deserve."²¹¹ Instead, unlike humans for who punishment is legally permitted by the persistence of criminal acts, animals' innocence is the reasoning for their mistreatment, due to their inability to recognize and respond. As Sapontzis states, animals are "damned if they are, and damned if they're not."²¹²

²¹⁰ Sapontzis, F. Steven. *Morals, Reason and Animals*. 1987. Pg. 13.

²¹¹ Ibid. Pg. 13.

²¹² Ibid. Pg. 13.

Furthermore, when we consider the treatment of animals within Kantian terms, it can be seen that if animals were innocent agents, it would open them up to being considered as lacking in agency and therefore leading to more exploitive mistreatment, thereby highlighting the complex and circular nature of animals, where their innocence both endangers or saves them from humans who love, consume and abandon them. Adding to this, both the endangerment and saving of animals through their innocent nature can parallelly be working at the same time, an animal can be both, a pet, placed within a home, cared for and fed while also at the whim of consumerist tactic such as, breeding for 'desirable' aesthetics disregarding of health conditions and the purchasing without sensible consideration of individual characteristics leading to negative implications of mass abandonment.

The lack of animal's comprehension universally transfers from species to species by means of understanding how ultimately animals are placed lower than human counterparts. It could be conceived that there are three distinct groups of animals, outside animals; these animals' homes are within nature, either in the wild or the fields with the main purpose of continuing the ecosystem. Then there are inside animals; these animals are hand-picked for the human purpose of companionship, sharing out gardens, homes, and lives. Lastly there is both inside and outside animals; these animals are more complex; they can either be creature in the home or animals bred for consumption. But what about the animal who meant for our homes but have been abandoned due to human egotism, they are neither inside nor outside animals, they are in-between animals, both wild and domesticated, owned, and free, neglected and looked after.

All animals mentioned prior within the narrative of *Domestic*, the Chicken, the Cat and the Dog, have one major factor in common that they are animals placed within the human domestic sphere without choice, despite being pets or not, each animal has been affected by the humans around them, without consideration of their ethical treatment, to fulfil human desire and egotistical needs of a normative domestic equilibrium. Exploring the representation of pets within *Domestic* informs us of the linked nature of human and animal life, known as the self within the non-human. As by means of cinematic and locative tactics, we can link the post-Communist history and settings that have created the cognitive organisation of repression and control, which in turn has created a domestic sphere that has no space for non-humans, unless they fulfil a human desired function/purpose.

The Dog Pound

Within the narrative non-human spaces are situated within in-between spaces, for example being a staircase or a balcony. Although I suggest there is significant rationale for exploring the implication of representing the pound within *Domestic*. Like the staircase, the dog pound is a space which is not explicably outside or inside either. It is an in-between location which despite it not being within the domestic space is regulated by human restrictions and requirements. The intended purpose of placing canines within this in-between space, it to separate human zones from non-human interference, while also ensuring humans total domination and control of non-human counterparts. Within *Domestic* we can understand the representational canine as a symbol of the 'other' through the lack of 'seeing' its physical

form. Instead, the viewer builds their perception of the pound dog through the explicit implementation of sound, being the canine's bark.

Presented through a long medium shot, where the viewer is placed in the back seat of a vehicle behind Mihae and Toni, who has the canine on his lap.²¹³ We watch as we journey over one bumpy dilapidated road to reach to the canine's doom, the pound. Visually all the audience sees are the back of the character's head and a small part of the road. By stripping back the visual extravagance, it forces us to listen to the surroundings. The most significant sound within this scene is the loudening sound of canine's barks. At first, we hear no canines, all we hear are the humans talking, but as we get closer to the pound, we hear the cries of the canines grow and grow until all we can focus on is their barks, screams and calls. In a foundational essence this is a journey from one place to another, but symbolically it is a foreboding journey whereby the canine is going to meet its sad fate. We never see truly see the pound or meet the canines there, instead we see a short snippet of a long pound walkway, where there is kennel after kennels of metal fences which separate these canines from freedom.²¹⁴ Like the canine, we are utterly at the whim to the humans in the scene, unable to look away from the horrifying scene and unable to escape the harrowing barks, although unlike the Mutt being abandoned, we can move on through the narrative continuation. It is important to note, these canines are not just any canines, they are situated within terms of Mutt and Stray dogs. This makes the representation of this location significant, as it embodies the in-between spaces in which these canines are placed, not wanted within human life, but not free enough to escape human

²¹³ Sitaru, Adrian. *Domestic*. 2012. 00:16:30.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.* 00:19:03.

restrictions. As I suggest this treatment is an implication of the human-non-human hierarchal relationship, whereby humans create canine possibilities, and these possibilities are valued by their degree to better human life.

Artist and Director Christian Boltanski's film, *Entendres Les Chiens* (2003),²¹⁵ is an important example of cinematic representation visually denoting canines. Boltanski's film is a poetic-conceptual project which he displayed for the 50th Venice Biennale, where he emitted a recording of the sounds of stray dogs- who were hidden on an island of Lazzaretto Vecchio, away from the sight of tourists. These canines were hidden as their literal self was a reminder of the governmental lack of control of canines due to the lack of helpful legislation, instead their importance was placed on hiding the canines. The Curator Hans Ulrich Obrist comments on Boltanski's filmic creation, stating that the sound of the canines' hints at the precautionary measures due to the "murmur of their cries."²¹⁶ This governmental thinking, hiding over changing, is evident when we explore Eastern European's treatment of canines, whereby the government would rather hide canines, in dog pounds, than getting to the root of the issue, them. Building onto the physical lack of canine consideration within *Domestic*, I suggest that the language used is implemented to create a monstrous imaginary image of the Mut/Stray dog, to build onto the negative assumptions of the 'other.'

As Mihae and Toni drive to the pound we listen as they discuss the canine on their lap. They discuss this canine within dangerous terms, stating that, "hold him tight, he's giving me a

²¹⁵ Boltanski, Christian. *Entendre Les Chiens*, 2003.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

nasty look,”²¹⁷ and “if he escaped, he’ll come for me!”²¹⁸ This comment is both comical and saddening, as while this is being stated, this small canine amicably sits on the laps of the gentlemen in a passive way, while being discussed in hideous terms. Moving on from this we watch as a Stray dog runs up to the car, the men scream profanities at it stating, “mad dog,” and “I’ll skin him alive and eat him.”²¹⁹ Ironically, these men are aliens to this location, as it is situated as a canine space but still, they act shocked when seeing a canine counterpart and discuss it within negative terms. From these rhetorical expressions it builds an image within the audience’s comprehension of Mutts and Strays having dangerous attributes which are a hindrance to human life, even without any evidence of this. This highlights the readiness within representation of the binary assumptions regarding canines, whereby owned canines are seen within cute and desirable terms, and Mutt/Stray dogs are seen as unruly, unwanted, and undesirable.

Darcy Morey in *The Evolution of the Domestic Dog (1994)* proposes that domestication is a human design.²²⁰ Morey suggests that there is a distinction within the evolution of canines which is artificial and natural selection. When considering the differing parameters within these two functions, the artificial selection suggests the control of human society, whereas natural selection is the authentic occurrence without humans. Consequently, when we consider the evolution of the canine the human’s coercive ability to breed to create desired aesthetic characteristics of the canine, is an important example of how humans use animals for human’s

²¹⁷ Sitaru, Adrian. *Domestic*. 2012. 00:16:41.

²¹⁸ Ibid. 00:16:45.

²¹⁹ Ibid. 00:18:18.

²²⁰ Morey, Darcy. *The Evolution of the Domestic Dog*. 1994.

consumer society. Although, Geneticist Dimitry K. Belyaev, builds on the artificial nature of breeding canines in the text *Domestication of Animals* (1969) to suggest that the key factors of breeding canines are not just aesthetics attributes, instead the importance is on characteristics of domesticity and tamability, to minimize the risk of aggressive behaviour being passed down in the canines' cognitive state.²²¹ Consequently, when we explore the evolution of the canine, who we are met with today, despite the uses of the canine, the importance has always been placed on breeding to ensure ultimate control by the hands of human's, thereby Mutts, Strays and Wild dogs, can see seen as a risk to the artificial breeding of canines due to the lack of human control of the Mutt who inhabits the borders between domesticity and wildness.

