

## Article

# Seeing Beings: “Dog” Looks Back at “God”: Unfixing *Canis familiaris* in Kornél Mundruczó’s Film *Fehér isten/White God* (2014)<sup>†</sup>

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† I have had to rely on the English subtitles of this film, since I do not speak Hungarian. I quote from the film in English, since the version to which I have had access does not give the option of Hungarian subtitles.

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**Abstract:** Kornél Mundruczó’s film *Fehér isten/White God* (2014) portrays the human decreed options of mixed breed, abandoned dogs in the streets of Budapest in order to encourage its viewers to rethink their relationship with dogs particularly and animals in general in their own lives. By defamiliarizing the familiar ways humans gaze at dogs, *White God* models the empathetic gaze between species as a potential way out of the dead end of indifference and the impasse of anthropocentric sympathy toward less hierarchical, co-created urban animal publics.

**Keywords:** animality; dogs; film; *White God*; empathy

## 1. Introduction

*Fehér isten/White God* (2014) is not the first film use mixed breed canine actors who were saved from shelters<sup>1</sup>. The *Benji* films starred mixed breed rescued shelter dogs (McLean 2014, p. 7). Nor is it unique in using 250 real screen dogs instead of computer generated canines. Disney’s 1996 *101 Dalmations* starred around 230 Dalmation puppies and 20 adult Dalmations (McLean 2014, p. 20). It is also certainly not the only film with animal protagonists to highlight Liszt’s *Hungarian Rhapsody # 2* in its soundtrack. *Cat Concerto* (1947) as well as a host of other animated cartoons featuring anthropomorphized animals use this piece of music. *White God* also fits into the tradition of “lost dog come home” films, although the idea of home in this film is destabilized, and the dog in question very clearly does not “consent” “to be mastered”, which Fudge explains in the Lassie Come-Home story “makes natural the hierarchy inherent in that relation” (Fudge 2008, pp. 29–30). By making the effort to see the dogs as animals, as intelligent, communicative, individual non-human beings in a specific context, by destabilizing the normative animal categories, the narrator shows the inadequacy and unsuitability of the current normalized terms and images in which humans try to confine animals as pets, as consumable and disposable objects, as dangerous and thus killable threats, and as metaphors for human characteristics. Jonathan Burt explains that “the ways in which the animal is seen and not seen—the connection between presence and absence—” are implicated in how the animal is represented (Burt 2001, p. 207). “[W]e choose to find a place for them in a well-organized cultural logic that divides the animal world into categories like pet, vermin, threatened species and expendable species” (p. 204). All of these easily lead to another human construction of animality, because all of them are based on the idea of human dominance (Fudge 2008). As a film, *White God* already has the

<sup>1</sup> The brothers Luke and Body, so the story goes, were found by Theresa Ann Miller in a trailer park in Arizona just in time before they were to go to a shelter (Ventre 2015).

potential to model what Vivian Sobchack terms “actively seeing ‘the’ world or a world through the eyes of an ‘other’” (Sobchack 2016, p. 88), here as a caring and curious narrator who makes visible “their normal invisibility” (Berger 1972, p. 16). By pushing us to imagine a non human-centric urban space we could co-create with dogs outside of the film, it reminds us, that “dogs have been watching human beings for a long time” (Williams 2007, p. 104). It emphatically concludes that it is time for us to pay attention.

## 2. Synopsis

The “brave and tantalizing” (Nelson 2015, p. 68) *Fehér isten/White God* (2014) is the sixth feature film of Hungarian director Kornél Mundruczó<sup>2</sup>, earning the 2014 Un Certain Regard award at Cannes and the Golden Octopus at the Strasbourg European Fantastic Film Festival. In addition, Luke and Body won the Dog Palme for their performances as Hagen. The film follows how one mixed breed dog, Hagen and his benevolent thirteen-year-old companion, Lili (Zsolia Psotta) come to terms with their forced separation, a separation that occurs after Lili’s mother (Lili Horváth) leaves her daughter with her estranged husband, Lili’s father, Daniel (Sandor Zsoter). Having lost his wife, his job as a professor to now work as a meat inspector in a slaughterhouse, as well as the affection and respect of his daughter, Daniel acts out by refusing to pay a fictional tax<sup>3</sup> levied at owners of what animal control terms “mixed breed street dogs” and tosses Hagen out of the car on the side of the highway in Budapest. Hagen, separated from Lili, experiences the streets of Budapest alone. He finds a dog companion, a terrier, Marlene (Ally and Stella) with a rope leash around her neck, and a dogland in a no man’s land, part abandoned building site, part garbage dump. He is caught by a homeless man (János Derzsi), who sells him to a fighting dog seller, who sells him to a dogfighting trainer (Szabolcs Thuróczy), who renames him Max, and proceeds to turn the pet into an animal. Hagen/Max becomes a dogfighting champion, kills another dog, escapes, and refinds dogland and the terrier. The ever-present animal control (Gergely Bánki, Tamás Polgár, and some uncredited others) catches them. Hagen witnesses the euthanasia of another dog. He stops eating. He snarls at the hand of a girl (Orsolya Tóth) and is sentenced to death a second time (the first because of a wound). He rips open the neck of an employee who is trying to put him in the cage of dead dogs waiting. They escape, run freely through the streets of Budapest. Widespread panic ensues on the streets and in the concert hall, which the dog pack enters and disrupts. There is a curfew. The fighting dog trainer, the fighting dog seller, the butcher (Ervin Nagy) who threatened to kill Hagen with a cleaver when the dog was looking for scraps in the garbage, and the nosy neighbor (Erika Bodnár) in Lili’s father’s house, who called the authorities on Hagen the first morning, are killed by the dogs in seeming acts of revenge. The pack ends up at the slaughterhouse, presumably looking for the Lili’s father. There they find Lili—who plays her trumpet—leading to the re-relating at the end.

While Hagen is experiencing a new Budapest to the one he had previously known, Lili bikes and then runs through the streets putting up signs looking for him, hating her father, then reconciling with him, and playing a solo in the orchestra. When the dogs disrupt the performance, she leaves to look for Hagen, feeling that their presence there is a message for her. She witnesses the bodies of the fighting dog seller, the body of the butcher, and the body of nosy neighbor. She goes to save her father from Hagen’s revenge. She sees Hagen in the “canine beast” before her and asks him to see Lili in the “human beast” before him. She plays her trumpet. They share silence and a gaze; re-relate, “become with”.

<sup>2</sup> Mundruczó films include *This I Wish and Nothing More* (2000), *Pleasant Days* (2002) which won the Silver Leopard in Locarno, *Johanna* (2005), *Delta* (2008) and *Tender Son: The Frankenstein Project* (2010).

<sup>3</sup> A dog tax was proposed on all “mutts,” but did not pass a few years before the film was made (Taubin 2015, p. 87).

### 3. Alternative Globalizations

Haraway suggests that the process of “becoming with” is “a practice of becoming worldly”, that is a potential shared “retying” of what she calls “the knots of ordinary multispecies living on earth” into a “more just and peaceful other-globalization” (Haraway 2008, p. 3). The film *White God* imagines this retying between street dogs and humans in the courtyard of a Hungarian slaughterhouse, defying the usual association with the place as one of “finality” and death”. To get there, however, the narrator first presents the current normative animal categories/“knots” as defined by humans: street dog (free-roaming but hunted and successfully contained as shelter dog), pet, wild beast, pest, disposable object. By having a single dog, Hagen, represent all categories throughout the course of the film, the narrator attempts to destabilize these categories and open up the possibility for alternative ways for humans and dogs to share urban space, ways “for getting on together with some grace” (ibid, p. 15), “in specific difference” (p. 16). Both Haraway and the film’s narrator call for “companionate relations” (ibid), but leave “becoming” room in the term. Both urge viewers to look respectfully at the other, “[t]o hold in regard, to respond, to look back reciprocally, to notice, to pay attention, to have courteous regard for, to esteem” since “all of this is tied to polite greeting, to constituting the polis, where and when species meet” (p. 19).

### 4. Why Dogs?

McLean structured her edited volume *Cinematic Canines: Dogs and Their Work in the Fiction Film* around the question: “Why dogs in film now?” (McLean 2014, p. 10). Mundruczó has stated: “*White God* is “a dog movie, but it’s not about dogs” (Dollar 2015). I argue that the answer to the question: why dogs in a Hungarian film in 2014? Is that dogs help represent the instability of the idea of home, of Hungarian national identity in the 21st Century. According to the director, “Europe’s current fear [is] the uprising of the masses”. Since the 1990s, Hungarian national identity has had several iterations from being a member of the Eastern Bloc, to becoming a transit country for migrants from the Eastern Bloc, a member of the EU, and a transit and sometimes destination country for migrants from Afghanistan, Libya, Syria etc. Even before 2015 put Hungary in the international news due to Prime Minister Orbán famously proclaiming that the refugee crisis is “Germany’s problem” (BBC News 2015); before the Budapest Keleti train station became the site of “stuck” migrants; and before Hungary’s anti-immigrant border fences were erected, there was a growing sense of displacement in Europe in general and Hungary in particular. The film alludes to this identity “crisis” not only through the fictional dog tax that urban officials have put in place to prevent the “self-selected breeding” (McHugh) of the “non-Hungarian purebred dogs” in Budapest, but also through the film’s repeated use of *Hungarian Rhapsody 2*, a product of Hungarian nationalism of the 19th century, one which Mundruczó considers “an emblem for Hungary and also for something has passed” (Fehér isten/*White God* 2014). Much like the mongrel dogs who are not seen as individuals, the migrants are embodied by the negative and flat figure of “the Afghan” (as listed in the film’s credits) restaurant owner who is not viewed with compassion, but simply as a consumer (he is shown and heard eating, he owns a grill, he buys and sells dogs whom he mistreats, and is shown counting money while eating—i.e., he is the stereotype of the migrant who simply takes from his adopted country<sup>4</sup>). Anti-Roma racism is present directed

