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EXPLORING THE EVERYDAY COHABITATIONS OF HUMANS AND URBAN ANIMALS ... Bilkent University 2022

EXPLORING THE EVERYDAY
COHABITATIONS OF HUMANS AND
URBAN ANIMALS THROUGH THE
ECODOCUMENTARIES OF ISTANBUL

A Master's Thesis

by
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To Süleyman & Sinan

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The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
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JUNE 2022

EXPLORING THE EVERYDAY COHABITATIONS OF HUMANS AND URBAN
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by Medine Ezgi Altınöz

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ABSTRACT

EXPLORING THE EVERYDAY COHABITATIONS OF HUMANS AND URBAN ANIMALS THROUGH THE ECODOCUMENTARIES OF ISTANBUL

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M.A., Media and Visual Studies

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June 2022

This thesis examines three documentaries about street animals of Istanbul—*Taşkafa: Stories of the Street* (2013), *Kedi* (2016), *Stray* (2020)—belonging to the ecodocumentary genre. With particular emphasis on critical posthumanist and new materialist theories and concepts—especially Donna Haraway’s “companion species,” “naturecultures,” and the “Chthulucene,” Jane Bennett’s “vibrant matter,” Rosi Braidotti’s “nomadic ethics,” as well as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s “becoming-animal”—it employs a close reading of the narratives and aesthetics of the chosen documentaries in terms of the human-urban animal relations and interactions depicted in them. Through the selected theoretical lenses, this study identifies the ways in which the distinctive and entangled lives of humans and urban felines-canines are played out in the

cultural and historical contexts of Istanbul, as well as how and to what extent the dominant human gaze towards animals in visual culture is subverted in these documentaries. This thesis concludes that the modernist urge to gentrify urban cities by removing the urban street animals has been challenged in these documentaries, by portraying Istanbul as a composite zoe-centered terrain.

Keywords: companion species, critical posthumanism, ecodocumentaries, human-urban animal relations, new materialism

ÖZET

İNSAN VE KENT HAYVANLARININ GÜNDELİK BİRLİKTE-YAŞAMLARININ İSTANBUL EKOBELGESELLERİ ÜZERİNDEN İNCELENMESİ

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Yüksek Lisans ,Medya ve Görsel Çalışmalar

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Bu tez, İstanbul'un sokak hayvanları hakkında eko-belgesel türüne ait olan *Taşkafa: Sokak Hikayeleri* (2013), *Kedi* (2016) ve *Stray* (2020) adlı üç belgeseli incelemektedir. Eleştirel posthümanist ve yeni materyalist kavram ve konseptlerin—özellikle Donna Haraway'in “yoldaş türler,” “doğakültürler,” ve “Chthulusen” konseptleri ile Jane Bennett'in “canlı maddesi,” ve Rosi Braidotti'nin “göçebe ahlakı,” aynı zamanda Gilles Deleuze ve Félix Guattari'nin “hayvan-oluşu”—üzerinde durularak bu tezde, insan ve kent hayvanları ilişkileri ve etkileşimleri bağlamında seçilen belgesellerin anlatıları ve estetiği üzerine detaylı bir okuma uygulanmaktadır. Bu çalışma, seçilen kuramsal mercekler aracılığıyla, İstanbul'un kültürel ve tarihsel bağlamlarında

insanların ve kentli kedi-köpeklerin özgün ve birbirine dolanmış yaşamlarının bu belgesellerde nasıl anlatıldığını, aynı zamanda görsel kültürde hayvanlara yönelik egemen insan bakışının nasıl ve ne ölçüde altüst edildiğini analiz eder. Bu tez, bu belgesellerin, kenti kompozit ve zoe-merkezli bir yer olarak tasvir edip, sokak hayvanlarını ortadan kaldırarak şehirleri insanlara mahremleştirmeye yönelik olan modernist dürtüye meydan okuduğu sonucuna varır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: ekobelgeseller, eleştirel posthümanizm, insan ve kent hayvanları ilişkileri, yeni materyalizm, yoldaş türler

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

To think-with is to
stay with the naturalcultural multispecies trouble on earth.
(Donna J. Haraway, 2016)

1.1. Aims and Objectives

It is high time we, humans, professed generous attention to the non-human world surrounding us, flourishing in us, and changing us. It is high time we expanded our “we” to a more-than-human compass. Starting with the ones closest to us might be a good beginning. Hence, this thesis grants its concern to the street animals of Turkey which have continuously been subjected as a problem—a danger and a burden on society’s shoulders since the beginning of modernization. Serving as a potential mirror of the co-habitation of humans and urban animals on Istanbul’s streets, the documentaries—*Taşkafa: Stories of the Street* (Andrea Luka Zimmerman, 2013), *Kedi* (Ceyda Torun, 2016), and *Stray* (Elizabeth Lo, 2020)—are the objects of inquiry in this thesis.

*Taşkafa*¹, a documentary and essay film by Andrea Luka Zimmerman, intricately connects the relationships between Istanbul street dogs and people to particular issues related to memory, belonging, and remembering. *Taşkafa* is the debut feature-length film of the director, through which she ties the historical presence of the dogs and people with the present-day co-habitation in Istanbul. Bringing to the fore the empathetic relations people form with the stray dogs of Istanbul through its interviews, the documentary also aims to picture how those dogs can bring together people from diverse backgrounds. *Taşkafa* also includes an intertextual element in its narrative, *King: A Street Story* by John Berger. Berger himself narrates the voice-over by reading particular passages from his novel, and adds an ambiguous layer to the documentary narrative. The novel is about a dog named King and its closely-knit community of homeless people, and it is told from the dog's perspective. Zimmerman admits that it was this novel that prompted her to make a film about the dogs of Istanbul since she was genuinely touched by the novel's questioning of dreaming about co-existence (Lebow, 2016).