Ken McCort in *Animal Behaviour* (2013) highlights the classification of dog breeds, as non-biological, instead suggesting that “hobbyists are responsible for defining canine characteristics into groupings collectively referred to as breed.”²²² Fiala builds on this notion in the text *The Canine Version of a Socially Constructed Race* (2013) to propose that people understand the visual differences in breeds but do not understand that breeds are based on human assumptions rather than scientific classifications.²²³ Fiala goes further to state, “biologically speaking, the Doberman, Pinscher and the Pug are all the same (...) we can organize, step in and breed for collectively desired characteristics and behaviours.”²²⁴ Thereby, if we understand breeds as a human construct without scientific difference, where there is nothing intrinsically better or worse about the differing breeds, then when exploring

²²¹ Belyaev, K. Dmitry. *Domestication of Animals*. 1969.

²²² McCort, Ken. *Animal Behaviour Consultant Trainer*. 2013.

²²³ Fiala, Irene. *Dog Breeds: The Canine Version of a Socially Constructed Race*. 2013. Pg. 139.

²²⁴ Ibid. Pg. 139.

discriminatory and prejudice treatments onto canines, who do not fit into human breed classification this reflects human society more than the canine's individual familiarity. Consequently, through the focus on canines within the film *Domestic*, we can understand the connection between the lacking and othering of canines as a key tool to which to suppress and hide canines within in-between zones. Thereby acting as a foundation by which to look to the implications of canine's representation within Eastern European film, as a space to which to make canine disparities more visible.

Conclusion

Domestic acts as a significant film to explore, as it allows us to better understand the non-human within a granular level. By doing so it enables us to place non-humans within categories, which are determined by humans, being either domesticated or wild. By looking to categories of Pet, Companion and Domesticated canine better allows the comprehension of human hierarchal tactics which perpetuates non-human domination, being consumerism and consumption, which constitute the non-humans value. I propose that these non-human possibilities are perpetuated through the space they are allowed to permit, as I suggest space is not just a location instead it culturally charged to create order and hierarchies when we consider human-non-human meeting points. I state that these spaces are significant to explore within an Eastern European context, due to the post-Soviet past which has created the cognitive organisation of East vs West, borne from the need to move away from Communist assumptions. Thereby forcing the non-human to be hidden within human spaces, unless

permitted, to re-position the human at the centre of non-human possibilities. These concepts position the non-human within binary terms whereby allowing us to consider the effects on non-humans that do not fit into these human restrictions and categories. As I suggest canines are significant non-humans to focus on, as the representational canine acts a microcosm of non-human binary positions, being either a breed owned dog or wild Mutt/Stray dog. I aim to build upon this idea in Chapter 3, moving away for the focus of the domestic space, to consider the outside space within canine representation, especially the Mutt and Stray, to highlight the importance of exploring the canine within Eastern European film.

Chapter Three: Watching the Dog

Revenge of the Mutts and Strays

“Dogs are the only animals that are sure to know their masters; and if they suddenly meet him as a stranger, they will instantly recognize him. They are the only animals that will answer to their names and recognize their voices of the family. They recollect a road along which they have passed, however long it may be. Next to man, there is no living creature whose memory is so retentive.”

(Pliny the Elder. *The Natural History of Pliny*. Translated by John Bostock and H. T. Riley. Vol III. London. Book XI. 2019.)

Introduction

In Chapter Three I aim to highlight the distinct rationale for exploring Eastern European to comprehend how and why Mutts and Strays are readily used as signifiers for the fear of the other within and Eastern European context. I intend to achieve this through the exploration of the film *White God (2014)*, Directed by Kornel Mundruczo,²²⁵ within the theoretical model of Garry Marvin’s concept of non-human spectatorship, being to ‘Watch’ the representational Mutts and Strays to acknowledge the points of restriction and limitations as a place of impact that overtime has effects on canine counterparts.²²⁶ I intend to divide this chapter into two sections, the first being to ‘watch’ the canine by means of spatial separation to understand

²²⁵ Mundruczo, Kornel. *White God*. 2014.

²²⁶ Marvin, Garry. *Seeing, Looking, Watching, Observing Nonhuman Animals*. 2005.

‘where,’ as a result I look to the connections between Pet, Mutts and Stray representation and the differing uses of space. The second section aims to situate the canines within anthropomorphic terms of human law, being revenge and justice. I propose that at a foundational level revenge insights feeling of deviance, primitive and violence, whereas, retributive justice is lawful, Godly and restorative, in order to highlight the distinct rationale of exploring Mutts and Strays within Eastern European film, as a means to tease out the geographical contextualisation as a main implication onto canines in representation and actuality. I aim to propose the following questions, what are the effects of placing the film, *White God*, within the location of Eastern European parameters? And What are the effects of placing anthropomorphic characteristics, such as revenge, onto Mutts and Strays?

Viewing Stray and Mutts

Throughout this thesis there is a theoretical continuation concerning the connection between representation (the camera) and comprehension (the viewer). This important connection is not just rudimentary as differing ways of viewership create different outcomes concerning judgment, pre-conceptions and beliefs of the subject matter being represented. Therefore, I suggest that the symbolic is predisposed within human ideology, by the means of cinematic curation. Through this thinking, I intend to implement Garry Marvin’s teachings from his text, *Seeing, Looking, Watching, Observing Non-human Animals (2005)*,²²⁷ throughout this thesis in order to better understand different ways of viewing, in order to better

²²⁷ Ibid.

conceive hierarchal discourses within canine representation by means of visual culture. Within Chapter Three, I aim to move away from foundational comprehension of human-canine meeting points by implementing the expression of ‘watching’ to suggest that, when viewing canines the audience must not just acknowledge the canine within a granular level instead, we need to acknowledge the points of restriction and limitations as a place of impact that has effects on canine counterparts. I will suggest that watching representational Mutts and Strays will inform us about human ideological limitations placed upon the ‘other’ within Eastern European representation and actuality, and the negative impact upon the Eastern European canines. In this example, I intend to place Mutts and Strays within *White God* as signifiers of the ‘other’ through the contextualisation of Eastern European post-Soviet pasts.

As stated previously, when exploring the effects of post-Soviet control onto Eastern European states the canine’s physical and symbolic state was affected, from beings that are wanted (owned) to unwanted (abandoned), due to industrial migration to city spaces causing a spike in Stray/Mutt dogs. This thinking informs us on the overall reasoning for exploring canines within Eastern European visual culture and the contextual history acts as a concentrated space whereby canine disparities are heightened and easily visible. Consequently, I suggest that due to the canine being a signifier of human ideology, the Mutt and the Stray within Eastern European popular culture are readily concerned with undesirable characteristics, being wild, dirty and dangerous, thereby being perpetual reminders of post-Soviet pasts whereby the defined sense of national identity was lost, and personal control was fragile.

I intend to build on Charles Taylor's comprehension of the "Social Imaginary," within the text *Modern Social Imaginaries* (2003),²²⁸ to propose that within *White God* the canines are represented within terms of Eastern European Social Imaginary. The Social Imaginary is a term to explain the ways in which people imagine their own existence, being how they fit in with others, their interactions with their fellows, the expectations they follow and the "deeper normative notions and images that underlines these expectations," suggesting that the social imaginary isn't understood within theoretical terms, instead it is seen within the image of the self.²²⁹ If we comprehend the representational canine as a product of human ideological, cultural and sociological thinkings, then we can understand the intertwined nature of canine representation and the self, as a result the non-human is confined by human ideals and expectations to inform the human on how the non-humans fit into society, often seen within anthropomorphic representation.

I intend to make a clear connection between the degree of either positive or negative anthropomorphic representations onto the canines within *White God* and their placements within society being either, Breed, Mutts, or Stray. This will be achieved through building upon Nicole. R. Pallotta's rhetoric in the text *Dogs in film* (2024), where she highlights anthropomorphic canine representation as a product of hostile speciesism which is a belief that arose from harmful canine policies whereby all dogs are considered "aggressive stupid or destructive."²³⁰ Thereby positioning the foundational understanding of anthropomorphic canine representation as a negative tool. As a result, I will aim to build on the comprehension

²²⁸ Taylor, Charles. *Modern Social Imaginaries*. 2003.

²²⁹ Ibid. Pg. 23.

²³⁰ Pallotta, Nicole. R. *Dogs in film*. 2024.

of anthropomorphism as an oppressive tool to suggest that negative human attributes are readily placed onto Mutts and Strays compared to Breed/Pet dogs, in order to highlight the degree of canine disparity within Eastern European spaces in film and actuality.