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<sup>4</sup> Here is not the place to discuss this figure in detail. While one could of course read the director’s vague statements about the masses rising up as alluding to nationalist masses who feel that they are in the minority, I choose to read the film as one which critiques subjugation of one group by another. I think this very one-dimensional figure, one of the one-dimensional figures killed by the one-dimensional construction “wild beast”, appears in this film to remind us that humans do not only “flatten” and have “low expectations” of “mutts” but certain people, too. Smuts describes “dog-human relationships” until now “have more to do with . . . [his] limited expectations and mistaken assumptions than with who they really are” (Smuts 2006, p. 124). The same could be said about our expectations and assumptions about other others. It seems significant that the only figures that Hagen the Beast kills are completely one dimensional. We never see the dead body of the trainer, although, it is clearly implied that he will die from being torn apart by the dogs. Similarly, although we do not know for certain whether the pound director dies from being knocked down and run over by the dogs, we do not see her “dead.” She,

toward the marginalized figure of the dogtrainer, whom interestingly the narrator does not portray as one-dimensionally as the “Afghan”. Mundruczó makes no bones about using dogs as symbols in his film, declaring that “the dog is the symbol of the eternal outcast whose master is his god” (*Fehér isten/White God* 2014). He justifies his choice of “animals as the subject instead of minorities”, because he wanted to “focus [...] as freely and with the least amount of taboos possible” on what he terms “a caste-system [which] has become more sharply defined”, “parallel to the questionable advantages of globalization” (ibid). While he seems to use “animals”, “dogs”, “minorities” and “masses” almost as synonyms, Mundruczó clarifies that his “intention was to demonstrate that mankind and beasts share the same universe. [...] [I]f we are able to position ourselves in the place of different species do we have the chance to lay down our arms” (ibid). Like Haraway, he seems to also hope for a type of “autre mondialisation.”

## 5. Homing Dogs

Dogs are often associated with home. Fudge goes so far as to say that home is “where the pet is” (Fudge 2008, p. 23). Franklin credits canines with giving humans “ontological security” (Fudge 2008, p. 17). The “story of the return of the lost dog” represented by the *Lassie Come Home* novel is “an important interrogation of the role of the pet in the construction of the human home and thus of the human” (Fudge 2008, p. 27), one whose “constant re-use and revision” (p. 15), indicates an important connection between the figure of the lost dog and the idea of home. Indeed, this film is a version of this come-home story, one fitting to the current instability many feel. If home has become unfamiliar, what better way to represent displacement than to destabilize the figure of *canis familiaris*? If one can find ways to communicate with a *canis unfamiliaris*, then perhaps one can find ways of feeling at home in a home that has become unfamiliar.

*White God*’s narrator appears to agree with Horowitz, that “[f]amiliarity is both a boon and a bane to the domestic dog, *Canis familiaris*.” It “prevents us from seeing dogs for who they are” (Horowitz 2014, p. 219). Horowitz claims that “[m]ovies using dogs represent various manifestations of the use of dogs as props, as veritable family members, or even as nonindividuals, instead of animals” (Horowitz 2014, pp. 219–20). For her, seeing dogs as animals is necessary to stem our misreadings of dogs, that is seeing them as animals defining themselves specifically and in context, not subsumed under a generalized human term. Erica Fudge agrees, believing that “we need to try to find an alternative way of engaging with the presence of the animal that emphasizes its status as *animal*” (p. 39). Indeed she goes so far as to describe pet dogs as “animals out of place” (Fudge 2008, p. 19). To see a pet, then, as an animal “the pet would need to have a status that has not yet been traced” (p. 40), a status which includes the “recognition that pets themselves can make meaning” (p. 41), and thus that they can “escape our understanding” (p. 46). For Fudge and Horowitz, seeing dogs as animals, allows a “humbled” (p. 46) viewer to reengage with them differently, to “reimagine their place and his/her own space in normally human ordered spaces. In *White God*, the pet Hagen is defamiliarized by not choosing to come home. At the end, however, Lili is “humbled” and sees Hagen as an “animal” though not as a figure of human defined “animality.” In a world in which “movement is the common state of humanity after globalization” (Fudge 2008, p. 35), a world which for Berger in the 1990s already was a world in which “being homeless is becoming a norm” (ibid, p. 34), an unfamiliar dog might help one create a sense of home. If “home” is no longer a “space under control”, as Mary Douglas defines it (Fudge 2008, p. 19), then the pet is no longer associated with a place that is controlled. This opens up possible new ways of relating to dogs in an unstable world in which “[e]migration, forced or chosen, across national frontiers or from village to metropolis is the quintessential experience of our

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too, although certainly not a positive figure, is not as one-dimensional as the others. Both she and the animal trainer claim dominance over the dogs, but both also to some extent show a type of “affection.” In some sense these two figures embody Tuan’s “dominance with a human face”, or “[d]ominance [...] combined with affection” (qtd in Fudge 2008, p. 21).

time" (Fudge 2008, p. 34). If Lassie no longer has a home to come home to, she is open to creating a home anywhere and with anyone. In some sense, the idea of home, is always that of a lost stable and unchanging idyll. It never existed. As Fudge admits "in reality the human is never made secure by the existence of a pet. But that does not mean [...] that we do not search for stability, that we will stop telling ourselves the story of Lassie" (Fudge 2008, p. 38). She also reminds us that "[t]he story of the come-home is also its other: the story of the forever lost" (p. 33).

## 6. Mood Cue: Displacement

The narrator's basic mode is to disorient the viewer, even if only slightly. The film manipulates our moods particularly through its music and through the progression of images that relate to each other not only in terms of the plot, but in terms of normative categories for dogs/animals. As Carroll explains: "Moods are incorporative and inclusive." (Carroll 2003, p. 527) As such they "pervade perception rather than focusing it" (ibid, p. 528). He points out that "pre-title sequences [...] are often used to establish the mood in the audience that the filmmaker supposes will best suit the reception of the film" (p. 542).

The pre-title sequence certainly establishes the mood that stays with the viewer throughout the film, a mood of displacement and disorientation, of being discomfited, unsettled. There is a certain fear, but it is not overwhelming. The narrator provides an extreme long shot, showing an eerily empty Budapest. A bridge splits the image longitudinally at an angle and empty highways stretch out horizontally. The music is very muted at first, plaintive, then becomes foreboding and ominous. Then one spies a lone figure on a bicycle coming towards the viewer at an angle on the bridge. One also sees a white bird land on a lamppost next to another bird. Unsure what to make of this little bit of life in this barren and unfamiliar because empty urban landscape, the viewer is tense. Indicated is a post-apocalyptic space of sorts, but one without dead bodies or building ruins. I associated it with a city vacated because of some environmental toxin. When the dogs arrived, I thought of the dogs left and roaming the streets of the abandoned towns of the Fukushima prefect. The scene is enigmatic, slow; we are given time to see the girl approach, to see the emptiness as the music builds up. We hear the car blinker of the abandoned car on the bridge very loudly; we hear the bicycle chain as it moves; we hear an eerie windswept sound motion as it were. The girl in a green hoodie is shown from a low angle in slow motion. She is clearly looking for something, some sign of life, which appears unexpectedly with a tense and dramatic crescendo which is followed by galloping, panting, and barking. We see a pack of dogs running through the streets. The camera gives us time to see this pack, to see the individual dogs in the pack from a low "dog" level angle, from the side, and from above. While at first the music and the sudden appearance of a huge pack of dogs was frightening, when we look at the pack, especially at the individual dogs in the pack, our assumptions that this galloping pack of panting and barking dogs is threatening and ominous, that this is pure "animality" unleashed, is replaced by the realization that many of the dogs are wagging their tails, that they seem to be enjoying their freedom, that they are focused but not intent on prey. The girl, too, does not react as expected. She looks back at them, but her face, although perhaps showing awe at this incredible life force coming toward her, does not necessarily show fear. She does not pedal faster does not seek shelter in one of the buildings, but keeps pedaling. For a while it almost appears as if they are following her, but then the dogs part and move past her, they are moving with her, sharing this space. It is unsettling and enigmatic. Is this a dream? Before we can decide, it cuts to the title *White God* written white on a black background as the credits had been, tying back to the credits and joining the next scene, similarly bright in the afternoon sun, an idyllic park scene this time, in which the same girl plays with her dog surrounded by other dog owners. Both figures are full of life, running and actively playing. There is a big black dog to the side of the shot. The girl tells her dog to give her the toy, that "it is not yours." (*White God*) and then pets him praising him for being "a good boy" (*White God*). All seems well and whole in the world, except that a voice calls Lili and the girl puts her dog on a leash and talks to her mother about her mother's imminent departure for three months to Australia.