*Kedi*², a documentary movie by Ceyda Torun released in 2016, is the debut long-feature film of the director, as well. The movie focuses on seven cats in Istanbul, namely Sarı, Duman, Bengü, Psikopat, Deniz, Gamsız, and Aslan Parçası. The movie consists of interviews with people closely connected to these cats, and with people who are famous for their creative work about cats, such as the visual artist Elif Nurşad Atalay and *Kötü Kedi Şerafettin*'s creator, caricaturist Bülent Üstün. Between these interviews, *Kedi* also portrays other cats of Istanbul showing their particular ways of

¹ *Taşkafa* premiered at Istanbul Film Festival in 2013.

² *Kedi* premiered at If Istanbul Film Festival in 2016.

living in the city. As the Guardian reviewer Simran Hans puts it, *Kedi* goes beyond the cute kitty portraits, and captures the audience in terms of “both the spiritual and the practical relationship the animals have with the community that comes into daily contact with them, looking at gentrification, pest control, everyday companionship, and the idea that a cat can absorb a human’s excess energy” (2017). The documentary, along with its international acclaim³, can also be argued to have paved the way for the cultural portrait of Istanbul overflowed with urban free-ranging felines.

*Stray*⁴ was also the first feature-length film of the director Elizabeth Lo. Released in 2020, the documentary traces three stray dogs in Istanbul, namely Zeytin, Nazar, and Kartal, from their height. Appalled by Turkey’s no-kill and no-capture policy on stray animals, Lo portrays these dogs with their unrestrained yet interconnected lives with refugee children on Istanbul’s streets. Like its thematic companion *Kedi*, David Sterritt calls for more commentary and review for *Stray*, as it would have “deepened and strengthened the film” (2022). Sterritt also puts a note saying, “Doctoral dissertations will surely be written about the recurring combination of free-ranging animals, low-slung cameras, and Istanbul” (2022).

This thesis analyzes these documentaries which share a similar theme and setting by portraying the lives of street animals in Istanbul, in an attempt to question and scrutinize the everyday life interrelations of humans and urban animals in this particular setting. The documentaries in question are analyzed by classifying their

³ *Kedi* became a winner in multiple festivals, such as *Atlanta Film Critics Circle* (2017), *Critics’ Choice Documentary Awards* (2017), *North Carolina Film Critics Associations* (2018), and *Sidewalk Film Festival* (2016).

⁴ Premiered at Tribeca Film Festival in New York, *Stray* is an award winner in the category of Best International Documentary at *Hot Doc Canadian International Documentary Festival* (2020) and won the best cinematography award at *Millenium Docs Against Gravity* (2021). It became a nominee at other film and documentary festivals around the world.

particular thematic concerns, comparing their techniques, discussing their voices, and scrutinizing their portrayals of empirical animals and humans. To achieve this aim, this thesis employs Donna Haraway's formulations of "companion species" (2016a) and the "Chthulucentric" "world-" and "kin-makings" (2016b) in the relevant discussions revolving around the inter-species relations and practices in the chosen documentaries. In this thesis, a crucial concentration is also given to the portrayals of the agency of urban animals in a tight discussion according to the theories of non-human animal agency and Jane Bennett's new materialist understandings of this concept, such as "vibrant matter" and "distributive agency" (2010). In light of these analyses, this thesis examines the participatory relations of humans and urban animals in these documentaries by arguing that they can be resonated with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of "becoming-animal" (1987) and Rosi Braidotti's "becoming-nomadic" (2011).

1.2. Situating Urban Animals in Ecocinema Studies

Cats and dogs, with their cinematicity, allurement, and utmost proximity to human lives, have become increasingly spotlighted in digital and social media. Naming this uprise the "cat renaissance" of the recent years, *Kedi*'s director Torun admits that it was this huge interest that led the way to convince the financiers of their documentary (Kao, 2017, para. 8). Despite this enlarging interest in watching companion animals, there remains a serious research gap considering the place of street cats and dogs specifically in media studies. This gap might exist due to the fact that the realms of media studies and critical animal studies are gaining significance in the Western academia, though in these Western settings, urban companion animals—especially cats and dogs—live scarcely outside the household. Correspondingly, existing studies

in terms of companion animals and their representation in media do not offer a classification of pet and stray states of companion animals⁵. In this thesis, this classification is crucial to be made considering the different lives of pet and stray animals ubiquitously found in Istanbul's streets, shops, bazaars, restaurants, undergrounds, outskirts, and construction sites, as also witnessed in the documentaries under scrutiny.

Ecocinema studies have emerged along with ecocritical scholarship, over the past two decades, with initial works setting this field after the mid-1990s (Chu, 2017). While this field of study can cover fictional films in the genres such as science fiction and horror, as well as animation, the primary corpus of this field leans towards the documentary genre considering its "certain generic conventions" of portraying the world from a non-fictional perspective, which potentially "facilitate the conveyance of eco-messages more effectively than others" (Chu, 2017). Within this particular genre, the environmental problems regarding climate change, meat consumption, pollution, toxicity, and animal extinction have become the major thematic concerns.

The problem-addressing narratives of the ecodocumentaries can clash with television/mainstream wildlife/nature documentaries, whose concerns are capturing nature as well, yet not always through a problem-driven and ethical perspective. These television documentaries, as documentary and film studies scholar Derek Bousé states, "has become increasingly ratings-driven, and therefore reliant on formulaic, dramatic narratives that continue to blur the lines between fact, reconstruction, 'infotainment,' and fiction Wildlife documentaries" (1998, p. 116).

⁵ Studies on news media coverage of domestic (pet) animals during COVID 19 (Hooper, et.al. 2021), the study on media attention on obese pets (Degrling & Rock, 2012), cultural intermediation on "petworking" (Hutchinson, p. 2014) could be some examples for this claim.