Canine Representation in *White God*

White God (2014), directed by Kornel is a film that's narrative and cinematic curation is both shocking and compelling. Within this narrative we follow two main characters the first being Lilly, a thirteen-year-old girl who recently had been forced to move in with her estranged father, and her beloved Mix-breed dog named Hagen who is ultimately perpetually abandoned and mistreated, due to an allegorical law that implored people to pay tax on mix-breed dogs. The film *White God* is a tale about the favouring of pedigree dogs above the concern for Mutt and Stray dogs. Although, this narrative story is not just a bleak tale about animal abandonment, instead the canines within the narrative aren't beaten down into submission and instead strike back in an explosive manner, hunting and killing each human that has wronged them. Consequently, creating a dualistic film whereby the audience is made to feel both sad, due to their abandonment, and scared, due to their monstrous anthropomorphic characterisation of the canines within the narrative.

When looking to Hungarian canine history, we can better comprehend the representational curation of canines within *White God*. The canine treatment seen within Hungary is no different from other Eastern European states with there being a large disparity with the treatment of pedigree dogs compared to mix-breed dogs. Hungary is seen to be a country like others that have a strong love for Pets, with estimated around 50% of households to have at

least one Pet.²³¹ The most common of these Pets are dogs, as estimated by the University of Veterinary Medicine Budapest that three out of four households have a dog within their domestic sphere,²³² with a jump from 36% of households having a dog in 2018 to 56% in 2023.²³³ Despite many households having a canine as a Pet, like many other Eastern European states, there is still a considerable number of Strays within Hungary, with an estimation of around 500,000 Strays living on the streets around 2000 dying every month.²³⁴ Although it is still evident that Hungary, like many other states, leans on quick and cost-effective solutions for the canine abandonment issues, as importance is placed on hiding these Strays away in pound which are overcrowded, leading to deaths caused by mistreatment and euthanasia. The non-profit organisation Hungary Hearts Dog Rescue (2012) estimated that around 12,000 dogs are living in non-governmental shelters, and 20,000 living under municipality pounds, with around 35,000 of those canines being euthanised in inhumane ways.²³⁵ Consequently, highlighting that there are many issues concerning canine treatment within Hungary, but these issues emulate those found within other Eastern European states mentioned, like Romania. This showing reasoning for placing these geographical places within similar categorisations within representation and actuality. Thereby, I suggest that when exploring popular rhetoric within media regarding Eastern European states, like Hungary and Romania, conversations are readily concerned with the representation of negative treatments of canines disregarding of the

²³¹ N/A. *Hungary Animal Welfare and Cultural Issues*. ExpatFocus.

²³² N/A. *Animal Protection Legal, Analytical and Methodological*. Centre of the University of Veterinary Medicine Budapest.

²³³ N/A. *Cat Covid Dog Pandemic Pet Survey*. Hungary Today. 2023.

²³⁴ N/A. *Situation in Hungary*. Help Hungarian Dogs. N/A.

²³⁵ Hungary Hearts Dog Rescue. 2012.

positive attributes of canine treatments within these locations. Consequently, I propose that exploring *White God* will enable us to better understand the connection between the representation of canines in Eastern European visual culture as a refraction of Eastern European human-canine realities.

It is evident from the film distribution of *White God* that the film is made to illicit self-reflective tactics, whereby emotional scenes make us question the human-canine meeting-points within human life. When looking to the film poster we can see this product as a hint to the emotionally charged nature of the human-canine meeting-points within *White God*, through the visual disparity of one small girl compared to a hoard of canines.



Figure 2. Poster. (Mundruczó, Kornél. *White God*. 2014)

At the forefront of the ariel picture, we see a distant image of a flood of canines, all different sizes, colours and shapes, all sitting bowed towards the only human counterpart, this human counterpart, is small in stature and presence, easily missed by the human eye by the sheer amount of canines, but yet the canines are controlled by the presence of the human. This moment is visually striking as it brings up many questions how it became to be, as the poster in essence is mysterious, giving away no true individual character information and context, although we are able to understand the purpose of the image through the tagline, “The Unwanted Will Have Their Day.” The choice of foreboding words is significant as before seeing any narrative continuation, the image of these canines within the audience's comprehension, are placed within unwanted, undesirable, and dangerous terms. Through this understanding there is a binary feeling created, whereby we feel sorry for these canines who are ‘unwanted,’ while feeling fearful of the canines, which we know will strike back and ‘have their day.’

Not only does the film poster act as a key site of inquiry, Lynn Turner in the text, *Poetics of Deconstruction* (2020), highlights the importance of exploring the filmic title ‘*White God*,’ as a tool to bring human ideological issues, as seen within Eastern European states, to the forefront, being racism, while perpetuating the oppressive tactics onto canines which fuels them as a symbol of human needs.²³⁶ As Turner suggests, the title *White God* was born from the inspiration of the film *White Dog* (1982) directed by Samuel Fuller,²³⁷ which is a narrative

²³⁶ Turner, Lynn. *Poetics of Deconstruction*. 2020.

²³⁷ Fuller, Samuel. *White Dog*. 1982.

which follows a black dog trainer who attempts to train racist fuelled violence out of a canine counterpart, who has a compulsion to hurt and kill black people. Turner suggests that this narrative intertwines the question of racism and animals as an intimate linked problem,²³⁸ as in both films we see clear connections, one being the effect of negative training/treatment onto canine counterparts, the other being the symbolic canine's perpetual representation of human issues, like racism. Although, in *White Dog* we see a human counterpart attempt to right the humans' wrongs ultimately leading to the canine's death, whereas within *White God* we are met with the implications of bad training which is a canine army who hunt those who have wronged them leading to their downfall later in the narrative. I suggest that despite different outcomes of this narrative both place the human at the centre of non-human possibilities. As Turner suggests the title *White God* highlights "the spectral contamination of Dog and God, Beast and Sovereign, baring this fight from really changing the order of things,"²³⁹ thereby we can see a shift from the canine in *White Dog*, to the human in *White God*. As a result, we can see the title *White God* as indicative of the degree to which the canines within the narrative are placed within human ideological terms.

Peter Bradshaw in his film review titled, *White God Review (2015)*, incapsulates the ideological parameters of the film where the canine's body is utilized to inform the viewer on the differing structures of human's hierarchal oppressive systems, by defining *White God* as a film that represents "unclassified satire of power relations, a subversive reverie about the

²³⁸ Turner, Lynn. *Poetics of Deconstruction*. 2020. Pg. 143.

²³⁹ Ibid. Pg. 144.

prosperous classes in any city and their fear of what lies beneath.”²⁴⁰ Consequently, by exploring *White God* through this rhetorical expression, we can see dual moralistic meanings throughout the narrative. The first being the negative implications of oppressive hierarchal structures within Eastern European states, which create a cognitive organisation of them and us, the norm or the other. Whereas the latter being the adverse consequences of placing human ideology onto canines, whereby humans place limitations and restrictions onto the canine, which have harmful effects on those who do not fit into desirable terms.

Adding to this, when looking to film critic Matt Zoller Seitz’s film review titled, *White God (2015)*,²⁴¹ Seitz expands on the film’s self-reflective nature. As Seitz highlights Mundrucuszo’s cinematic process, which heightens the canine’s perspective, forces the audience to look at oneself, and thereby their own treatment onto canine counterparts, through the implementation of documentary like filming, whereby the camera is hand-held, placed at ground level within the dogs’ eyes.²⁴² Consequently, by placing the audiences at the dog’s level in-turn forces the viewer to question their own moralistic views, as they, like the narrative canines, are placed in emotionally charged situations at the hands of humans. Seitz highlights the self-reflective tactics throughout the film by highlighting the thematic structures of moral codes that are seen throughout *White God*. We know this as Seitz states, “the characters are clearly defined a moral or immoral based on how much empathy they show towards animals,” to either condemn or approve them depending on their degree to which they treat the canines

²⁴⁰ Bradshaw, Peter. *White God review*. The Guardian. 2015.

²⁴¹ Seitz, Matt Zoller. *White God*. Roger Ebert. 2015.