The spell of solid, stable home is broken, not only by the talk of the mother leaving for an extended period of time, but more strongly by the unexpected cut from this safe place to an image of blood pooling on a white tile floor. We then see what we later find out is the meat inspector looking out of place and slightly sad/unsettled and then we see what he is looking at: a cow carcass whose feet and head have been cut off being slowly skinned. There is no music, just the sound of the knife scraping the skin, then later the heavy sliding sounds and overpowering sight of the cow being disemboweled. The disemboweled cow is then sliced in half by a giant machine. The meat inspector takes a tiny knife and cuts open the heart—we see and hear this clearly, and announces that the cow is “suitable for consumption” (*White God*). Then he stamps the carcass that is then electronically transferred to other hanging cow carcasses. Then we cut to the girl and her mother sitting in the car in the parking lot of the slaughterhouse seemingly oblivious to the carcasses that are being moved into the waiting truck. Even the dog lies quietly on the girl’s knees, not at all responding to the smells of the place, as if this were just any old interchangeable parking lot. Inside the slaughterhouse, Daniel, the meat inspector for whom those in the car are waiting, tries to wipe off blood that dripped onto his shirt, gives up when he simply makes more of a mess, and then blows bubbles from a bubble blower he has in his pocket into the mirror in the bathroom. Similarly as incongruous as dropping your daughter off at a slaughterhouse is the act of a grown man blowing soap bubbles in a slaughterhouse bathroom with blood on his shirt. The slaughterhouse foreman interrupts him and hands him a package of meat now wrapped in brown paper for the daughter. The inspector signs one more piece of paper outside as a giant muscle man waits and other meat pieces are transferred to a truck. And then the “handoff” of the daughter occurs in the middle of the slaughterhouse parking lot as if this is a completely normalized space for such an exchange. When the mother drives off after some tense words with the father, the narrator watches Lili and Hagen standing where the mother’s car had been, the distance between the father and the pair seems to grow. When they drive off after another strange exchange, the camera shows us two cows being led orderly on the crosswalk by two old men leading them to their slaughter. Then we cut to the girl and her father opening the door to the building and being immediately accosted by a neighbor woman who is affronted that he would bring “that mutt” in here, that such mutts “need to be reported” (*White God*), that there is a list “now”. In hindsight, the enigmatic pre-title sequence seems almost idyllic compared to how people treat each other and non-animals in this crowded city.

I do not have space to discuss each scene, but this description of the beginning shows how the film makes surprising cuts and how important diegetic and non-diegetic sound is. The diegetic sound often seems overloud, as if the narrator is focusing on the sound. The soundscape of the film is significant in setting the mood, of making the viewer seem slightly displaced even as many of the images of animals and social behaviors shown on screen are familiar. This soundscape includes the sounds of dogs—barking, whimpering, howling, breathing, running, hitting the pavement as part of the sound world of the city—cars, buses, church bells, bikes, doors opening and closing, TVs running, money bills being counted, parking brakes being pulled, water dripping from faucets, sirens firing, gunshots, bike chains, television newscasts, meat being cut, cooked, and chewed, rain, wind, thunder, people bickering, screaming, crying, putting down others, the cries of victory, the lulling sounds of pity, the barking of commands, the sounds of dismissal and of praise, diegetic music of connection and loss, and non-diegetic music. There are many scenes that do not include non-diegetic music. These are often long, but they are not silent. The narrator is attuned to the sounds around it. It makes us hear what we might normally (like to) drown out, makes very present that which we might (like to) “over” hear as it were. Perhaps it does this because it is trying to imagine how the world sounds and looks not just from a human perspective but also from the “invisible” dogs, whom it also makes very visible and audible. The film cannot provide a smell scape, which is so significant to canine experience, but at least invokes a soundscape that sometimes competes with the visuals. The running faucet in the bathroom in which Daniel locks Hagen is an example of this. Lili’s loud footsteps in a city under curfew also help create the experience of emptiness and loneliness. The “real” sounds also link the fictional space

to the outside world, to the cars in the background of the space in which the viewer is watching the film, for instance.

In a relatively short amount of time, enough to establish the relationships between the main characters, we have been confronted with dog categories of pack, pet, meat, and mutt. This fairly quick succession from one category to the next destabilizes the categories, especially since, with the exception of being seen as meat, (although Daniel and the neighbor see him as disposable), Hagen ends up embodying all of them. He signifies the pack because he is the “leader” of the pack. The narrator sometimes keeps his distance, sometimes is very present as embodied by a handheld camera that sometimes moves jerkily or shakes. Everything seems a bit over the top—the mean father, the mean neighbor, the mean conductor, the sounds, the pristine white uniforms of everyone in the slaughterhouse (except for Daniel’s shirt) etc. Although we empathize with Lili and with Hagen, the narrator always keeps us distanced by moving our focus, whether because suddenly we hear a loud sound, or the camera cuts to something unexpected, or the music does not quite fit the actions of the scenes. It also lets us see Hagen give the “same” expression in very different circumstances—he gives the cocked head, quizzical look when looking at the father in the slaughterhouse courtyard as he does to Marlene, the terrier, he meets at the butcher, as he does to the director of the pound after he has just killed a man. Additionally, the pack’s meaning is ambiguous, portrayed as it is as both individualized and as spectacle. Thus while destabilizing, unsettling Hagen’s meaning for the viewer and for Lili, the narrator also shows how others stabilize his meaning by forcing him into their constructions.

## 7. Spectacular Pack

The pack of dogs which appears in the pre-title sequence, then in the middle after we have learned the context, and which remains prominent to the end of the film is filmed as spectacle. According to Nick Browne, the “the rhetoric of the spectacular” includes three things: it must be big, it must be viewed often or for a long time, and it must be at an angle which highlights the force of the thing being filmed, but “not its meaning” (Murray and Heumann 2006, p. 47). The pack of dogs certainly fits these requirements: it is very big—250 dogs; it is shown repeatedly and for a long enough time to experience its force from the side, from overhead, and low angle face on. Our automatic assumption that a pack meant “unbridled animality” was unsettled in the pre-title sequence. When the pack appears again, this time in context, and accompanied with similar urgent, throbbing, ominous, rhythmic music, it is almost disappointing, because this time the human reactions seem somewhat comic, somewhat out of place and extreme for the reality of what the dogs are doing. Indeed, the humans disrupt the beauty of the moving spectacle. On the one hand, it seems natural that when faced with a pack of running dogs one would run and feel threatened. Yet, the dogs for the most part ignore the people screaming and stumbling as if in a different movie. Those dogs who do “attack”—attack bags and hoses. A few bark at specific people, but in the specific context it appears as if the dogs are “putting on a show”, as if they have decided to “act” the part they have been labeled, since the people are already responding to that part. It is almost as if they are enjoying the chaos—Hagen snarling at a particular person and another big black dog who hit a car door barking into the window of the woman who is screaming her head off. The narrator witnesses the human reactions to the dogs in a way that keeps the viewer from identifying with those screamers. Since the film here seems to be a combination of slapstick and horror genres, we are unsettled, but not necessarily scared. What is under scrutiny here, is our automatic assumptions, and our automatic relating to particular animals, here particular dogs, based on general assumptions. In addition, the dogs playing the “pack” here are not aggressive dogs. They really are just running and playing and snarling/barking on command. This destabilizes the image of the pack as dangerous threat to humans. As Sheehan explains, “[t]he recalcitrant actuality of animal being inevitably stymies all attempts at complete anthropomorphosis” (Sheehan 2008, p. 123). Burt agrees: “any form of [animal] representation will be either a fiction or in some way *falsely motivated*” (Sheehan 2008, p. 128). In this way the dog pack, a normalized human category to refer to animals as threat “signifies a node of resistance” not just “to the technological goal of complete image control” in terms

of film, but also against the goal of containing the animal other in clear categories. As Burt explains, “the animal is caught in an uncertain space between the natural and the contrived. The elements that make up the response to animal imagery appear to compose a similarly ambiguous space” (Burt 2002, p. 10). The narrator portrays the entire city as this ambiguous space, a space in which “the animal” is meant to follow “contrived” human orders, orders which the street dogs refuse to obey.

In *Dog*, McHugh gives the history of the mongrel dog as a figure of tension or resistance. She explains that by the 19th C the “urban stray dog” “embodying freedom of movement and especially the ability to move (and mate) among different classes [...] actively threatens bourgeois notions of stability.” As an “alternativ[e] to the status quo”, she notes, the “non-breed dog initially served as a figure of ironic contrast or chance, especially random public violence” (McHugh 2004, p. 134). Later, the stray mutt was used “as an exemplary victim” in literature demanding social change (McHugh 2004, p.135). Surprisingly constant, the stray dog today, “has become a cross-cultural trope”, one that “symbolizes even as it stakes out the limits to this process of seeing ourselves as well as other people in dogs” (McHugh 2004, p.136).