Furthermore, “The ‘nature’ presented by nature documentaries is almost always a nature that is ‘out there’: a nature populated by animals engaged in the ‘struggle for life’ or something of the sort,” as Adrian J. Ivakhiv notes (2013, p. 206). This positioning of nature as “out there,” then, sustains nature’s dichotomic separation from culture, by manifesting an isolated environment from human settlements, also through, at times, “fake” representations of the filmed environment and animals (Ivakhiv, 2013, p. 206). The ecocritical perspective on ecodocumentaries, on the other hand, conceptualizes the environment in an entangled interconnection with culture, as the editors of *Ecocinema Theory and Practice* (2013) Stephen Rust and Salma Monani carefully mark:

From an ecocritical perspective, environment is not just the organic world, or the laws of nature to which Kant counterposed the powers of human reason in the struggle for freedom, or that Nature from which Marx thought we were condemned to wrest our survival; it is the whole habitat which encircles us, the physical world entangled with the cultural (p. 1).

Considering the environment is not a separate entity from humans and culture, even urban settings can be rendered from an ecological and environmental perspective. As such, Robin L. Murray’s and Joseph K. Heumann’s collaborative book *Ecocinema and the City* (2018) sheds light on the possibility of studying films even shot in the utmost humanized terrains from an ecocritical perspective. While this book’s essays cover a generous amount of ecocritical issues in cities, such as underground myths, urban eco-trauma, zoos, birdwatching, city gardens and parks, as well as sustainability, there still remains a gap in studying the urban environment concerning stray animals in the cities’ daily settings.

Also found in this book, *White God* (Kornél Mundruczó, 2014), a fictional drama film portraying the abandoned and mixed breed dogs on the streets of Budapest gained

scholarly attention in terms of its portraying the human-animal relations empathetically (Pleasant, 2017), and addressing the issues of eco-trauma which is also affecting non-human animals (Murray and Heumann, 2018). However, as Murray and Heumann point out, the film portrays “one mixed breed dog’s responses to a lifeless urban environment” after being abandoned by his companion (2018, p. 80). This film can be considered as one of the attempts at pointing out the classification between pet and stray animals in the recent European context by portraying the trauma the formerly-pet dog experiences. Yet, the movie falls short in comprehensively covering street-born urban animals, thus the scholarly work on this film neither bears this distinction.

This thesis aims to discuss the particular urban setting of Istanbul bearing vital and lively entanglements of the lives of humans and urban animals through the chosen documentaries, instead of the traumatic, apocalyptic, and threatening consequences that the Anthropocene brings over nature that most ecocinema scholarships tend to focus on. This is not to say that they are insignificant, in fact, these foci of the ecocritical inquiry enable a great awareness of the environmental decay that we should all be concerned about. Yet, an intricate lens into the human-companion animal relations outside the household is needed to generate concern and awareness for the lives of street animals in Turkey or other countries with significant urban animal populations. In other words, in the crucial and comprehensive corpus of ecocritical scholarship, these particular relations with stray animals should also be granted further attention, merely because they exist.

A relevant consideration of the situations of urban animals in Istanbul is put into context by the close examination of the documentary *Kedi* in the book: *Kedi: A Docalogue* (Baron and Fuhs, 2021). In this book, the documentary is analyzed from multiple perspectives. Benjamin Schultz-Figueroa situates *Kedi* in the ecocinema genre and classifies other similar documentaries like *Sweetgrass* (2009), *Nénette* (2010), *Leviathan* (2012), and *Bestiaire* (2012) as the “archetypal examples of ecocinema’s entryway into the world beyond the human” (2021, p. 8). For him, *Kedi*’s belonging in this genre is closely knit to its portraying “vanishing animals, threatened environments, or rapidly changing human/nature relationships,” specifically the “threatened community of stray cats and the people who love them” (2021, p. 9). In light of his argument, *Taşkafa* and *Stray* can also be categorized as ecodocumentary practices considering their similar concerns. Yiman Wang offers a comparative analysis between *Taşkafa* and *Kedi* arguing that “each film differently engages with pressing issues related to the human/non-human relationship as well as the limits of Foucauldian governmentality and environmentality in the Capitalocene” (Fuhs, 2021, p. 2). Paul N. Reinsch closely analyzes the musicality of Istanbul through *Kedi*’s selection of songs and original soundtrack, arguing that the documentary offers a “city symphony of Istanbul” (2021, p. 48). Melis Behlil situates *Kedi* between national and local, scrutinizing the documentary’s political messages and contexts. While Chris Cagle, going in-depth about the distribution of *Kedi*, argues that the documentary can be classified as a “crossover documentary” which is qualified as “popular art cinema” and defined “by the nexus of documentary aesthetics, cultural legitimacy, and distribution strategy” (2021, p. 78). The epilogue of the book offers an interview with Ceyda Torun conducted by one of the book’s editors Kristen Fuhs.

While the book in itself covers almost any aspect of the documentary, in this thesis I offer other perspectives on it by closely analyzing both its anthropomorphic aspects and its resonances with Haraway's companion species. By also integrating the other two ecodocumentaries, this thesis also brings to the fore the gaze of animals and its close connotations to non-human agency in light of Bennett's ideas, as well as another aspect of human-animal relations in and beyond their narratives from a Deleuze-Guattarian view of becoming-animal. These discussions offer comparisons among the three documentaries under question, and contribute a further discussion, especially on Wang's comparison between *Kedi* and *Taşkafa*, with the inclusion of *Stray*.