²⁴² Ibid.

in the narrative as individual rights or menaces to the natural order.²⁴³ I propose these thinking hints to Lacan's text *The Mirror stage and a Formative of the I Function* (1949), whereby the viewer either shares recognition with the object depending on the degree to which it fulfils the egotistical needs of the 'I.'²⁴⁴ Thereby within the context of *White God* the viewer either recognises or separates themselves from the characters to the extent by which they consider the characters as either immoral or moral, to fulfil the 'I's egotistical need to consider their own human-canine meeting points as justified. These thinkings highlight the importance of exploring *White God*, as it is a film that makes a clear connection between the historical context of Eastern European states whereby the fragile sense of self is transferred onto the symbolic canine, as a result the 'other' as seen within the Mutts and Stray are perpetually mistreated, hidden and suppressed, in order to re-position the East as a hegemonic society which has complete control on non-human and human life, moving away from chaos to harmony.

Canine Spaces in *White God*

Within this section I intend to 'watch' the differing canine spaces in *White God*, to situate the understanding that Pets are placed within domestic spaces to be sanctioned, legitimised, and controlled. Mutts are in-between canines which are either outside or inside depending on the degree to which their wonky aesthetics fit the humans needs. Lastly, the Stray is placed within outside spaces due to their identification as undesirable. Thereby, understanding the

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Lacan, Jacques. *The Mirror stage as Formative of the I Function*. 1949.

differences in canine's spaces, being outside, inside, and in-between, allows the comprehension of the ways in which canines are represented, specifically concerning the language used that builds on the representation that Mutts and Strays are marginalised within otherness in an Eastern European filmic context.

Pets, Mutts, and Strays within White God

White God is a film that represents human-canine ideological permeameters and power hierarchies, being canine ownership, canine consumerism and canine preconceptions, Mundruczo takes these human-canine limitations and heightens them by placing these relationships within an allegorical context being a fictional law that implores the taxation of mix-breed dogs over pedigree canines causing mass abandonment and mistreatment. I suggest that the fictional nature of this law should not be comprehended with any less importance than real-life canine treatments and laws, as the film acts as a signpost for Hungary's social imaginary, whereby the sociological and political tension of Eastern Europe is emulated through the exploration of human-canine structures, meeting-points and events which are based on real-life human-canine relationships, thereby acting as a tale, warning humanity of the implications of placing limitations and restrictions on the other, in this case being Mutts and Strays. As a result, I propose that Mutts and Strays are readily squeezed out of sight and spaces, perpetually placed behind bars and destroyed to relieve the burden of them on the governmental structures that are meant to help them, thereby, they have no space, no title, no purpose, they are in-between animals.

When exploring *White God*, we can see the culturally charged nature of spaces which allow for canine permeation depending on the categorisation of canines. I suggest despite Hagen being considered as a Pet at the start of the narrative, his identification as a Mutt, who is illegitimate, accidental, and un-sanctioned, propels him to be turned away, suppressed, and hidden, turned into a Stray. I propose these etymological changes, from Pet, to Mutt, to Stray, are represented through the force of movement in canine placement within the narrative, whereby Hagen goes on a journey with no choice of his own. We are represented with many spaces throughout the narrative, but I intend to zoom in on three spaces, being the domestic sphere of Lily's father's flat, the outside space of the streets and the governmental structure of a pound, as these spaces inhabit within differing human zones. Therefore, I propose that despite canines right to be an individual, a Pet within the home, free within the wild, or cared for by the organisations who claim to do so, Hagen is not wanted within any of these spaces, due his aesthetical identification as a Mutt, who is often hidden within the Eastern European social imaginary, due to its unsanctioned biological make-up.

The Flat

As seen within the film *Domestic (2012)* directed by Adrian Sitaru,²⁴⁵ the permeation of the animals within the domestic space is a signifier for breaking the domestic equilibrium, causing them to be placed within in-between spaces and hidden away in order to try reaffirming control and this is no different than within the film *White God*. Although, this becomes more visible when we look to representational Mutts and Strays in an Eastern European context due

²⁴⁵ Sitaru, Adrian. *Domestic*. 2012.

to their concern within negative stereotypes. We can see the destructive implications of the ‘other,’ by watching when Hagen first enters the domestic sphere.²⁴⁶ The camera is placed at shoulder height being handheld with a medium close-up, as Hagen, Lily and her father, open the door into the apartment building. The foyer of the building is dark, with tones of brown, black and grey covering the screen. Adding to the cold atmosphere is the concrete floor that spreads itself throughout the depressing building with black railings that wind themselves around the room. After the viewer takes in the bleak scenery the icy tone is heightened as the viewer is met with an even bleaker energy being the old woman neighbour.²⁴⁷ The time it takes for Hagen and his human counterparts to enter the room before the neighbour proclaims her disgust for the “Mutt” being within her space. His aesthetical attributes, which are not legitimate and human-controlled, are used as a reason for his banishment within the domestic equilibrium. This instantaneous negative proclamation takes two seconds to be stated, from the moment the door is opened, and Hagen enter the room, therefore, highlighting the severe degree to which Hagen, a Mutt, is not welcome within this domestic space.

Further permitting within the building, being the flat, it is emphasised the degree to which Hagen is not welcomed within this intimate space. As seen within the exploration of *Domestic* in Chapter 2, animals are perpetually placed in human controlled in-between spaces within the domestic sphere, being the balcony, the bathroom, and the foyer, and this can also be seen within the film *White God*. After reaching nighttime Lily’s father asks where Lily will sleep,

²⁴⁶ Mundroczo, Kornél. *White God*. 2014. 00:09:50.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. 00:09:52.

as she answers back “the same one as Hagen,”²⁴⁸ this proclamation is met within disgust as the dad sees himself as above a canine, unlike Lily who sees herself within equal terms with her canine counterpart. This explosive moment ends with Hagen being hidden away within the cold bathroom which is only lit up by a single ray of moonlight seeping through the window.²⁴⁹ It is important to understand the significance of the narrative effect of not allowing Hagen to permit within the bedroom, this moment places him no longer within the signifier as Pet instead he categorization as a Mutt is made to be more visible, whereby Hagen moves from the domestic realm to a fractured in-between state. Consequently, showing this moment as the catalyst which causes Hagen to run from space to space to survive due to his identification changing from, normative and controlled Pet, to dangerous and illegitimate Mutt. This moment is indicative of Clive Hazell’s conceptualisation of alterity, whereby otherness is used to enmesh, differentiate and control.²⁵⁰ Thereby, Hagen’s aesthetical characterisation within otherness propels the humans need to control him within the suppression of space.

The Street

The use of movement is an important narrative strategy used throughout *White God*, to highlight the connection between canine possibilities and canine space, sanctioned by humans. When considering the spatial implications of the canine's identification as a Mutt, we are informed by the implication of the aesthetical characterisation being within terms of

²⁴⁸ Ibid. 00:12:26.

²⁴⁹ Ibid. 00:14:40.

²⁵⁰ Hazell, Clive. *Alterity: The Experience of the Other*. 2009.

undesirability, allowing us to understand how the Strays within the narrative came to be. As when considering Marta Borgi's text *Baby Schema in Human and Animal Faces* (2014), we can further comprehend the connection between domestication and canine's aesthetical attributes through the degree to which canines have infantile aesthetics.²⁵¹ Therefore, the Mutts within the narrative who do not fit into these criteria's being either big, scruffy, dirty and self-assured are propelled into outside spaces through their lack of desirable characteristics.

When watching the representation of Strays within *White God* we can understand their placement within society as defined within outside parameters. In a heart wrenching scene Hagen is ripped from Lily's arms as the dad drags him by his scruff onto the cold and desolate streets.²⁵² There is an explicit narrative change from this moment, as whenever the audience views Hagen, the camera is placed within his focal point of Hagen, in order to force the viewer to visually watch Hagen as we see the harsh truth of the humans' effects onto canine counterparts who don't fit into rigid categories. As Garry Marvin highlights, it is highly important to gaze upon visual representation in differing ways, by watching we must acknowledge the object and its change over time,²⁵³ therefore by watching Hagen the viewer will be able to comprehend the effect of human-canine meeting points onto canines, as we complete a journey alongside Hagen of self-reflection. Consequently, by watching Hagen with a self-reflective gaze to understand humanities long term effect onto canines, highlights the impactful nature of inhabitants Hagen on the streets. It is incredibly important to comprehend

²⁵¹ Borgi, Marta. *Baby Schema in Human and Animal Faces*. 2014.

²⁵² Mundroczo, Kornél. *White God*. 2014. 00:24:17.