## 8. Lying Knots

“At one extreme, terms like mongrel and mutt make breed a kind of measuring stick, according to which most dogs fall short. Paralleling their use as ethnic racial epithets among humans these words imply degeneracy, degradation, and ultimately social chaos” (McHugh 2004, p. 129), precisely those things that according to the director not only Hungary fears but all of Europe. Mongrel, Mutt, fleabag, mixed breed street dog are all used in the film by those characters who degrade Hagen, the father, the butcher, and the nosy neighbor. The father is not thrilled with the news that he has to live with a dog for three months, but he truly turns against the dog after the neighbor humiliates him, implying that that his allowing that mutt to enter the building, that he is degrading the building. For the nosy neighbor, a mutt is a threat to order. She has no problem lying to animal control that the mutt “bit” her. The father and the conductor, too, see “mutt”, “fleabag”, disrupting presence as synonymous with social chaos and thus with animality. In order to be allowed back into the orchestra which she left when Hagen didn’t stay in the closet in which she put him during practice, the orchestra conductor not only expects an apology but also an admission that a “dog like that” conforms to his idea. He prompts her in her father’s and in the rest of the orchestra’s presence to “admit” that a mutt like Hagen belongs at the shelter because he bit her father. While it is clearly difficult for her to say this, she does so in order to be allowed back into the “community” of musicians. This is the second time in the film that Hagen has been accused of biting those who in fact have hurt him. It will occur one more time, after which, Hagen then does turn into a biter. I argue that the repetition makes the meaning. Hagen has been accused of biting three times and therefore in the eyes of the white god he is a biter. Of course, he never had a chance since a “mixed breed street dog” by definition needs to be “contained” by the urban authorities for their “non-Hungarianness.” The film shows how the dissemination of animal types regardless of accuracy ends up “producing” that those types. It doesn’t matter that Hagen does not bite, or that it was humans who goaded him to violence first as a fighting dog and then in order to save his life. He was a “dead dog” simply by being labeled a mutt, a mongrel, and thus a violent dangerous presence. In fact, the first time we see him playing with Lili in the park, the very picture of beloved pet, there is a large black dog off to the side sharing the space. Perhaps this is an ironic nod to Seurat’s painting which contrasts the black urban street dog with the little pug pet as McHugh describes in Chapter 3 of *Dog*. In this particular park, the big black dog and the mixed breed Hagen are both pets, but in hindsight, the black dog seemed to warn of the Hagen’s impending sinking into “street dog status”. The black dog, particularly the big black dog, has the tendency to be used by humans as symbols of outliers, of possible chaos, even death. In the film’s “pack” there are a lot of big black dogs, as indeed (Woodward et al. 2012) reveal- there are more big black dogs in shelters than nonblack dogs. However, they find that the “Big Black Dog Syndrome”, like other labels, does



not need empirical evidence to be repeated. The film's narrator reveals the damaging power of such labeling, and how it can actually engender the very "animality" which it names.

## 9. Mirror Beasts

Chaudhuri explains that "the human descent into primitive emotionality is figured as animality" (Chaudhuri 2003, p. 654). In part this is indicated by the fact that Hagen becomes what he has been labeled, i.e., literalizes the animal construct with which he has been defined: beast, animal. "The Animal" is visualized in the film when at the moment Hagen kills a man, he becomes the leader of a pack. The moment Hagen kills the employee, he becomes animal and Hagen the animal is not separate from the pack. Similarly, the moment that the dog seller sees Hagen as an uncontrollable "beast," he sees the rest of the pack appear. The news reporter (Csaba Faix) reports that, "The city's biggest shelter has become a battlefield. According to eye-witnesses the most alarming sight was how the dogs acted not like animals but like a well-organized army (*White God*)." As if on cue, the dog trainer who had been watching the news sees the pack in his house. While being pulled apart by the pack in front of his TV, he beseechingly looks for mercy from a powerful Hagen looming over him and snarling, who becomes the mirror image of the "beast" the trainer had impersonated by dressing up in a black hoodie, with a black bandana over his face and dark sunglasses. Much as the bum who first rescued him "turned" on him and declared that "I will show you who is master here" (*White God*) and like the trainer who at first seemed to gaze at Hagen respectfully but then grew ever more abusive, Hagen "turns" on humans by becoming less "doglike" and more "human." Lili only sees the pack after Hagen has snarled at her and has refused to "fetch." Yet, she is capable of moving past this and is able to see not only Hagen as an individual if unfamiliar dog but also the individual dogs in the pack. For her, the pack is not "the animal." At the end of the film, Hagen is one of an individualized pack of dogs, each dog with his/her own story, even if this story is as "invisible" to us.

Even before we see the pack and pet as images of dogs, we see them as words. While many films that use animal actors begin with a declaration that "No animal was harmed in the making of this film," this film begins with the declaration that "All of the untrained dogs who perform in this film were rescued from the streets or shelters and placed in homes with help from an adoption program" (*White God*). The former, as Rule following Lippert points out, "betrays a view of animals as collective beings not individuals." And that in so doing, "cinema reassures its spectators that they are singular and animals are plural" (Rule 2010, pp. 539–40). *White God's* white-worded declaration reassures its spectators that the dogs in the pack are singular, too, since each was "individualized" by finding a home. Indeed, the film begins with the claim that all the untrained dogs were adopted (*White God* 0:00:06) and ends with the same claim, after a list of names of "our dog friends" (*White God*) who made up the pack. In short, in becoming a pet who has found a "new famil[y] after the shoot" (*White God*), an invisible, thrown-away "Dog" is reanimated into this dog, this dog with a name and a person. A study found that "people ignorant of shelter dogs' outcomes rated dogs who had been adopted as more attractive than dogs who ultimately had been euthanized" (Hecht and Horowitz 2015, p. 154). Perhaps it senses that the many black shelter dogs in the film might not elicit positive responses from the viewers since, "[r]egarding coat color, a yellow-dog picture received a higher rating on 'agreeableness,' 'Conscientiousness,' and 'Emotional Stability' than an identical picture of the dog with a black coat" (p. 155).

## 10. Terrier Bridges to Dogland, a Self-Selected Home for Peopleless Dogs

now, somewhat arbitrarily, you are considered very cute by us humans . . . and we put you in television shows, and movies, and . . . and" (*Beginners* 2011)

As Lili is tentatively building a "home" connection with her father, Hagen escapes from the dogfighting arena and returns to dogland, that is, to the space Marlene had brought him after the two elude the butcher's cleaver. This place seems known to Marlene, who barks as she does periodically throughout the film to communicate to Hagen that he should follow. Here dogs run freely with no

humans in sight or on site. They run through the water and the mud. They urinate, run, sit, lie where they want to and when they want to. Marlene and Hagen, the two “character” dogs except for a brief initial running into the middle of dogland and thus into the space of the other dogs, stay separated from them, but by their own choice. Both find a spot on top of a hill and observe the other dogs. The narrator shows a long shot from behind them overlooking this no-man’s land where it seems all dogs are equal. The dogs running around in the water are free and do not appear to be acting, that is performing for a trainer and thus for the camera. They appear to be simply doing what they want. Marlene and Hagen, however, are set apart from these dogs, in part because they form their own group, but also because both have a history of being pets in the film’s story. While we do not know Marlene’s story, Marlene has a rope around her neck, which resembles the leash the homeless man tied around Hagen’s neck. Visually at least she is associated with having been “owned,” that is tied to a particular person. In addition, being a terrier, she is a familiar dog type in the movies, TV, and advertisements, indeed, like Asta in *The Thin Man* series a “guide” (Ross and Castonguay 2014) between worlds, here, not between human classes, but between petland and dogland. While Hagen and Marlene share the space with the other dogs, they are also removed from the others by their perhaps more recent ties to humans. The other dogs have no collars like Hagen and no ropes like Marlene. They are “freer” as it were, perhaps more at ease in this dogland. Marlene and Hagen do not appear ill at ease, but they choose a thrown out sofa on which to lie at night instead of the mud on which other dogs lie. Visually they are set apart from the other strays, in an “elsewhere” between “petland” and “dogland”. However, they seem perfectly content, having found “home” in their companionship. They communicate with the other dogs. Marlene even warns them when the animal control since from her vantage point she sees their arrival sooner than the other dogs. While the film showed dogland without accompanying music, by only giving the natural sounds the dogs might hear—they splashing in the water, barking, the sound of cars and car alarms, ominous non-diegetic music is added when animal control arrives. This is similar music to the music that accompanies the “pack” when it runs through the streets normally labeled “human” (or at least human vehicle space). The music lends a mood of tension, of fear, or disorientation. Here, however, it is the humans who are encroaching, who are breaching an “animal” space.

Animal control arrives by opening the green doors that close off this site where houses used to stand, doors that are similar to the shelter’s outer green doors. This no-man’s land, however, is much more of a “shelter” than the shelter, much more of a home space, that is a secure canine space than the “shelter” is. It is humans who enter this dog space and attack the dogs, rounding up these peaceful dogs as if they were vermin, ridding this human empty, human unused space of canine life. Although Marlene and Hagen escape from animal control the first time; they are hunted down and are found and rounded up by 6 animal control officers, as they are playing on the banks of the Danube. Unlike the dogs in dogland, Hagen and Marlene play tug of war, as Lili and Hagen had played when they were introduced. While Hagen in the course of the film is presented in the guise of dangerous beast, Marlene never is. She is always associated with pet, at least for the viewer, even if the animal control officer who kills her sees her and every dog that night as beast. She still plays the traditional sidekick role, although here, she chooses to be Hagen’s sidekick, not a human’s.

Often associated with screwball comedy, the terrier plays an important role in bringing the film’s main couple together. In this film, Marlene provides glimpses into how *White God* could have ended happily as part of a screwball comedy film, in which chaos leads to a happy end. Yet, a happy end would imply a return to human order, to clear categories of pet. In the rationale of this film, then, such a happy end would not be desired. Her murder makes clear that no dog in this film will be coming home. The home the terrier is associated with at least traditionally in movies, is one the film is criticizing as well. Indeed, *White God* asks the viewer to re-see the terrier not only as reliable “quasi-human” side-kick and quirky companion, but also as animal in Horowitz’ sense. Although Marlene and the dog euthanized on the table in the shelter are victimized, there are brown terrier

mixes in the pack, who are very present running with the pack and at the end, in this temporary space of seers being seen.