In order to situate the theme of urban animals in ecocinema studies, it is also required to outline how these animals are portrayed in the movies. For this, I discuss the employment of the animal gaze in the selected documentaries. Non-human animal gaze in the intersections of film studies and critical animal studies has found its relevance across various theories of John Berger, Jacques Derrida, Jonathan Burt, and Cary Wolfe, to name a few. Berger's (1980) foundational essay "Why Look at Animals?" has dealt with animal imagery and the disappearance of animals from everyday life as a result of capitalism and rapid urbanization. Accordingly, empirical animals are replaced by images (including the establishments of zoos, stuffed animals, and animal representations in Disney) which have emerged a cross-species alienation. However, the way he contests animal imagery in his essay has been subject to criticism by Steve Baker (2013), Jonathan Burt (2005), and Anat Pick (2010). Baker looks at the limitation of Berger's question of "why" instead of "how" humans look at animals (2013, p. 23) Burt in his close reading of Berger's essay comes to a

conclusion that the essay is in fact humanist, and over-simplifies pre-industrial contexts (Burt, 2005, p. 208). The human-centeredness in writing about the animal gaze also applies to Derrida's famous essay "The Animal That Therefore I Am,"⁶ as Haraway puts it: "he did not seriously consider an alternative form of engagement [...], one that risked knowing something more about cats and *how to look back*, perhaps even scientifically, biologically, and *therefore* also philosophically and intimately" (2008, p. 20, emphasis in original). Pick, while criticizing Berger's "ensorious attitude to images," connects the human gaze to the term "male gaze" as the "bearer of the look" coined by the feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey (2010). Accordingly, Pick suggests: "As a corrective to the male/humanist gaze, one can conceive of a range of alternative gazes: the female, queer, or the animal gaze" (Pick, 2010, para. 2).

Another consideration of the animal gaze addresses the hierarchy of senses in bodily sensorium, which is prone to differ in dissimilar organisms. As Kari Weil suggests, "to focus on the gaze of the animal and especially on that of an animal who looks at me is to remain within a humanistic tradition that values sight above all other senses and that identifies seeing with knowing" (Weil, 2012, p. 45). The vision as the highest of the senses of humans encloses the consideration of the animal gaze from a humanistic perspective. However, the moving picture's limitations make it almost inevitable to not concern the gaze of animals. As such, Burt makes clear,

⁶ Derrida's essay starts with his encounter with his in-house cat, through an eye-contact, while he is naked. In a deconstructive manner, Derrida then dives into a philosophical inquiry about animal otherness, especially the gaze of the animal by questioning if the particular cat is even aware of the concept of nudity for Derrida to become ashamed of. Derrida's work also enables us to question the category what we call "animals", or "cats" serving as a futile attempt in unionizing them under a roof, and to acknowledge the singularity of the animal individual. The essay then paves the way for questioning human uniqueness and subjectivity. However, the humanistic ground of the work still needs to be addressed in accordance with the form of the encounter with the animal other, one that entails a responsivity to the cat's way of interacting with the human.

The image of the animal's eye reflects the *possibility* of animal understanding by emphasizing animal sight. This does not mean that the eye gives any access to what is understood but it does signal the significant participation of the animal in the visual field (Burt, 2004, p. 71, emphasis in original).

It is only possible, then, to consider the camera's rendering of the animals' vision without anthropomorphizing the animal gaze by not equating vision to knowledge.

The moving image's limitations prove the impossibility to become non-anthropocentric in the present day, but the repositioning of the animal gaze "in a more general bodily sensorium" can be employed if it serves as a disruption of the dominant human gaze (Wolfe, 2003, p. 3). As such, the research questions of this thesis are as follows:

1. How do the narratives, aesthetics, and forms of *Taşkafa*, *Kedi*, and *Stray* depict the human-animal encounters, relations and interactions within the cultural and material context of Istanbul?
2. How and to what extent do these ecodocumentaries pose a disruption to the human gaze and all-too-human conventional narratives?

1.3. Methodological and Theoretical Foundations

This thesis employs a critical posthumanist and a new materialist perspective to find an answer to the above-mentioned research questions regarding the aforementioned documentaries, alongside particular contributions coming from the intersections of critical animal studies and film studies. These perspectives prove useful both as the theoretical foundation and the methodology of this thesis, since they, first and foremost, necessitate the displacement of the human from the very center of things.

Since Haraway's conceptual framework of companion species primarily puts dogs into significance—by justifying that they should be taken seriously—her manifesto is taken as a groundwork for this thesis. The methodological input provided by Haraway's conceptualization of companion species is that, in the consideration of human-animal relations, the agency of the animal is a constitutive force, and thus should be granted as much attention as the human counterpart. This thesis also employs more recent terms and concepts that Haraway provides such as “Chthulucene,” “becoming-with,” “living-with,” and “kin-making” to mobilize the human-animal relations in the documentaries from a philosophical grounding (2016b). The encounters with the vitality of urban animal life in the documentaries are analyzed as per Bennett's formulation of “vibrant matter” and “distributive agency” (2010). In this thesis, Bennett's concepts are employed as a methodology of new materialism in thinking through the intermingling relations between human and non-human agency. Lastly, this thesis offers a combinatory utilization of the notions coming from Deleuze-Guattari and Braidotti. By employing Deleuze-Guattarian “becoming” (1987) as a general principle of the mutative identities and entities, this thesis specifically provides an epitome for “becoming-animal/human/urban” by illustrating the relevant scenes and conditions from the documentaries in question. In the analyses of ethical and attentive transformations taking place in and beyond documentary narratives that stem from the close relations formed with the filmed animals, this thesis also deploys Braidotti's (2011) “nomadic ethics” and “becoming-nomadic” which calls for a type of responsibility that is materially and relationally embedded in the non-human world.

1.4. The Trajectory of the Thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters, the first of them being this introduction. In this chapter, I outline the aims, objectives, and corpus, along with a brief literature review that helps situate the documentaries in question within the recent studies of the eco-film genres, and highlight the significance of this research. The next chapter lays out the theoretical framework of this thesis by introducing and discussing the key concepts and notions from Donna Haraway (1988, 2008, 2016a; 2016b), Jane Bennett (2010), and Rosi Braidotti (2011), as well as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987).