²⁵³ Marvin, Garry. *Seeing, Looking, Watching, Observing Nonhuman Animals*. 2005.

the importance of Mundrucuszo's implementation of handheld camera positions to force the viewer to truly place themselves within Hagen's emotional journey, as the viewer cannot escape the gaze of the canine, which therefore enables the viewer to see hidden worlds of the canine's life when they do not fit into society's standards. Mundrucuszo emphasises the Stray's status as an outside animal, through the restoration and break of domestic spaces. Hagen is introduced to an abnormal and hidden domestic sphere, by means of a small scruffy Jack Russell Terrier, [OBJ] which acts as their own microcosm of their past domestic lives. This hidden world is only a stone throw from human life, separated by a simple hole in a metal gate, and by entering this space, with Hagen, we are preming into a new world.²⁵⁴ This location is a visually dualistic space, in one way it is bleak and sorrowful, a location which is unwanted by humans, behind forgotten buildings, surrounded by rubble and rubbish, on the other hand this space feels like an abnormal happy home, all the canines are happily walking around, running in the body of water, sleeping on broken sofas, barking in rejoice to each other, happily inhabiting in this forgotten unwanted outside sphere.²⁵⁵ In this space Hagen can be stagnant and still, for the first time since the narrative starts, showing the importance of this location as it enables a momentary breath for Strays who are 'lucky' enough to inhabit it.²⁵⁶ Therefore, when the dog catchers arrive the juxtaposition from a still quiet night to a chaotic morning heightened, as dogs scatter and run from those who are trying to hunt them down.²⁵⁷ In a heart-breaking scene we follow as dogs scream and whimper as they are lanced onto a pole

²⁵⁴ Ibid. 00:32:35.

²⁵⁵ Ibid. 00:32:60.

²⁵⁶ Ibid. 00:33:19.

²⁵⁷ Ibid 00:33:43.

and shoved into a van.²⁵⁸ This scene is emotionally moving as we, like Hagen, feel one with the canines, due to camera placements focus on the canine's perspective. Consequently, when Hagen finally feels settled, we feel at peace with him, therefore when the tone is changed from quiet to chaotic the viewer is made to feel scared and anxious like the hunted dogs. In basic terms these canines were creating no trouble for humans within their own abnormal domestic sphere, they were living peacefully within their own microcosm, but their crime was their label as a Stray. Consequently, despite their hidden nature away from the human's gaze their label generates shame within the human counterparts due to their own mistreatment of canine counterparts, although instead of perpetuating positive actions to solve the problem humans have created, negative and quick tactics are implemented to hide the issue away, placing them behind bars. Thereby, this scene highlight's the lack of space Strays is permitted within the human world, making us question, if they are not allowed to be within the domestic sphere or the outside world, then where are they allowed to be?

The Pound

When exploring canine treatment in an Eastern European and worldwide context, there is a one clear connection for solving the Stray epidemic which is hiding these canines in governmental controlled spaces of pounds. These spaces in a foundational essence should be a space that Strays are permitted to be within, to be cared for and looked after, as if there no room for them anywhere else there must be room for Strays in a space made specifically for them. Although, this is not true within representation or actuality, with these spaces being seen

²⁵⁸ Ibid. 00:34:06.

as a burden on humans despite humans being the cause. This is evident when exploring *White God* after Hagen's long-suffering journey from one human-canine meeting point to the next, he finally is lead to the space of a pound.²⁵⁹ After entering the metal gates in a prison like van, Hagen is dragged into a line waiting for his fate, we see this moment from a far, within the bars of the shelter, as the viewer sees a glimpse of the sheer amount of canines differing in size and colour within this space.²⁶⁰ The camera moves from a low shot of the canine's perspective to an arial shot of the compound, this angle allows the audience to take in the sheer number of canines within the shot, barking, whining, and running in a chaotic and sorrowfully charged scene.²⁶¹ In a hopeful narrative Hagen would get to the front of the line and be fixed, loved and saved within a space that is made for him to thrive. Instead, Hagen is sent to his death, as despite his injuries and mental suffering being the cause of human's actions, he is persecuted for them and placed with a new label "a goner."²⁶² As Hagen is dragged through the pound the viewer is unable to escape the devastating surroundings as the camera angle changes to Hagen's focal perspective, the sounds are unforgiving with hundreds of dogs shouting and screaming, the environment is depressing with concrete and metal bars surrounding every part of the location, and the canine's fate is depleting with canines being pressed against the bars with no room to move or space to breath.

Throughout the film of *White God*, the audience has followed Hagen from one location to the next with no place having space for him. Within the Domestic sphere he was abandoned due to

²⁵⁹ Ibid. 01:18:10.

²⁶⁰ Ibid. 01:18:22.

²⁶¹ Ibid. 01:18:30.

²⁶² Ibid. 01:18:51.

his aesthetic label as a Mutt, within the outside space he was hunted down and hidden due to his label as a Stray who are understood within dirty and wild terms, and within the pound he was sent to his death, as his suffering caused by his labels caused too much trauma onto him thereby labelling his unfixable. All spaces, events and actions onto Hagen have a clear link, the effects of negative human-canine meeting points caused by Eastern European negative preconceptions onto undesirable canines which are concerned with the other. Therefore, when Hagen enters the last location of the pound, there is a cinematic realisation within his character, that there is no space for him and his fellow canine, therefore they must make space for themselves.

When Canines Strike Back: Anthropomorphising of Canines

To better understand the readiness to represent Mutts and Strays within undesirable terms within popular culture, we must understand their capacity to be at the whim of human perception, by the means of anthropomorphic representation. I suggest that Mundrucozo aims to situate canines within human law, whereby he questions the degree to which canines within the narrative are either, seeking revenge or justice. I propose that at a foundational level revenge incites feelings of deviance, primitivity, and violence, whereas, retributive justice is, lawful, godly, and restorative. I aim to not answer the long-held question whether non-humans should be considered moral agents within the intuition of law but implement the thinkings by which to situate Mutts and Strays within the binaries good/bad dichotomy. As I suggest that anthropomorphic feeling of revenge is used to insight fear of otherness within the audience,

whereas justice is used to re-position the human as the centre of non-human possibilities, through the disruption of violence.

Retributive Justice and Revenge

Within *White God* I suggest the canines represented, being Mutts and Strays, are presented as beings who are seeking revenge and not justice. This revenge seeking representation is used to place these canines as figure of wild and dangerous beings. In turn, I propose that justice is only seen within human counterparts, seen within the moment the canines are stopped by means of human intersection.

Margaret E. Oswald in the text *Social Psychology of Punishment of Crime* (2009) makes clear distinctions between the retributive justice and revenge.²⁶³ She suggests that revenge is evil, sinful, private, and primitive, whereas retribution is enlightened, impersonal, virtuous, and public.²⁶⁴ Oswald states that the retribution implies there is limits to the punishment, whereas with revenge there is no limit to what is inflicted.²⁶⁵ When looking to non-humans, despite their capacity to be victims, it is often conceived that they cannot be agents which seek or have justice. This is due to justice being a product of social, political, and economic relations, which are all human constraints. Thereby, suggesting the violent acts of the canines within the narrative, are not acts of justice, instead are revenge fuelled events, highlight the idea that these canines need to be tamed and dominated, to restore the domestic equilibrium.

²⁶³ Oswald, Margaret. E. *Social Psychology of Punishment of Crime*. 2009.

²⁶⁴ Ibid. Pg. 138.

²⁶⁵ Ibid. Pg. 138.

When considering the human institution of law, one of the key aspects disregarding canine as agent who can seek retributive justice, is the degree to which canines are seen as complex cognitive beings. As seen within Robert Garner's text, *A Theory of Justice for Animals* (2013), where he suggests that "animals are not capable of agreeing and upholding principles of justice."²⁶⁶ When considering canines, we can understand them as beings that are more complex than other non-humans, allowing them to be intertwined within human domestication and evolution. Although their capacity to be within human life is defined by human control, where their cognitive capacity is manipulated to better human needs. Therefore, acknowledging their advanced capacities in distinction to other non-humans, while re-placing them as non-capable beings who cannot warrant justice.