Like Asta, whose image in six films of the *Thin Man* series was used to approach “charged issues that are salient in the screwball comedy, such as class, labor, gender, romance, and marital dynamics” (Ross and Castonguay 2014, p. 80), Marlene the terrier alludes to how pets, specifically terriers have been used in films, and how these images have informed constructions of dogs outside of film. The narrator asks us to examine our response to her on-screen murder and compare it with our response to the on-screen murder of many pack dogs in the tunnel, dogs whom we see dying individual deaths, but whom we have not engaged with on a personal level before their deaths. Do we respond less to the yelps and falling of the “unknown” dogs than to Marlene’s quivering, bleeding body? Do we feel differently toward the anonymous police shooters behind the barricade than we do towards the one animal control man who responds to Hagen licking his hand, positively? If so, why? The narrator makes visible the death of the “invisible” dogs that happen daily in shelters. It also visibly kills Marlene, the more “visible” dog in human society, that is, the pet. It asks us to consider both the stray and the pet as equals, not in death but in life. Killing those pack dogs in the tunnel, the narrator argues, is equivalent to killing Marlene. Each dog is an individual even if we do not know the backstory.

At its extreme, the chaos that Asta embodies threatens to overwhelm social order, write Ross and Castonguay (2014, p. 91). “Somewhere between rigid and utterly anarchic lies the irreverent balance that is at the heart of the screwball comedy” (ibid), a between space that is also to a certain extent promoted in the film *White God*, despite its not being a screwball comedy. I argue that this space is represented by dogland in the film.

## 11. Saved for Dogland

The butcher then notices them and since for him, the dogs are vermin/pests that threaten his business, he defines them as the expendable enemy. Not only that, but the narrator shows him treating dogs as meat; when he threatens Hagen with a cleaver he tells him “I’ll gobble you up” (*White God*). We not only see, but hear him hacking through bones, seeing all animals as containable if cut up into pieces. The narrator also implicates the unseen but heard customer, who asks for the piece of meat which the butcher then divides. In short, as in the slaughterhouse scene the narrator focuses on the violence of butchering.

In this scene, the butcher is shown as the villain, shown from a lower angle in a medium shot wielding a huge weapon and cornering Hagen into a small space. Marlene prevents his demise, by biting the butcher as he is about to strike. Non-diegetic music suddenly is heard and the potential horror film turns into buddy movie as the two dogs run through the streets and end up in dogland. The music, however, bridges this low angle scene of dogs running through the streets together with the earlier scene of the pack of dogs running through the streets. While different, the tone is similar, or the mood that it creates. The music is foreboding and ominous. It would have fitted the scene from which the two dogs are escaping. We might expect music that seems more uplifting since they have escaped the enemy. Of course, it could indicate that there is only worse to come, and yet the dogs look do not look menacing. While people scared of dogs, might react by being frightened at the site of these two running dogs, and while terriers can of course bite, the terrier running with the bigger dog, deflates the possible danger of the image of a big dog running through the city streets. Plus, we already know the dog and that he is friendly. However, by using music evoking a similar mood for the scene of two dogs running through the streets as it does with the images of 250 dogs, including terriers, it asks us to consider how numbers affect how we read dogs. In that scene, the music seemed fitting; what was unsettling was that the dogs did not seem to be in attack mode, they seemed just to be running not attacking. There seems a mismatch between the images and the music as there is in this scene. Here as Marlene and Hagen run away from the butcher, most viewers will be rooting for them.

The narrator takes us gently into dogland as it were, by giving “it” a familiar “face”—that of Marlene. In contrast to the “big black dogs” with whom she is first seen outside the butcher shop, Marlene the terrier is familiar and seemingly “safe.” It is she who brings Hagen to dogland, to the land that is full of “big black dogs.” Yet, then *White God* shows us Hagen rejecting Marlene, becoming more like the “big black dogs”—less familiar, less “safe; , and then finally her being shot in front of us. Without the terrier, has Hagen finally crossed over to the side of animality? In the clear categories of the white God, yes, he has. Why is it necessary to kill the terrier; to leave us with Hagen as leader of the unfamiliar mongrels? The narrator is tearing away the bandaid as it were, bringing us into unfamiliar territory at the end without the crutch of the familiar terrier dog so associated with pet. It does this to test us, to see if we will engage with these unfamiliar dogs assembled in the *abbatoir* courtyard.

Described by a critic as “a scene-nibbling Jack Russell terrier named Marlene” (Dargis 2015), her terrier looks are familiar to those interested in films with dogs or to many from advertisements<sup>5</sup> seemingly more “readable” than those of Hagen perhaps, or the other street dogs because the terrier-type, especially Jack Russells, have performed as sidekicks, eliciting sympathy, mirroring their “owner’s” emotions, a kind of shorthand or gauge. Sometimes a foil, pitting his will against that of the owner or another human, but in the end loyal above all else. The film expands and diversifies the cinematic dog figure not only through the diversity of dogs in the film but also to a large extent by not anthropomorphizing these dogs. There remains a distance between the dogs and the viewer, even with Hagen. In a sense Hagen and the other dogs remain closed off, maintain a distance.

Interestingly, although we are never given Marlene’s name during the film, we find out that the nameless terrier has the name Marlene and is played by Stella and Ally. Her lack of name at least while we were watching the film does not prevent her from being a character despite not having a name, despite being personless in the film story. Giving the fictional dog performed by two real dogs, a name outside of the film, that is in the credit frame of the film draws attention to how important naming dogs can be for our perception of them as individuals. The character on screen was individualized because of her ability to communicate with and befriend Hagen; a name did not individualize her any more than the list of names of the adopted dogs helps us to visualize which dog the name refers to. Also striking is that Pimpa’s whelps are named Pimpa’s whelp 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5; and that another six whelps are named whelp 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. The lack of “human” name for these puppies seems to call into question that they were truly adopted; that outside of the film they are seen as individuals.

The “generic” terrier is the type of dog one is used to in films in which dogs play the cute “almost human” role; it is anthropomorphized like Tom in *Tom and Jerry* cartoons, and like them reappears again and again portrayed by different dogs, often several of a generation (Asta was played by several dogs, as was Eddie in *Frasier*). Significantly, it is this dog whom we see get killed, away from the pack. She is given an individualized death, is not killed as one of many like the dogs in the tunnel.<sup>6</sup> Like the dog seller, the trainer, the butcher, the animal control officer, the nosy neighbor, this particular terrier is difficult to separate from its role, here as “being cute.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, this one is visually linked to humans by a noose-like rope leash, which she wears even as a street dog. When this leash is finally removed in the

<sup>5</sup> Terriers, whether Boston Terriers (see Mastercard’s Lost Dog ad available at <http://www.businessinsider.com/advertisers-are-obsessed-with-boston-terriers-2013-8>) or Jack Russells (see McDonald’s 1995 Lost Dog Television Commercial, available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-9to3kVTCPY> or the VW ad available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nLTh6PhCCmQ>) are popular in advertisements.

<sup>6</sup> Even the dog who gets the lethal injection while Hagen is watching seems to be a terrier-type dog. However, other terrier mixes are part of the pack, like the one given an unanthropomorphized moment in the end, as the narrator focuses on another unnamed terrier-type lying down in the last scene.

<sup>7</sup> The AKC (American Kennel Club 2017) “often link[s] physical appearance to temperament characteristics” (Hecht and Horowitz 2015, p. 255). On the [akc.org/dog-breeds/groups/terrier](http://akc.org/dog-breeds/groups/terrier), for instance, the terrier group as a whole is described as having “the distinctive terrier personality. These are feisty, energetic dogs [...]. In general, they make engaging pets, but require owners with the determination to match their dog’s lively characters.” The site describes the Parson Russell Terrier as “bold, friendly, athletic, and clever;” the Rat Terrier as “friendly, lovable, inquisitive, fearlessly game for just about anything;” and the Russell Terrier as “alert, lively, inquisitive, and friendly.” The nameless terrier in *White God* exhibits these characteristics.

pound, she is symbolically cut off from generic “cute” terrier to become just another generic street dog. In short, she is always generalized. Individual, small, cute, “white”<sup>8</sup> dogs are usually labeled “suitable for human consumption” (entertainment), that is, if they have an owner. This is made clear in the white god language of the film that alternates generic breeds—“Speciality Rottweiler Trainer” (*White God*)—and generic street dogs—“all of the *untrained* dogs” (*White God*)—with named “dog friends” (*White God*) and the very broad “animal” objects of the “animal trainers.” The credits state that the “[p]rincipal dog characters supplied by Teresa Ann Miller” and that “Hagen is owned and trained by Teresa Ann Miller (*White*).” It is clear that Teresa May Miller, is not only the trainer of Luke and Body, their dual identities erased by the character name, but also that she is the owner and provider of the professional canines in the film, that is of Luke, Body, and Stella and Ally (*ibid*). Of course, terriers can bite, and were bred to kill what humans deemed “vermin,” but shooting this dog at point blank range to take control of the “pack” that is taking revenge elsewhere is an empty gesture of human revenge. Not that the killing of the other dogs in the tunnel is not revenge, but the fact that a single dog is equated with the pack is telling. Granted, this animal control officer is now out to kill animal control officer killers, i.e., dogs. For him and for most of the Budapest populace in the film shown as frightened for their lives, even this little dog is just a “figure of animality,” just one more dead dog object to kill and throw in a body bag.