The analytical chapters of this thesis begin with Chapter III in which I peruse the narratives of the documentaries, *Kedi*, *Taşkafa*, and *Stray*, by granting particular emphasis on Haraway's companion species, significant otherness, situated knowledges and multi-species response-ability, as well as her conceptualization of the Chthulucene. Chapter IV discusses how the agency of the animal performers in these documentaries is portrayed through their techniques of portraying and embodying the gazes of the animals, by merging the theories of animal agency and new materialist approaches to this concept, particularly of Bennett. Chapter V examines the intricate relations of humans and urban animals in these documentaries—also including the directors and the film crew of them—giving way to their reciprocal transformations and attentiveness to each other, by combining Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming-animal and Braidotti's concept of becoming-nomadic.

The last chapter aims to conclude these discussions by recapitulating their outcomes and providing hints at potential future studies. This final chapter also makes

suggestions for the ways in which the urban animals can be more attentively situated within the eco-philosophy of the moving image.

CHAPTER II

Towards A Non-anthropocentric Analysis: A Framework of Critical Posthumanism

2.1 Introduction

This chapter lays bare the theories that are crucial for understanding the components of critical posthumanities, critical animal studies and new materialisms and aims to generate a framework for the analyses of the selected documentaries—*Taşkafa*, *Kedi*, and *Stray*. The focus is on the theories of non-human agencies, human-animal relations, and the attempt at the disruption of the Cartesian hierarchical position of the human from the very center of phenomena. Each theory introduced in this chapter proves pertinent for the close reading of the documentaries in question, thus they do not only stand for a theoretical background but are also part of the methodology of this thesis.

Human-animal relations in critical discourses have long been studied in literary, media, artistic cartographies. Posthuman criticism and discourse in critical animal studies have given significance to the replacement of the binary oppositions—nature and culture, human and animal, human and non-human—with non-dualistic recognitions (Haraway, 2016a; Braidotti and Hlavajova, 2018). Cary Wolfe—a prominent figure in posthumanities and critical animal studies—notes that

posthumanism's grounding in contemporary critical animal discourse can be found in the 1990s (2010, p. 99). However, one can trace theoretical and conceptual developments grounding posthumanism back to the 1960s during which one genealogy of posthumanism—man and humanism—is questioned and denounced by Michel Foucault (1966) in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (Wolfe, 2010, p. xii). Further back, in the 1940s and 50s, the first debates about cybernetics were given in seminars by Gregory Bateson, Warren McCulloch, Norbert Wiener, John von Neumann, and many other scholars, whose debates indicate a questioning of human's singularity and privilege regarding biological, mechanical, technological spheres (Wolfe, 2010, p. xii).

As posthumanist English studies scholar Neil Badmington states: "Posthumanism marks a careful, ongoing, overdue rethinking of the dominant humanist (or anthropocentric) account of who 'we' are as human beings" (2011, p. 374). Critical posthumanism defines the posthuman as "within an eco-philosophy of multiple belongings, as a relational subject constituted in and by multiplicity, that is to say, a subject that works across differences and is also internally differentiated, but still grounded and accountable" (Braidotti, 2013, p.49). In other words, the posthuman is the displaced condition of the human from the very center of things, reconstructed against the Cartesian normative of the human, and a relational being/becoming with its surroundings on both macro and micro levels. The "critical" in critical posthumanism, in part, refers to the "ethical concern for the relationship between new concepts and real-life conditions," hence one of its main concerns is to establish "a view to the deconstruction of anthropocentric thought" (Braidotti and Hlavajova, 2018, p. 1; Badmington, 2004, p. 115).

The question of “animal” in critical posthumanities is often asked ontologically and epistemologically regarding the binary divide between human and animal. Much has been written in the intersections of the critical animal studies and the critical posthumanities realms ranging from agency (McFarland and Hediger, 2009), representation (Baker, 2001; Burt, 2002; Mills, 2017; Lippit, 2000), feminism (Adams, 2010), rights (Cavaliere, 2001), and sociology (DeMello, 2012), to list a few. There are certain clashes between these two realms mostly concerning the binary divides (Pedersen, 2011). However, as ecofeminist Greta Gaard puts it, by challenging “humanism’s sexism, racism, and speciesism,” both fields work “to contextualize these approaches in terms of ecological, economic, and political sustainability by developing theory [...] for the conditions and relations among and within all species take place in environments that are co-constituted along with these relations [...]” (2017, p. 126). In this light, this thesis aims to read the selected documentaries converging these fields of critical animal studies and posthumanities, by also narrowing the overarching focus of these realms to the conditions of stray dogs and cats, and their relations with humans in Istanbul, by way of the documentations gathered from the selected movies.

This thesis also pays a special emphasis on the theories of new materialism. New/neo/vital materialism, basing its historical and modern roots on the works of Baruch Spinoza, Henri Bergson, Bruno Latour, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, appears in the contemporary academia as commonly a “research methodology for the non-dualistic study of the world within, beside and among us, the world that precedes, includes and exceeds us” (van der Tuin, 2018, p. 277). Questioning the binary dualisms between life and matter, biota and abiota, matter and meaning, body and

mind, as well as nature and culture, new materialism is not a disparate field of inquiry from the critical posthumanities. In fact, as Braidotti ascertains: “As a brand of vital materialism, posthuman theory contests the arrogance of anthropocentrism and the ‘exceptionalism’ of the Human as a transcendental category” (2013, p. 66).