Sarah Byosiere in the text *Canine Cognition* (2022) highlights the importance of understanding perception as an individual's sensory experience of the world, as a process of "organizing and interpreting sensory stimuli."²⁶⁷ Byosiere suggest that the canine's perception is often associated within stimulus and outcome,²⁶⁸ whereby the canine learn by imitation of humans. This capacity to learn from humans provides an exclusive model for understanding domestication and the evolutionary process, due to their sensitivity to human-given social cues. Whereby, the canine's cognition is moulded by humans culturally charged parameters. By understanding the canine's cognitive capacity to be easily changed by human counterparts, acknowledges the canine's readiness to be within human life, but disregarding them as

²⁶⁶ Garner, Robert. *A Theory of Justice for Animals*. 2013. Pg. 5.

²⁶⁷ Byosiere, Sarah. *Canine Cognition*. 2022.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

individual agents due to the degree they are moulded by human imitation. Thereby, moving them further away from the idea, that they are beings who can enact justice, within the parameters of human law.

Turner proposes that canines are often considered within ‘can’t’ being they “can’t act out in concert, can’t act to plan - and most of all- cant recognize death and thus can't recognize a crime.”²⁶⁹ Although this film does the opposite, placing the canine within ‘can.’ This is only made possible due to the anthropomorphic representation of the canines within *White God* who surpass their singular definition, to be complex beings who have the capacity to perceive, remember, and act. It is evident that when exploring the dialogue used concerning Hagen throughout the film, he is continuously discussed in undesirable terms, the title ‘good boy’ was only used twice, whereas countless times Hagen is called, ‘Mutt,’ ‘It,’ “Fleabag,’ ‘Dirty Pig,’ ‘Beast,’ ‘Monster,’ ‘Mother Fucker’ and ‘That animal.’ If we comprehend canines as non-complex beings, these titles have minor impact, and the power of these undesirable terms are destroyed. Saying this, the canines within the narrative of *White God*, are represented within anthropomorphic terms, whereby they are beings who share the human capacity to listen and remember. Therefore, this highlights the implications of these negative words over a period, as the canines turn into the monster, they are readily described. As seen within the representational change, where the canines are once the hunted and now the hunter.

The enactment of revenge is highlighted through the visual implementation of hordes of dogs taking over the city, as one dog running through the city would lack in effect, whereas the

²⁶⁹ Turner, Lynn. *Poetics of Deconstruction*. 2020.

shared feeling of revenge that jumps to canine-to-canine emphasises the mutual feeling of exasperation that causes them to take back control. Through a medium static shot the viewer watches as canines of all differing varieties burst out of their confinement, some fighting to get to the front in sheer desperation.²⁷⁰ This moment is almost laughable, as the meagre gates that have been able to control them are broken in a second through shared strength of the canines, highlighting not only the charged tension that the canines have been suppressing, but also the fragility of human control if the wronged decide to strike back. Following this emotionally charged moment where the canines break free of their chains, we see Hagen take command of his own canine army as he guides them through the city.²⁷¹ One by one Hagen and his fellow canines hunt those who have wronged him, being the take-away owner who sold him into dog fighting,²⁷² the butcher who nearly killed him,²⁷³ the man who broke his spirit for dog fighting,²⁷⁴ and the old neighbour that forced him onto the streets,²⁷⁵ all that's left of these individuals is the stains of blood that seep onto the floor. These bloody and horrifying sequences are the culmination of shared tensions that have been building throughout the film narrative, being the continuous movement of Hagen from one place to the next, wronged by one person then another, being hidden and hidden again until he is forced to take back his own space.

²⁷⁰ Mundroczo, Kornél. *White God*. 2014. 01:25:15.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.* 01:27:42.

²⁷² *Ibid.* 01:34:28.

²⁷³ *Ibid.* 01:36:43.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 01:39:24.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 01:42:56.

I suggest that this representation has two different outcomes, on one hand the audience feels content in this outburst. As mentioned by Kai Erikson in the text *Wayward Puritans* (1996), that the act of defiance whereby a group strikes back at the normative structure forces people to take notice to the interest and values which have propelled the collective revenge.²⁷⁶ Thereby, through the implementation of imitate camera positing within the narrative, the audience is made to feel one with Hagen's journey, thereby feeling a sense of satisfaction and understanding with the violent outcome. On the other hand, by understanding this violent act as going against the status quo of the human world, whereby lawful and controlled justice is disrupted, we can see this outcome as a warning to humanity. Non-human and human distinctions are made by means of cognitive separation whereby the non-human's intelligence is lesser than the humans. Although, by placing the non-human with the same cognitive capacity to human counterparts, hints to humanity's long-standing fear of non-humans, which is the fear that if non-humans have bodily autonomy, they will use their strength and numbers to easily dominate and destroy humanity. Thereby, this fear rips the canine of their agency, whereby they are not considered within the same legal equality than human counterparts. Consequently, even if the viewer feels satisfaction by means of the revenge fuelled event this act of terror only re-fuels fears into the human regarding non-human otherness further pushing the need to dominate them.

²⁷⁶ Erikson, Kai. *Wayward Puritans*. 1996.

Human retribution

In contrary to revenge, when considering justice, I suggest that it is a human function that is used to re-position the human at the apex of the world, this is evident when looking to the change of movement within *White God*, from fast, unpredictable and violent, to staticity and stillness, in order to re-centre the human as in control of all canine realities. After charging throughout the city, being the hunter, Hagen and Lily meet face to face. This takes place during the night, the screen is only lit up by warm rays emitting through the streetlamps, the setting is desolate apart from Lily and the canine counterparts, there is no noise just tension that surpasses through the screen. The viewer is first met with close-up parallel shots of both Hagen and Lily's feet, Lily is backing away while Hagen is approaching, like a predator stalking its prey, then he stops.²⁷⁷ The camera zooms out as we see a wide shot of the canines, Hagen and Lily standing looking to each other. In an emotionally charged moment the viewer is not sure what will happen, close-up shots of Hagen show his monstrous face as he snarls at Lily, with all humanity being lost within his eyes.²⁷⁸ Although, this emotionally charged moment is broken by the use of sound, Lily brings out her trumpet and plays a song to the canines, we see close-up shots of each canine's faces as they stop and listen and in a shared moment of equality Hagen sits and howls back to her.²⁷⁹ This is followed by the most important visual image within the narrative, whereby Lily, Hagen and her father, bow to each other.²⁸⁰ I propose there are dual implications of this scene that run parallel to each other. In

²⁷⁷ Mundroczo, Kornél. *White God*. 2014. 01:50:18.

²⁷⁸ Ibid. 01:50:29.

²⁷⁹ Ibid. 01:52:10.

²⁸⁰ Ibid. 01:54:30.

one sense, this moment hints to the mutual terms of Lily and Hagen's relationship, where they have shared respect and love for each other. In another sense, we can see this moment as Lily's acknowledgment of their interests within their revenge fuelled outbreak, while knowing their doomed fate, to be perpetually oppressed by humans. Thereby suggesting that the justice within *White God* is only permitted within human counterparts, due to their status as moral agents, as the audience may feel fear within the canine's attempt to grant justice for their mistreatments, whereas satisfaction is felt when the human's stop this.

When looking back to Genesis of justice we can make a connection between God and retribution, whereby only Godly citizens are moral agents that deserve justice. This is evident when looking to the thinking of Margarete Oswald in the text *Social Psychology of Punishment of Crime* (2009), where she highlights the monarch and the church as considering "themselves God authorized representatives on earth."²⁸¹ We can connect this thinking within the film *White God*, through Lynn Turner's rhetoric where she proposes the film has an underlying theme of the forbidding figure of the father.²⁸² This thinking builds onto the good/bad dichotomy within *White God*, as to consider the canines as agents who don't warrant justice, moves them towards the identification of evil. Consequently, by proposing that canines within *White God* are not Godly subjects who are not able to seek justice strips them of their agency. As Derrida states in *The Death Penalty* (2014), by considering non-humans as lacking, this frees us from any moral obligations as "with any respect to any living being that is not

²⁸¹ Oswald, Magaret. E. *Social Psychology of Punishment of Crime*. 2009.

²⁸² Turner, Lynn. *Poetics of Deconstruction*. 2020.

(our) fellow or is not recognized as (our) fellow,” means it is “other than man.”²⁸³ Therefore, re-positioning the humans within narrative as Godly recipients, who can seek justice, is used to restore the domestic equilibrium by means of dominating the non-human threat.

Consequently, this thinking is significantly important to comprehend within Eastern European film, as the historical contextualization of Eastern Europe makes human-canine disparities more visible allowing us to understand the representational and actual implications of negative Mutt/Stray dichotomy.