Significantly, when Hagen turns into the “beast” he is separated from the “pet” Marlene. The terrier had disappeared from Hagen’s side after Hagen killed the pound employee. Separated from the pack, she had reappeared after the dog pack’s revenge is already in progress, where we (and Hagen) first encountered her at the meat market. She remained behind at the butcher shop now no longer hampered by the butcher. The horrified Lili has just come upon the dead butcher, throws up in response, and calls her father to warn him that he might be Hagen’s next target. It is then that the little terrier barks at and leads Lili on her bike in her search for Hagen. The terrier is guide dog to death (for the butcher) and guide dog to Lili and to Hagen (in terms of helping Hagen survive and acclimate to life on the streets). She is faithful companion, playmate, guide—positive roles often associated with dogs. But there is no room for her as representative of the domesticated cute companion in the “beast pack.” And so the little dog keeps running toward *mal* (Steeves 2011). As the terrier shakes in pain, bleeding from a shot wound, the man stands over her and delivers the kill shot up close and personal. This terrier is expendable, since she does not “hear [her] master’s voice.” In the white god’s world a street dog is a street dog is a street dog.<sup>9</sup>

## 12. Inconsiderate Sympathy

We have witnessed a bloody dogfight; we have witnessed a trainer beating, injecting, and goading Hagen into “beast.” In the shelter examination/killing room scene, we see a dog being put to death. And shortly after this scene, the narrator will show us Hagen’s bloody face with a piece of a man’s neck hanging from his teeth, as well as the blood-spattered windows of the restaurant, and the bloody bodies of the butcher and the neighbor. In including this piece of the cartoon, the animation of a cat dressed in a Tux mimicking a performance of a piece of High Culture, the film not only emphasizes the trappings of “civilization,” but recognizes its own acts of mimicry. Tom mimics the expected “deep” feelings of a pianist interpreting Liszt’s music, dressed in the proper attire for the part. The shelter director is dressed as the authority figure that she is, here in a white coat, usually associated with doctors or vets who are meant to heal. In this white coat, with Liszt’s music turned into “dying room”

<sup>8</sup> When potential adopters are looking at the dogs in the pound, the pound director tells an older woman, “There are white ones (*White God*),” implying, that at least for this woman, a white dog might be more desirable than the other “mutts” in the pound.

<sup>9</sup> I am making the assumption that the terrier did not participate in killing and mauling the dead butcher, in whose establishment Lili finds her. At that time, however, she is not with the body and she is not bloody. The butcher’s wounds look to have been made by a larger jaw, but, I still am just assuming this. Even if the dog did participate, she is not attached to the pack at the time that the man shoots her. That man has no idea that this dog was associated with the “killer” dogs.



musak as it were, the woman plays the role of caring, pitying, benevolent “god” who kills in order to save the “object” from more pain. Yet, while Lili’s authoritarian orchestra conductor had praised her playing by saying “play that at my funeral” (*White God*), these euthanized dogs get no personal memorial; they are not remembered, but are wrapped in garbage bags and incinerated. Intriguingly, when the employee comes with the bag for the body of the dog the pound director has just killed, she asks, “Last one?” He answers, “Yes. The rest is routine.” (*White God*) What exactly he means by this remains unknown. As she pets the dying dog with the hand holding the empty syringe, she promises “You won’t have any enemies where you’re going. No one will hurt you anymore. It’s not lie. I mean it” (*White God*). Legally (Tasker 2008, p. 9), euthanasia is prohibited according to Hungarian national law, except in “mercy killing of animals in order to avoid or prevent the unnecessary prolongation of their suffering” (Zoltan n.d.). Aggressive dogs can also be killed (Tasker 2008, p. 9). In this shelter, the director seems to be the arbiter of what constitutes “suffering.” This role, however, when witnessed by another dog, seems to cause her shame.

The five dogs are watching a cartoon that features an anthropomorphized cat, prone to violence against a mouse, who gazes at them. They gaze back (sort of). The music is the same music that Lili had played Hagen in the bathroom to calm him, to commiserate with their new unfamiliar situation in the apartment of her father. In the cartoon, the part she plays on the trumpet is played on the piano. The narrator first focuses the shot of the cartoon, we see the the frame of the TV around the image of the cartoon, but what is on view is the cartoon not anything outside of it or the TV. This in itself is destabilizing, since the previous shot was of Hagen walking through a row of caged dogs to be placed separately, since he has been deemed unadoptable and thus a “goner” (*White God*). The next shot is of Tom. Then we see Hagen and the other dogs watching. The narrator calls attention to the position of these dog spectators. First it shows them in a long shot from a high angle looking up. Then it enters their space and looks up from a very low angle position, revealing Hagen looking up and the TV placed high on the wall. It is not just Hagen’s perspective, but one in which we watch Hagen watching. The camera angle indicates that this is the position of a dog, but none of the dogs in the room are that short. It is almost as if this would be the position of what looks like a terrier type dog being given a lethal injection next door. It calls attention to this dog’s absence. At this moment the dog is presumably still alive; but having been marked as a “goner” as well, he is already marked absent. It is only after this invisible dog point of view, that Hagen gets up distracted by the soothing voice next door and goes to investigate through the crack in the door. In this way, just as in the slaughterhouse scene and the butcher shop scene, the narrator pays attention to a dead body, although in this scene the body lying prostrate on the table is just a simulated dead dog, unlike the dead in real life cows.

The whole scene is strange. We had been led to believe that Hagen was to be put down because of the shelter director’s analysis of his leg wound: “That wound is pretty nasty. No one will take it. It’s a goner. Put it separate” (*White God*). Then we see the opening of the *Cat Concerto*. In her white coat, wielding the emptied syringe, the pound director pets and pities the dog before her. This is a shelter, where unadoptable dogs are killed, by a euthanizer who pities the euthanized. Is her pity valuable? Is her white coat of death different than the white coat of the butcher who sleeps in his office in a building full of hanging carcasses? Is white the habit of regarding animals as objects? Is her promise that no one will hurt the dog anymore where he is going anything but empty?

The shelter director recognizes that Hagen has seen her. Both the dog’s look and her look are open to interpretation, but I interpret her look as that of shame for the mistreatment of dogs by other humans, and shame, because of her own part in ranking dogs on the basis of human acceptability. Is her sympathy for the dog during its last moments different than the two old men an invisible dog showed leading their cows over the crosswalk to their slaughterhouse ends? These two cows were personally accompanied to their deaths, instead of simply dropped off en masse. Yet, their haunches will be interchangeable with those already anonymously hanging on meat hooks. While the pound director tries to save dogs, she still generalizes, is willing to sacrifice some to save others, is stuck in

the impasse of sympathy. Pity, although a move beyond indifference, is still not going to change the situation of the massive number of strays in Budapest's streets due to the white god's indifference.

The anthropomorphized cat looks back at dead dogs seeing, sitting and at a human audience seeing. Hagen looks back at Tom and looks back at the shelter director, who is not as flat a character as the dog seller, for instance. She does give Hagen a second chance. Normally, she maintains her distance, a strict, business-like arbiter of canine value. She seems to see herself as a savior, berating Lili, who comes to see if Hagen is at the shelter, for abandoning her dog. She "kills" Hagen three times in words, after which he "rises again" as a beast. The first time, she tells Lili that a dog on the streets has no chance of still being alive after a number of weeks. Never shown with glasses, she pretends that she cannot clearly see the picture on Lili's "lost dog" flyer. In a sense, she does not see Hagen clearly. He is just another stray dog, one more problem for her to deal with. With only so much funding and space, she culls the pack into those she deems more likely to be adopted, that is those that fit nicely into the human idea of canine possession, the cute, the friendly, the docile, the nonthreatening. Hagen becomes a specific problem for her when he lunges at the hand of the girl looking to adopt a stray. His uncontrolled behavior destabilizes her authority and therefore also hurts the chances of all the other dogs she has deemed "adoptable." Like the animal trainer who can not grasp that Max would come back to kill him, since the animal trainer somehow felt a connection despite his abuse of Hagen/Max, the shelter director seems personally affronted by the actions of a dog whom she had shown pity/mercy in letting him live despite his leg wound. Hers is a practical approach, and, the narrator shows, a defensive approach of "false witnessing." Hers is a White God approach—all business, vengeful god, or, with the dogs she puts down "the merciful approach of 'benevolent dominion'" (Kao 2014, p. 750). She still treats the dogs as objects that only have value if "fit for consumption" (here: adoption). While she pities those that are not, her pity does nothing to change the status quo of white god over dog.

### 13. Wild "Eastern" Stare-off

After the cartoon/euthanasia scene, Hagen is returned to the kennel. Hagen's response to associating the piece of music Lili had played him in order to soothe him with his uncomfortable witnessing of another dog's euthanasia is to stop eating. When he stops eating, he also stops engaging with and connecting with others. In the next cage, Marlene, the terrier from "dogland" looks at Hagen and wags her tail; Hagen does not respond, is indifferent to the terrier's attempted engagement. In the next scene in which potential adopters walk along outside kennels, his warning to be left alone is misinterpreted by a young woman seeking to adopt a shelter dog. By barking and lunging defensively at the fingers put into his cage by this young woman, he is simply expressing his choice. Like Lili, who had told her father that "I don't want a dog" when they reconcile and he suggests they go to the pound to adopt a dog, Hagen does not want "a girl." (At this point in the film, not even the companionship of a girl dog.) He is done trusting humans to treat him with respect. He did not immediately lose trust; even after Lili's father threw him out of the car, he licks the animal control officer's hand, who says surprised, "he doesn't hate us!" (*White God* 0:36:09). He has learned, however, to respond to his repeated objectification by treating humans as humans treat him—as objects to control. He targets specifically those who have hurt him. To the others, both he and the "pack" are shown to be indifferent.<sup>10</sup>

After the pound director yells at Hagen, "Have you gone mad? It's over. This is the end!" (*White God*), Hagen is led away by a pound employee to join the other dogs who will be killed. At the door of the cage the man has opened, Hagen slips out of his "noose." Unlike Marlene, who acts similarly whether she wears her rope leash or not, the "free" Hagen acts like the "captive" Hagen, the Hagen

<sup>10</sup> If humans are in the way of the pack, the dogs will simply run them down as if they weren't even there. The few times the narrator shows the dogs "attacking" random pedestrians, the dogs grab things (garden hoses, bags), not people.

who learns to see humans who control him as the enemy, an enemy who teaches him to bite the necks of those he fights. The narrator shows us both the employee's perspective of a snarling, fang-revealing animal in the defensive position, as well as Hagen's view of the employee's scared, defensive face. Both share a look, but Hagen only attacks the pound employee when this man yells at Hagen to "back off" and whips at him. Hagen rejects cages and he rejects obeying. He had given the white god a chance, but the white god refused to respond in any other way but by attacking him physically. Hagen responds in kind, and attacks as he has been taught to attack by biting "Just the neck! The neck!" (*White God*). In contrast to his reaction after the dog fight, Hagen looks at the man's body without empathy, the bloody piece of the man's neck in his mouth, seemingly becoming the picture of terrifying animality, becoming exactly that which the pound employee had feared. Yet, fear for his own life, lead both the pound employee and Hagen to attack the other as they do. It is not personal, yet; this is not revenge for revenge's sake. Hagen then looks at those in the cage, who begin to come out, and turns to leave the pound. Before he escapes, however, Hagen and the pound director share another moment.