Contemporary new materialist scholars—such as Stacy Alaimo (2010), Karen Barad (2007), Jane Bennett (2010), Serpil Oppermann and Serenella Iovino (2014)—invite us to think about the interconnectedness and entanglement of the nonhuman world, matter, and ecology with the human body, settlements, and constructions. Therefore, they disrupt the conventional notions of agency that are granted merely to humans, and propose a non-autonomous understanding of the term that is not preexisting, preestablished, and predetermined. Instead, what new materialism coins to the new understanding of agency is that non-humans are bearers of agentic capacity relationally, processually, and intra-/inter-actively with/in humans and other nonhumans agents. Bearing all these interrelated realms in mind, this chapter brings into view the concepts and notions of Haraway, Bennett, Braidotti, Deleuze and Guattari, which all prove pertinent for the analyses of the chosen documentaries.

2.2. Companionships and Cohabitations

To provide a deeper insight into the philosophical grounding of the nonhuman animals in the documentaries in question, the theoretical framework of this thesis primarily comprises Haraway’s concepts of “companion species” and “naturecultures” introduced in her book *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Haraway 2003).⁷ Other primary terms of

⁷ The first edition of this manifesto is published as a book under this name, and Wolfe assembled Haraway’s two manifestos—“A Cyborg Manifesto” and “The Companion Species Manifesto”—and a following interview with Haraway in a new book entitled *Manifestly Haraway* (2016), accordingly I take the recent publication as a reference throughout the thesis.

Haraway—“becoming-with,” “making-with,” and “living with”—coming from the books *When Species Meet* (2008) and *Staying with the Trouble: Making-Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016b)—also prove useful in understanding the companionships and cohabitations in Istanbul of humans and urban animals in the selected documentaries.

2.2.1. Disrupting The Binary Opposition between Nature and Culture

Haraway’s “The Companion Species Manifesto” suggests a breakdown of the binary opposition of nature and culture through the residual and interconnected lives of dogs and people. She offers a new term for the composition of the two terms:

“natureculture” to understand the inseparability of the terms from one another (2016a). Embodying complexity and emergence, naturecultures with their ontological, epistemological and ethical considerations prioritize relatings rather than beings:

“Dogs are about the inescapable, contradictory story of relationships co-constitutive relationships in which none of the partners preexists the relating, and the relating is never done once and for all” (2016a, p. 103). The complexity of naturecultures refers to “the impossibility of separating domains such as history and biology in technoscience and everyday life alike” (van der Tuin, 2018, p. 269).

Introspective about companionship, Haraway’s manifesto regards dogs’ and humans’ relationship to be a part of an active co-history and co-constitution. “Partners in the crime of human evolution,” as she states, dogs constitute a complex co-history with humans, becoming an example of biopower and biosociality (Haraway, 2016a, p. 98). Haraway also writes: “Historical specificity and contingent mutability rule all the way down, into nature and culture, into naturecultures,” co-history and coevolution during which dogs, cats and humans have significantly changed their ways of living—and

still do—, their biological features, and terrains are key elements in questioning “culturally normal fantasy of human exceptionalism” (Haraway, 2016a, p. 104; 2008, p. 11). Hence, these reciprocal relationships require a re-thinking of the term domestication, which is elaborated on in the following section.

Haraway associates nature with biology and culture with history in her manifesto. As such, when an issue related to biology emerges, it is impossible for it not to have a historical dimension to it, and vice versa. As van der Tuin writes on Haraway’s manifesto:

Both dogs and humans have played their part in histories of colonization and colonizing processes have affected dog-dog, dog-sheep, dog-human, human-human, and many other relatings. All of these are still ongoing on the many entangled layers of history and biology in the twenty-first century. (2018, p. 269)

The manifesto offers us the layer of dogs’ and humans’ co-constitution of history and biology primarily in the context of the United States, while stressing its ongoingness. Similarly, in the following analytical chapter, historical and biological agents that shaped and are still shaping the lives of street dogs and cats in Istanbul as portrayed in the chosen documentaries are taken into account.

Focusing on its non-human residents, I designate Istanbul as an emergent urban natureculture in this thesis. The approach to urban life and urbanization has generally been human-centered. Urban animals have not been considered residents of the urban space by city planners. Instead, they are driven to shelters, conditions of which oftentimes are worse than the streets. Yet, the urban landscapes do not merely consist of humans, they are still home to other-than-human organisms. Haraway’s rendering of emergent naturecultures embodies a “vulnerable, on-the-ground work that cobbles together nonharmonious agencies and ways of living that are accountable both to their

disparate inherited histories and to their barely possible but absolutely necessary joint futures” (2016a, p. 100). Urban settings could be considered as one of the ultimate human-made environments but still, they embody emergent naturecultures with their past, present, and future more-than-human joinings.

In this sense, a Chthulucentric approach to the emergent narratives and realities of the Anthropocene appears needed. Chthulucene—a newer term coined by Haraway in *Staying with the Trouble*—“is a compound of two Greek roots (*khthôn* and *kainos*) that together name a kind of timeplace for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth” (Haraway, 2016b, p. 2, emphasis in original). Far from “the dominant dramas of Anthropocene and Capitalocene discourse” in which humans are granted the central position, in the Chthulucene “[t]he order is reknitted: human beings are with and of the earth, and the biotic and abiotic powers of this earth are the main story” (2016b, p. 55). The decentered human in this emergent and tentacular narrative of the Chthulucene is entangled with non-human beings of “past, present, and to come” (2016b, p. 101). Given these definitions by Haraway, Chapter 3 collectively discusses the documentaries *Kedi*, *Taşkafa*, and *Stray* as providing an analysis of Istanbul as an emergent natureculture by assembling both human and non-human non-harmonious agencies, and manifesting an everyday life that congregates non-pre-existing histories of the subjects and possibilities of a shared future.