Fear of Otherness: The Monstrous Mutt

Within this section I will propose that Mundrucozo implements a visual tone of gore, blood, and violence throughout to highlight the negative effects onto animals who are objects of human consumeristic gains. Although, I will suggest that this perpetual bodily slashing of canines, which creates a monstrous effect onto Mutts and Strays, to position them as the figure of otherness. Thereby, allowing me to make a clear connection between how canines are represented and the spaces they are permitted within. All in all, I intend to highlight the foundational fear that lies beneath the human-canine relationship in Eastern European film whereby, the human world and the natural world live parallel to each other in retrospective meeting points of controlled and controller, but if this relationship is disrupted and one space bleeds onto the other out of the human’s control, the human’s underlying fear is brought to the forefront, the monstrous Mutt.

²⁸³ Derrida, Jacques. *The Death Penalty*. 2003. Pg. 257.

The Monstrous Mutt

When considering the film *White God*, as a narrative that has the figure of the father (God) running implicitly throughout, we can consider those who disrupt the natural order, Mutts and Strays, as demonic, evil, and ungodly terms. It is apparent that Mundroczo chooses to perpetually represent blood and gore within the film. The visual representation of slicing, blood and violence is implemented through the narrative, within a slow release of gore, violence, and chaos, with the overall gain to slowly build tension, where the viewer is waiting for the explosion of pressure at any moment. Understanding the use of gore as a thematic string is important as I suggest that the representation of slicing and gutting combined with the monstrous outbreak highlights the humans fear of their monstrous products breaking out and striking back, much like Frankenstein and his monster.

Frankenstein (1992) written by Mary Shelley,²⁸⁴ is a famous literature text that acts as an allegorical tale for the implications of ‘playing God’ by disturbing the natural order. Despite this literature text being vastly different in narrative style to *White God*, we can see parallels and similarities in each texts’ ideology, I suggest this being the adverse effects of human control and domination onto others. Within both these texts we are represented with revenge seeking characters who are propelled by societal neglect and cruelty, both the Monster within

²⁸⁴ Shelley. M. *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*. 1992.

Frankenstein, and the Mutts within *White God*, are characters who are perpetually marginalised due to societal prejudice regarding their aesthetical attributes, which causes them to be cruelly treated whereby they then act out in revenge fuelled fury. Thereby, I suggest when considering the Mutts and Strays in *White God* as human made monsters, much like Frankenstein's Monster, who act out against their creators in violent revenge, has a dual effect onto the viewer. On one hand it allows the viewer to understand the consequences of oppressive tactics places onto Mutts and Strays, placing these characters into categories of victims. Whereas simultaneously enacting within the viewer is the subconscious need to dominate these beings to ensure that these monstrous outbreaks are not made possible.

The most visually upsetting scene within the narrative concerns the dog fighting ring, whereby Hagen is beaten down into submission until he is turned into the monster needed for the purpose of consumeristic gain. Thereby, the human within the scene is quite literally playing God, manipulating, changing, and messing with the natural order, to lead to a demonic creation. As, I build upon Turner's thinking where she highlights implementation of blood flowing as a thematic theme, which positions binary dichotomy of beast and sovereign.²⁸⁵ To propose that, there is a distinct correlation between blood and money flowing within the shared purpose to control the canine's bodily autonomy, by creating a beast to fill their pockets.

Throughout the film we see the recession of events that have compiled within Hagen, abandoned, sold, chased, and beaten, leading to him to be coerced into a monster. Placed

²⁸⁵ Turner, Lynn. *Poetics of Deconstruction*. 2020. Pg. 152.

within a metal bared cage, with a rusty chain around his neck, we focus on Hagen's slum and beaten down stature, his whines and cries pierce the ears of the viewer, as even if the viewer cannot watch this horrible scene Mundruczo makes sure the viewer cannot escape the sound.²⁸⁶ Moving from focusing on the bodily form of Hagen, we then watch from his focus perspective, through a low, close up shot, we peer through the encapsulating bars as we witness the figure towering over us, with a balaclava over his head, gloves on his hands and an apron, the figure walks back and forth, until finally pulling Hagen out, we do not see what happens next, but we can guess it is anything close to torture.²⁸⁷ By situating the human counterpart, as a nameless figure, places the figure within the symbolic acting as a malevolent God, who can mould the natural world for good or for bad. This is apparent as the human does not only break his emotional spirit, but we also watch as she injects him with steroids to make his stronger,²⁸⁸ makes him run until he passes out on a treadmill²⁸⁹ and lastly psychically saws his teeth to make them shaper.²⁹⁰ In a literal sense, as seen within Frankenstein, the human uses bodily slashing and ripping to create his final product, an ungodly creature, who turns into a human killing machine. Not only does this monstrous depiction build onto comprehension regarding the human's fear of non-humans fighting back. It also informs us on breed good/bad dichotomy, whereby due to the breeds dogs' comprehension within control and legitimacy we do not see a pedigree dog being readily placed in the space of a dog fighting ring. As a small, fluffy and barky Pomeranian does not incite fear, but a wonky and abnormal

²⁸⁶ Mundruczo, Kornél. *White God*. 2014. 00:51:26

²⁸⁷ Ibid. 00:51:33.

²⁸⁸ Ibid. 00:55:33.

²⁸⁹ Ibid. 00:53:11.

²⁹⁰ Ibid. 00:56:31.

Mutt does, and within this essence, the differentiating aesthetic criteria, whereby the canine is either a Mutt or a Breed dog, is the slight degree to which the canine is considered as the norm or the other, domesticated or wild, Pet or Stray.

The fighting ring acts as an unavoidable space to which the viewer cannot forget as the blood flows through the concrete flaw, the jaws of canines lock, the superficial calls of the human echoes, the huffing exhausted bodies drop and the silence holds us when we see the tragic canine death, within this setting we are unequivocally met with the raw reality of canine possibilities, as Turner suggests, “the makeshift ring concentrated an idea of the raw-of raw nature, raw wounds, raw blood.”²⁹¹ In this sense lies the tragic, raw truth, that if we truly watch canines, in their raw state, seeing their raw realities, we are met with tragedy, that the canine will always be oppressed within the human world. When looking to the genesis of monstrous depictions in film, we can understand the implications of placing Mutts and Strays as signifiers of otherness within Eastern European film, who have been historically suppressed in order to highlight normative structure, ideologies and cultures to move away from post-Soviet pasts. Robin Wood in the text *An Introduction to American Horror Films* (1979), States that “normality is threatened by the monster.”²⁹² Thereby conceiving the monster as a threat and the Mutt and Stray as a monster within Eastern European film allows us to understand the East’s need to suppress, hide and dominate the ‘other’ in order to restore order as seen within homogenous societies whereby non-humans are under complete control within outside spaces.

²⁹¹ Turner, Lynn. *Poetics of Deconstruction*. 2020. Pg. 152.

²⁹² Wood, Robin. *An Introduction to American Horror Films*. 1979. Pg. 14.

When viewing the monstrous outbreak whereby hordes of Mutts and Strays attack and hunt those who have wronged them, has both positive and negative effects onto the actual and representational canine. On one hand this monstrous representation perpetuates the fear of the other, where Mutts and Strays have an innate wild need to destroy humans and their controlled equilibrium. On the other hand, this film hints to the need to change negative tactics onto canines, to fix human ideologies and legislation that mistreats animals who do not fit into desirable terms. Although, this outcome is completely dependent on the perspective and ideological parameters of the viewer consuming this text, as once a film goes into the representational realm there is little anyone can do to control it again. Not only does *White God* make us question the extent to which revenge seeking representation has an overall negative or positive impact on real life canines, specifically Mutts and Strays. We also question the impact of placing this negative representation of the mistreatment of Mutts and Strays in an Eastern European location rather than a Western location. As mentioned prior there is a clear link between Eastern European post-Soviet past and the rise in canine abandonment, creating a negative effect with Eastern European states of seeing Mutts and Strays as undesirable, hinting to harsh uncontrolled pasts. Saying this, when looking to the wider context of canine realities within the global sphere were able to see the hierarchal positioning of humans above canines, where canines are bought, owned, abandoned, cared for and mistreated, although the contextualisation of Eastern European pasts has created a concentrated form of human-canine relationships, whereby the degree in which a canine is a pet, or a stray is more visible. Thereby, creating a circular effect where canines in Eastern

European cinema are often concerned within the Mutt and Stray dichotomy, as a result when we consider Mutts and Strays, we often think of them within Eastern European contexts.