Of all his victims, only this woman does not get a look accompanied by snarling fang-displaying growls and raised hackles. Hagen shakes himself as if shaking off the blood from the last encounter and calmly stops to look at the woman across the water trench between them. The pound director looks back. Perhaps she is trying to stare him into submission, but she realizes that she is not in control. Her twitching hand belies her calm; she is scared. Yet, even in her fear she seems to pity him again, his fight to survive in the world of the white god. He then looks quizzically at her, cocking his head twice, in an attitude humans typically like to read as "cute"<sup>11</sup>, initiating a connection perhaps. Yet, this seems so incongruous here. He has just shaken off the blood. Without the cocked ears and head, Hagen looked like a mean dog viciously looking at the pound director. Yet, he then cocks his ears and tilts his head. Viewers have grown to read this as the cute look of an anthropomorphized dog. It is a look that is often shared and interpreted in a dog-human pet relationship, in which the human interprets the cocked ears and slight head tilt as proof of the adorableness and/or the manipulative charm of a dog who knows how to control his/her human. [Hecht and Horowitz \(2015\)](#) cite a 2013 study that revealed how "a picture of a floppy-eared dog led the dog to be rated higher on 'Agreeableness' and 'Emotional stability'" (p. 161). The look is clearly elicited by the trainer beyond the camera. Yet, the narrator uses it here not, to destabilize the image of "animality" which he has just become as well as the image of the "readable cute pet" often assumed when a dog cocks his head. Hagen has repeated this throughout the film, when he wishes to initiate a conversation. However, like the shelter employee, the pound director, is unable or unwilling to renegotiate with him.

He gives her, like he does all of his victims, the possibility of a connection before pouncing. Yet, this look is different than the look he gave the dead body in the street and the dead body in the dog fight. It is almost as if he is mimicking the look of sympathy, the look of pity. Is he mocking her? Is he pitying her as she has pitied the dog she euthanized? Or is the viewer falling precisely into the anthropomorphizing trap that the film both uses and criticizes? I argue that this look does that—it manipulates the viewer into anthropomorphizing, into simplifying, into naming the dog's emotions to make sense of the preceding violence. Most viewers have probably been rooting for Hagen, want to protect him, want the happy end. Yet, after this line-crossing, can we continue to do so? Or has he irrevocably joined the dark side of "beast?" Can we reconcile cute and friendly with independent, self-protector? The narrator makes us look at how we read "dog," how we turn "dog" into readable "friend" and into evil, "beast," in short, it asks us to be cognizant of how we separate and simplify by naming. It asks us to see Hagen as a complex being, as much as it asks us to see the pound director as not just pure evil because of her "murders." It manipulates us into anthropomorphizing Hagen into

<sup>11</sup> [Hecht and Horowitz 2015](#) point out that, "[w]hen classifying dogs by breed, dog breeding organizations such as the American Kennel Club employ specific language to describe the requirements of each breed's physical appearance and often link physical appearance to temperament characteristics" (p. 255).

one who mimics and mirrors his human abusers in order to take canine human revenge. Yet, even as the narrator does this, it also keeps the viewer distanced enough from Hagen and the pack to be aware that she (and it) is anthropomorphizing Hagen's and then the pack's motivations. In so doing, however, the narrator clarifies the difference between pity and empathy. By having it look like Hagen is showing the pound director what it feels like to be the recipient of pity, the narrator also makes the viewer recognize how the film itself models this human tendency to "pity" in the *White God* rhetoric at the beginning and at the end in order to expose it. The viewer is torn into wanting Hagen to be "redeemable" and have his happy end, and recognizing that this is not going to happen. To deal with this recognition and this loss, do we turn him into the "beast" so that it is easier? In this sense, Péter (Károly Ascher), the boy Lili likes in the orchestra, was right when he tries to convince Lili to stay in the concert hall after the dogs have disrupted the concert that "You can't go out. They're rabid" (*White God*). This would be a way out of taking responsibility, of distancing ourselves, and making the individual dog invisible under the generic beast. If they are rabid, it is not their fault. No one is to blame. It happened to them, this "illness" where the familiar turns wild. Lili will not accept this. She still wants to save Hagen or at least connect with him before he is put to death. In her narrative, she can still save him. "I think they came because of me" (*White God*). For her, Hagen is still a pet who has a relationship with her despite weeks of being on the street. She is unwilling to see him as a beast. When the porter at the orchestra tries to prevent her from leaving the building by calling the dogs "Wild beasts!" Lili responds with "You're the beast!" (*White God*).

Interestingly, however, the pound director does not call Hagen a beast. The woman's hand twitches, and he has been trained to associate hands with human enemies. Hagen begins to run at her, not baring his fangs, but simply running at her and knocking her down. It is Hagen's version of "this is the end!" of the pound director's previous declaration after he had lunged at the girl who was considering adopting him. In other words, he has reached his tolerance limit with her behavior as much as she had reached hers with his behavior. The narrator has Hagen mirror the pound director's behavior to make the viewer recognize how differently similar behavior is interpreted if the actor is human or canine. Much like pound director had seemed indifferent to the fact that the body which she had just petted/killed is being put into a bag. Hagen, too, after their shared look, now seems indifferent towards her as the rest of the pedestrians who get in his way as he runs through the streets. However, she only yells at him as he starts to run toward her, not before. It is not even a command, but a powerless "You can't do that, you hear?" (*White God*)<sup>12</sup>, before he knocks her down from the white god position. His act of "mercy" is to spare her from a neck bite, but not from a stampede. He is in the white god position; he deems who lives and dies. He doesn't have a syringe masking as "benevolence;" nor does he wear a white coat of authority. He does, however, now seem to wear the "coat" of animality.

#### 14. Bridge to Animal

Ingold encourages us "to think of animate beings in the grammatical form of the *verb*. [...] Wherever and whenever we encounter them, humans are humaning, baboons are babooning, reindeer reindeering." He continues that "[h]umans, baboons and reindeer do not *exist*, but humaning, babooning and reindeering *occur*—they are ways of carrying on." (Ingold 2013, p. 21) And so Lili's "Stop! Stop! Come back! Stop! No, don't go! Come back!" (*White God*) to the terrier and "No!" (*White God*) to the animal control officer who shot the terrier was wrong. In a sense she was telling the dog to stop dogging so that she would protect herself from the animal control officer humaning. She stopped and witnessed both "carrying on" until the little dog could no longer carry on. The film, however, carries on and ends in the hybrid space of dogging, humaning, and godding. In this last space, Lili's

<sup>12</sup> In one sense she is right, a dog "cant' do that"—that is attack humans if s/he wants to be accepted in this human dominated society.

“No! Dad, stop it! Enough! All of you!” (*White God*) works, but not because she commands it, but rather because she doesn’t respond in (defensive—barking, snarling, shouting, flame throwing) kind, but by playing her trumpet. This unexpected reaction causes 251 dogs and one man to stop, to listen, to look, and to feel. It is a pausing to look at the other dogging and humaning and to hear the birding going on. Everyone including the moving camera “carries on” in this shot. And this is the point of the film: to “narrate” both humaning and dogging to the best of its godding ability. As Ingold explains, “to move forward, in real time, along with the multiple and heterogenous becomings with which we share our world, in an active and ongoing exploration of the possibilities that our common life can open up. And just as in life, becoming continually overtakes being” (Ingold 2013, p. 21).

Kao argues that “[t]hose seeking to change (and not simply interpret) the status quo must think carefully about how to inspire others to action” (Kao 2014, p. 746). *White God* attempts to inspire its viewers to action, to rethink their own relationships with animals in general, but specifically with dogs, and more specifically with stray dogs. It “examin[es] our assumptions about who the knowing subject can be” (Wolfe 2009, p. 571), shows “communication, response, and exchange” (ibid) between species. Lili plays the trumpet, communicates not through language but through music with Hagen, who howls/barks in “response.” They then exchange a silent look; this shared, nonverbal gaze is a shared space, a close distance as it were, a shared separateness. This is repeated as we, the audience of the film, watch via an invisible dog perspective individual dogs from the “pack” sit down. We, too, are invited into this space. Like the father, we have a choice. The “pack” of dogs stares at the “pack” of humans.