2.2.2. Rethinking Domestication

In most humanist discourses, the process which led dogs’ to be man’s best friend is named domestication which is often understood as a process done to animals by

humans forcibly. British historian and animal studies scholar Erica Fudge classifies pets as “both human and animal,” which “live with us, but are not us; they have names like us, but cannot call us by our names” (2002, p. 28). Accordingly, Kari Weil, whose recent research focuses on nonhuman animals and human-animal relations, addresses the question Fudge asks “Is pet an animal?” according to modernist and contemporary thought. For Deleuze and Guattari, primarily, “a dog or cat lover is a fool because the dog or cat is not really an animal, but a creature made by humans to confirm an image of ourselves we want to see [...]” (Weil, 2012, p.53).

This view acknowledges the idea that pets have served humans’ narcissistic inclinations. Pets, as a result of domestication, have been thought as a “deanimalized creature that has been stripped of its original virile wildness and tamed into a ‘feminine’ and inauthentic servitude” (Weil, 2012, p. 56). A similar ontological viewing of the process of domestication comes from the Marxist ideology that regards domesticated animals as commodified market instruments and considers domestication as forged on purpose by capitalist market structures, thus the oppression of the domesticated animals gravitated them into properties (Weil, 2012, p.55). For Weil, this entails the binary distinction between wild and domesticated animals, accordingly, in this distinction their existence is reduced to their status of enslaved and free (2012, p. 55).

Unlike domestication’s above-mentioned understandings, which often disregards the agency of the domesticated, Haraway’s definition surpasses this attributed singular (human) agency and marks it as “an emergent process of cohabiting, involving agencies of many sorts” (2016a, p. 122). Correspondingly, cultural historian Richard

Bulliet argues that “in most cases, domestication came about as an unintended, unremembered, and unduplicatable consequence of human activities intended to serve other purposes” (as cited in Weil, 2012, p. 57). This view disputes the mere cause of human/capitalist intentionality on domestication and rather serves the idea of coevolution which is a dynamic, non-singular, and interactive process. Questioning the possibility of non-human agency in the processes of coevolution and domestication is necessary to think of the current state of companionships between humans and animals, because disregarding this possibility will lead humans to a deterministic understanding of the dominance and oppression, which is against the ideal companionship. The concept of the non-human agency is further discussed under section 2.3. In light of Haraway’s formulation, “becoming-with is how partners are [...] rendered capable,” the purpose of rethinking domestication is to better acknowledge the non-singular and a relational process of companion species (2016b, p. 12).

“To be one is always to *become with* many,” states Haraway in her introduction to *When Species Meet* (2008, p.4, emphasis in original). At the heart of her notion of becoming-with, lies the encompassing relations giving birth to emergent naturecultures, dynamizing the companionships mostly in the context of daily encounters and interactions with other living beings. As she states: “To knot companion and species together in encounter, in regard and respect, is to enter the world of becoming with, where *who* and *what* are is precisely what is at stake” (2008, p. 19, emphasis in original). In this manner; daily and ordinary becomings-with play a crucial role in constructing multi-species worldings. The contact zones in these relations are shared by the equally historically situated multi-species crowd; “we

become-with life as it is manifested through the body of another, and lives are always connected to worlds” (Wright, 2014, p. 280). Haraway’s companion species regards at least both sides of companionship as co-constituting each other, therefore in the discussion of domestication, it disputes the singular human agency and power, while stressing the multiple, dynamic, and relational forces.

Although the focus of her manifesto is on dogs, Haraway’s concept of companion species extends beyond companion animals to a bilateral directionality between humans and other organic beings such as “rice, bees, tulips, and intestinal flora” (Haraway, 2016a, p. 106). The term species as organized within differentiating biological and genetic kinds and thus within distinguished categories is also about “the corporeal join of the material and the semiotic” (Haraway, 2016a, p. 107). Since this thesis analyzes three documentaries about street animals, the stories told in these documentaries and how they are told are the object of analyses that eventually serve to understand the corporeal material and semiotic states of the street animals. The question of whether the street animal is a pet, a wild, or a companion animal is discussed in the following chapters 3 and 4, regarding the concepts of companion species, agency, and becoming-with by way of the manifestations of the selected documentaries which portray the state, condition, and gaze of the street animals, as well as their interactions with humans.

2.2.3 Thinking Non-Human Agency and Multispecies Response-Ability through Situated Knowledges

Situated knowledges is a concept developed by Haraway in 1988 in her article “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial

Perspective” in which a groundwork for feminist new materialist epistemology was created (van der Tuin, 2015). This concept challenges the realms of realist, relativist, and universalist objective knowledge and regards objective inquiry to be developed in the entanglements of partial perspectives. As such, Haraway calls for the “politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims” (Haraway, 1988, p. 589). Situated knowledges produce a more active, mobile, and hybrid viewing of science.

The partial perspective is key to situated knowledges as Haraway states: “There is no way to ‘be’ simultaneously in all, or wholly in any, of the privileged (i.e., subjugated) positions structured by gender, race, nation, and class” (1988, p. 586). Dismantling the unionizing approaches of science and feminism, Haraway in this particular judgment connects the dots of feminist scientific epistemology with the metaphor of vision. She identifies universalist claims of objectivity with a “god-trick” that entices “seeing everything from nowhere” (Haraway, 1988, p. 581). Such a god-trick vision of universalist expositions brings about a fallacy of objectivity which “promises transcendence, a story that loses track of its mediations just where someone might be held responsible for something, and unlimited instrumental power” (1988, p. 579). This subjugator of gaze from a standpoint of nowhere instrumentalize “the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation,” thus disabling an embodied, partial, and local perspective only which promise an objective vision (Haraway, 1988, p. 581).