Toni Morris in *The Nobel Lecture in Literature* (1993), highlights the effect of representation onto actuality stating that, “oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge.”²⁹³ This rhetoric expression is so important, as despite language not physically enacting pain and suffering due to its abstract nature, its effect causing change in perception thereby having a knock-on effect on reality. Consequently, considering this expression with the exploration of the negative representation of Mutts and Strays, we can see the violent nature of placing these characters and locations in undesirable terms. As I suggest subconsciously the audience builds on negative preconceptions of Eastern European states and Mutts and Strays, causes a catastrophic knock-on effect where the East is seen as the other and Mutts/Strays are seen as dangerous. As once the filmic text transcends into the audience’s comprehension there is no control, no way to change it, and no way to take it back, and in this lies the danger of representation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the film *White God* is a significant film to which to explore, as it informs us on the inherent connection between Eastern European social imaginary, as defined as fractured due to post-Soviet pasts, and negative Mutt/Stray representation within Eastern European film.

²⁹³ Morris, Toni. *The Noble Lecture in literature*. 1993. Pg. 19.

By watching these canines, to consider their treatment by means of implications over a period, allows us to truly consider the implications of good/bad canine dichotomy, specifically concerning Mutts and Strays as signifiers of the fear of the 'other' striking back. I aimed to situate the disparities of canine spaces as interconnected within Breed/Mutts/Stray dichotomy, to ultimately propose that Breed dogs as placed within inside spaces, as controlled and regulated, Mutt canines as in-between spaces depending on their aesthetical desirability or undesirability and Stray canines as outside beings who are hidden and suppressed due to their dangerous and unregulated representation.

Conclusion

Summary

In this study I demonstrate that within Eastern European cinema the representational canine is defined by Eastern Europe's fractured national identity, in turn making the representational canine a signifier of Eastern European assumptions, stereotypes and ideology. This is significant because it points to the exploration of space as integral to the understanding of the Eastern European representational canine, allowing me to make a clear distinction between the differences in the representation of Breed/Pet dogs and Mutt/Stray dogs, whose possibilities, placements and spaces they reside or do not reside within are regulated and restricted in differing capacity's, depending on their degree to which they are considered desirable or undesirable within Western normative standards.

Value of This Thesis to The Study of World Cinemas and Animal Representation

Within this thesis I suggest that the significance of exploring canine representation within the location of Eastern Europe lies within the degree to which Eastern European canine disparities are significantly heightened and visible compared to any other location. These canine disparities, between Breed/Pet dog and Mutt/Stray dog, concern how they are seen, where they are allowed to permit and how they are treated are present within every location, like within the West, but due to the nature of Eastern European history these human-canine

power differences are made unquestionably visible through the medium of Eastern European film.

In the following section I aim to tease out my contribution by means of three sections, Eastern Europe, Canine Representation and Non-human Power Discourse.

Eastern Europe

A key contribution this project has made is through the suggestion that the fractured nature of Eastern European national identity, caused by post-Soviet pasts, acts as a unifying tool to which to make clear connections between the representation of ideology, culture and sociological thinkings between state lines in an Eastern European filmic context. This thinking is built of the theory of Fragmentations of Spatial Boundaries coined by Ewa Mazierska in the text, *Eastern European Cinema: Old and New Approaches (2014)*,²⁹⁴ where I implement her thinkings to suggest that the fragile nature of Eastern European social imaginary is a key tool to which to connect national cinemas, where space is not defined by geography instead its defined by culture. Thereby I implement the mode of filmic inquiry as a refractive tool to which to highlight the Eastern European canine as a signifier of the Eastern European's fragile and fractured national identity.

Canine Representation

The second contribution within this thesis concerns the importance of exploring the representation of Mutts and Strays within Eastern European cinema, as I suggest that the

²⁹⁴ Meziarska, Ewa. *Eastern European Cinema*. 2014.

fractured nature of Eastern European national identity is emulated within the figure of the Mutt and Stray within Eastern European films, as Mutts and Strays make conversations regarding human-canine power disparities, specifically in relation to canine marginalization, more visible. I propose that canine disparities between Breed/Pet Dog and Mutt/Stray is heightened within the conceptualisation of space through the theoretical framing of binary dichotomy being, inside/outside, private/public. As such I was able to conceptualize the use of space as a key tool to see canine disparities within an Eastern European context, where differing canines are placed within differing regulations and restrictions, which are made unequivocally apparent within the mode of Eastern European film.

Non-human Power Discourse

Lastly, this thesis contributes to non-human conversations as despite the intention to find canine agency within Eastern European film, where the canine is seen with individual essence, this thesis concludes that we will always lead back to the humans as the apex of canine representation within visual culture. This is built around Garry Marvin's theory of non-human viewership, who conceptualises the changing of viewership to situate the non-human as an individual agent.²⁹⁵ I propose that Marvin's theory is hard to achieve when considering the exploration of canines within visual culture, as such I suggest that when exploring Eastern European canine representation, despite the changing of the modes of viewership to acknowledge individuality, agency and essence, the canine will always be a product of the humans ideology, cultural and sociological thinkings.

²⁹⁵ Marvin, Garry. *Seeing, Looking, Watching, Observing Nonhuman Animals*. 2005

Conclusion of Value

In conclusion my main contribution is that through the visual exploration of Eastern European film we can understand the link between the representation of space and canine possibilities, where Breed/Pet dogs are defined within domestic and controlled settings, to emulate an homogenous society, where Mutt/Stray dogs are seen within uncontrollable outside spaces, hinting to post-Soviet fragmented pasts, as such I am able to propose that the Eastern European canine is unequivocally a product of Eastern European histories, culture and ideologies and this is made visible through the medium of Eastern European film.

Further Research

This thesis shows there is a consistent connection between how canines are represented within Eastern European cinema and the spaces in which they are either permitted or not permitted to inhabit. Saying this, extensions might also be applied to cinemas and films that are situated beyond Eastern Europe. This would imply that a mirror of theoretical thinkings could also be conceptualised within a differing locational context, within the same scholarly inquiry being, World Cinema, Non-human Representation and Cultural Studies. Highlighting the productive framework for a more comprehensive understanding of the representation of canines within differing geographical placements.

The conceptualisation of otherness within canine representation is more than ever apparent within personal and institutional rhetoric. With recent and rapid growth of cultural and geographical assumptions and stereotypes being placed onto the canine. Where popular media circuits within a Western context are infiltrated with anti-immigrant and foreigner rhetoric

when considering Eastern Europeans and their canines, as seen within BBC news, where Mutts and Strays are seen as, “posing risks to the UK,” as these dogs which are considered as foreigners are a “ticking time bombs-coming over,”²⁹⁶ and Eastern Individuals are considered, as stated by Nigel Farage, as illegals who eat swans in our royal parks,²⁹⁷ creating a spike in Reform UK followers, whereby we see more and more anti-immigrant-rhetoric within the fabrics of popular media rhetoric. It is therefore perhaps a start of a new Animal Studies, where theatrical thinking should move away from trying to situate non-humans as individual agents for moral satisfaction, to redirect its focus on the acceptance of the unavoidable human-centrism within the non-human, to further investigate the implications of negative human assumptions places onto canine counterparts. In such, unable to complete within this task, further development can be made regarding the East-West dichotomy within the representational canine but changing the filmic analysis to explore the ‘other’ within Western media circuits. This task can be achieved by using scholarship regarding World Cinemas, Cultural Studies, and Non-human Representation, to make a connection between negative Mutt/Stray dichotomy and Western popular media, which encapsulates anti-immigrant/foreigner assumptions. As, similar questions asked within the thesis, can be redirected to consider if Mutts and Strays can be seen in either differing or similar representational capacity when considering Western filmic locations.

²⁹⁶ Stanczyszyn, Kath. *Imported dogs posing risk to the UK RSPCA warns*. 2025.

²⁹⁷ Mitchell, Archie. *Farage Condemned for falsely accusing Eastern European migrants of eating Swans from Royal Parks*. 2025.

The findings suggest that filmic depictions of canines can aid further bridges between concern of human's ideological implications onto the canine, whereby the depictions of canines have a tangible effect onto their treatment within human society. The employment of film analysis acts as a foundational theoretical tool for further studies to follow, where distinct connection can be made by means of non-human representation of the tangible implications of such.

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