Through its pluralized yet individualized gaze, the narrator reminds viewers that “modern publics are necessarily animal publics” (Blue and Rock 2014, p. 504). “In the twenty-first century world, interaction, not hierarchical separation, is what enables living together” (Huff and Haefner 2012, p. 165). Although the film ends in a place not of living together, but a place in which animals are brought to die together, it shows the place as a Harawayian “living room” (p. 66).

In the space of “the intersecting gaze” (Huff and Haefner 2012, p. 166), Lili finds a bridge to the dog she used to know, but whom she realizes that does not know. In hearing it, he finds a bridge to the girl he used to know, but who is also different that the girl who had a pet. Lili does not see Hagen as a part of her anymore. After a moment of seeing Hagen as “beast,” she sees the individual dog before her, but one from whom she is now distanced. He is both familiar and unfamiliar. In this way, Lili sees a Hagen who is neither beast nor pet, but a complex, independent living being whom she not just loves as a former dependent but now also respects. In a sense, she proves to Hagen at the end what she had promised him when both sat on the hill and observed an old man training his dog to sit and to stay, namely that she would not treat him as a possession.

Lili moves from the benevolent ownership paradigm in which she feels she must speak for Hagen, to an acceptance of Hagen as an independent actor who does not “need” her and whose motives she may not understand. Her act of playing music to provide an alternative soundscape to the defensive barking and shouting is a leap of faith into empathy and the way she initiates a conversation with this unfamiliar dog who will not play the “good dog”, will not “fetch”. She hopes not for a reprisal of the bathroom scene in which she and Hagen are on the same side and she plays benevolent owner to a beloved pet, but rather for the possibility of communicating on equal terms with this independent Hagen who is part stranger.

When she first sees Hagen in the courtyard, the frightened Lili tries to be in control. She scolds Hagen, “What have you done?” (*White God*). Neither scolding, nor pretending that everything is the same, by throwing a stick and expecting Hagen to be a “[g]ood dog. Fetch! Why are you staring like that? Fetch the stick!” (*White God*) works. Finally, she negotiates with Hagen, asking him to see her: “Hagen, it’s me. It’s me, Hagen!” (*White God*). She asks him to see and recognize her as the individual Lili with whom he once lived. In so doing she is “letting go the lead, drawing closer, apprenticing herself to animal ways of being and knowing” (Fraiman 2012, p. 98). She draws closer not in terms of bridging the physical gap that remains between them. In a sense, this scene reviews Hagen’s different



“incarnations”—the controllable pet, the uncontrollable beast, and finally political partner in the animal public. In responding to the music as Hagen and not as a beast, Hagen takes his subjecthood back from the plurality the label of animality forced upon him. He is not the product of human abuse. He is not the product of human benevolence. He is an agent, not an object. Lili tries to “shame” Hagen with her look and her voice, but is shamed by his look and his growl. But both keep looking, extend their gazes to move beyond shaming, beyond fearing, beyond pitying. The dog trainer had picked Hagen from a room full of street dogs for sale because “You’ve still got a heart” (*White God*) and then tried to turn him into a monster. Whereas the beast is heartless machine, the dog who sits at the end still has heart, despite everything, where heart is the ability to empathize.

The statements about dogs and animals made in the opening credits bridge into the fictional world by being the first example in a series of animal representations provided by the film. It links the dogs in the real world to the dogs in the film. These dogs whom we see seeing at the end of the film, are again linked to the outside world by the ending credits in which these dogs are named and represented. If we watch the film to the end, how we read these statements that refer back to the dogs both in and out of the film is informed by what we have witnessed in the film. How can one credit the dogs in the film respectfully? Does calling the “pack” dogs “our dog friends” and the “professional dog actors” “our dog colleagues” patronize them or level the playing ground? Does pointing out that these colleagues are owned problematic? The fact that the title of the film is in white font on a black screen like the credits seems to indicate an awareness that the whole film is in the end a product of the white god, even if the white god narrator attempts to imagine how dogs might experience the world narrated in the film. It is a product for consumption by humans and nonhumans (should they be interested in looking or be in the vicinity of a human watching it and hearing its sounds) in which humans manipulated dogs into performing in front of the camera and manipulated the images of dogs through editing to create a performance readable in human terms. It has, however, shown how humans simply assume authority over animals, but by destabilizing the assumption that this is the only way to relate to animals it at least makes visible that “we fail to see the animal’s behavior on its own terms, because we have defined the term” (McLean 2014, p. 13) and that “in commercial cinema, they are characters in our stories not theirs” (McLean 2014, p. 13). *White God*’s narrator insists, however, that their stories and our stories while not the same are interrelated and that our relationship with dogs could evolve as it has “over millennia” (ibid, p. 11). The dogs in the film did not decide to make a film in which dogs play a significant role. However, the dogs co-created it not just in performing on command, but also in being dogs and therefore unpredictable. Mundruczó admits to using dogs as a metaphor for current human hierarchical social relations. At the same time, however, he found that in working with dogs he had to change his own methods of directing. Working with dogs was “a shooting process where we had to adjust to them and no the other way around”. By being themselves, especially the nonprofessional dog performers “bring a kind of indeterminate *otherness* into the frame, the otherness of the non-manipulable. Animals in feature films are thus always to some degree ‘troubling’, as they break through the falsely protective aura of the image, the aura that rules out the accidental and the unintentional” (Sheehan 2008, p. 122). The narrator does not “erase” the unintentional. There are plenty of shots in which the dogs are clearly looking either at their trainers or not at the object or person they are supposedly interested in in the film world. Examples are the five dogs “watching” the Tom and Jerry cartoon as well as, wonderfully, a black dog at the top right of the screen behind Hagen in the scene at the end who calls attention to him/herself by not lying quietly and attentively looking at Lili. In *White God* specifically, and in film in general, animals have a “rupturing effect, both in terms of the way it unavoidably points beyond itself to wider issues in its capacity to resist or problematize its own meanings on screen” (Burt 2002, p. 13). The film’s narrator uses “animal imagery [that] does not merely reflect human-animal relations and the position of animals in human culture, but is also used to change them.” (p. 15) Burt continues that the “transformative aspect” implicit in an animal on screen “reveals broader cultural tensions and anxieties about our current treatment of animals” and in *White God* the current treatment of other humans as well.

## 15. Conclusions

Recalling the tale in which members of Plato's Academy ended up defining man as "a wingless biped" and then being mocked by Diogenes who having plucked the feathers off a chicken" threw it in their midst as a representative of "man," Danta and Vardoulakis argue that the violence toward the chicken "becomes a primal scene of the human-animal relation—and thus a scene that is repressed" (Danta and Vardoulakis 2008, p. 3). They continue that "philosophers [and other writers and thinkers and artists] have not [...] shied away from defining the human in opposition to other animals. In a fable that is no longer fabulous, human being constitutes itself through a definite violence against the animal" (ibid). This scene is often carried out behind closed doors—whether in the slaughterhouse, the pound, and illegal spaces like dogfights—and it is this scene in its variations that the film *White Dog* focuses upon, albeit with dogs and cows, not chickens. Although the narrator presents a pessimistic view of current animal-human (and human-human) relations, it does offer the possibility of an alternative scene, one in which non-human animals and human animals redefine this relationship together. Indeed, it posits that dogs, like humans, should be considered "political animal[s]," (ibid) in terms of having a voice in shaping the organization and institutions of the modern metropolis, which in *White God* becomes the site of reconsidering the constructions of Budapest's urban order. Instead of the "human political animals" "avert[ing] their gaze from (and so derogate[ing]) the alternative sociality of nonhuman animals" (ibid), the narrator suggests that human sociality could be improved by seeing and listening to the "animals" who share the urban social space. Instead of trying to deny the animal presence in the modern city like Budapest, the narrator insists on making the animal, specifically, the street dog, visible and audible. It reminds the viewer that "the animal", that is the living, forceful, uncontained, and unknowable other, is not absent, but very much a part of the city's public space. Instone and Sweeney feel that "[i]n many regards, dogs offer new ways of being in public" (Instone and Sweeney 2014, p. 774). They "suggest that dogs themselves are agents in the making of publics and public space and that dog bodies constitute a non-speech, non-text form of public address that calls attention to them as a sort of animal public" (p. 776).

The narrator gives the invisible dogs it makes visible and audible space to relate with each other and with us. In a sense, it "trusts" them to just be and to see, and for us to see them being and seeing, or as Haraway explains, it "cares" about them, where "[c]aring means becoming subject to the unsettling obligation of curiosity, which requires knowing more at the ending of the day than at the beginning" (Haraway 2008, p. 36). The final scene, in this space normally indicating finality—the *abbatoir*—becomes a space of curiosity and caring. And while "[c]uriosity gets one into thick mud" according to Haraway, it also "is the kind of 'looking back' and 'becoming with companions' that might matter in making autre-mondialisations more possible" (Haraway 2008, p. 38). It might even begin with a quizzical look from the cocked head of an unfamiliar dog.

The spectators do not witness this mass killing at the end; instead we are left listening to birds and seeing in a bird's eye view the dogs looking at the human girl looking at Hagen and the father also lying down in front of the dogs and next to his daughter looking at his daughter. No *deus ex machina* will appear from the sky to save the dogs in the *abbatoir*. But the father, the original "White God" of the film tells the white coated slaughterhouse foreman who sleeps near his meat to pause, to wait, to postpone the destruction of these dogs, "to give them [Hagen and Lili, the 250 other dogs] a little more time" (*White God*).

It's not much, but it's a start; a start in a public space that for non-humans at least is associated with a dead-end.

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