I argue that this god-like vision could be compared with the dominant human gaze in productions covering multi-species participants and performers, which is regulatorily employed in wildlife documentaries—streamed by BBC, Netflix, Discovery, Animal Planet, and National Geographic—with didactic and anthropomorphic voice-overs, placing nature “outside the domain of human settlement” (Castree, 2005), and often embodying a “speciesist camera” (Ladino, 2013). Employment of the non-human gaze is vital in creating the partial, consequential, and localized perspective of situated knowledges. Being more engaged in environmental humanities, Monika Rogowska-Stangret (2018) notes that situated knowledges question the god-trick gaze of the Anthropocene discussions. The partial and the local vision is necessary to understand and discuss the Anthropocene without the fallacy of seeing everything from nowhere. Hence, I argue that the documentaries in this thesis, with their employment of non-human gaze and visions of multi-species interactions, potentially generate a discussion for situated knowledges in environmental humanities, an argument to be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

The situated knowledges in the particularity of human-animal relations in Istanbul open the pathway for multi-species response-ability. A lucid distinction between responsibility and response-ability is needed here, therefrom quoting Marc Higgins:

While responsibility always precedes our coming-to-knowing-in-being, the space of response-ability from which we can account for and be accountable to these responsibilities is highly productive as it invites and requires us to consider that which shapes our very ability to respond. Yet, the space of response-ability is ever in need of an ongoing unsettling the conditions which shape our ability to respond. (2021, pp. 271-272)

By converting the preexisting responsibility discourses and practices to active, dynamic, and bilateral interactions, Haraway’s multi-species response-ability indeed highlights “how the ability of humans and animals to articulate, attune and respond to

each other—often in bodily, more-than-verbal ways—is central to understanding animal-human relationality” (Brown, et.al., 2019, p. 55). Therefore, the particular relations of humans and urban animals portraying real-life interactions of multi-species response-ability with their situatedness and activeness, which are brought to the fore by the documentaries in question, are discussed in Chapter 3.

2.3. Non-Human Agency

This section aims to generate a framework for the potential two topics in the context of this thesis’ consideration of non-human agency: first, the agency of non-human animals inhabiting the documentaries under scrutiny, and second, the city of Istanbul as a human and non-human agentic assemblage. However, to be able to dwell on these issues, one first needs to look at how the concept of human agency is rooted in Cartesian thinking, and how the new materialist and posthumanist theories challenge this understanding. The traditional understanding of agency consists also of intentionality- and morality-focused perceptions and social constructivist agency-structure relations. In the case of agencies other than the human, the reflections are generated along the line of the similarity of non-humans to humans—mostly covering cognitive responses and behaviors. On these accounts, “agency has traditionally been intricately tied to extremely limited notions of subjectivity and power” in the limited associations with “intentionality, rationality and voice” (Marchand, 2018, pp. 292-3). As such, after outlining some critical discussions on these traditional understandings of agency in the following section, I provide how new materialistic understandings of agency can better acknowledge the agency of the non-humans by pursuing “the ability to discern non-human vitality, to become perceptually open to it” (Bennett, 2010, p. 75).

2.3.1 Non-Human Animal Agencies: Reductions and Reformulations

Bennett considers how Immanuel Kant links moral agency to free will as he tends to “define agency in terms of the autonomous will of the person who submits to the moral law (whose form is inscribed in human reason)” (Bennett, 2010, p. 107). The moral agency that is attributed to humans is questioned on the magnitude of free will, and even post-secular societies or non-religious individuals have the understanding of the mind as separate from the body. Therefore, a singular, closed, “the non-physical source of free will and agency” is established by the morality-oriented views of agency, as Sarah McFarland and Ryan Hediger state—two prominent figures in critical animal studies (2009, p. 5). From there on, some neo-Kantian views considered agency in relation to intentionality.

Intentionality-focused agency theories are prone to study non-human animal agencies on the scale of their cognitive and intellectual abilities. As McFarland and Hediger exemplify, the verbal interspecies communication between Alex the parrot and his human companion, or dogs’ ability to understand a symbol’s representation of a real thing illustrates the non-human animal agencies concerning cognitive similarities to the human (2009, pp. 1-2). In fact, the current question of linguistic ability while thinking about animal intelligence is also problematized by Fudge, as she proposes an inversion of the scenario “in which ‘can animals learn to speak human language?’ becomes ‘can humans learn to speak animal language?’,” which, in fact, “pulls out from under us the notion of our inbuilt superiority that persists in much of the language research” (2004, pp. 127-8). Nonetheless, the question becomes whether the animal agency can be reduced to intellectual capacities. Rather than this reduction, this thesis promotes a relational, emergent, and processual ontology of agency

following Haraway's becoming-with and Bennett's vibrant matter covering all domains of human and non-human forces and power. Even though Bennett's work does not explicitly focus on non-human animal agency, she yearns "to take seriously the vitality of (nonhuman) bodies" in general (2010, p. 11).

The tension between structure and agency sets forth the power of structures that limits the autonomous capability of making free and independent choices. This constricting relationship between agency and structures may well apply to many situations where humans' intentionality is narrowed. It also leaves almost no room for non-human agency, even if it does, it probably diminishes it to an anthropomorphic degree of consideration. In addition, as Bennett points out, the problem of social constructivism engenders a dead-end in that "Actors are 'socially constituted', but the 'constitutive' or productive power of structures derives from the human wills or intentions within them" (2010, p. 29). The limiting and consequential power of the structures on free will and intentionality are restricting the agency of the actors who are constituted within that power structures. Within that cycle, on the other hand, "[t]here is no agency proper to assemblages, only the effervescence of the agency of individuals acting alone or in concert with each other" (Bennett, 2010, p. 29). The equation of nonhuman agency with resistance—examples of which include animals escaping zoos, farms, circuses—also embodies an approach of intentionality by assuming that nonhumans are conscious of human oppression, therefore, take action in an attempt to repel it, as Chris Pearson problematizes it in his article "Beyond 'resistance': rethinking nonhuman agency for a 'more-than-human' world" (2015, p. 712). What is controversial about this resonance between resistance and animal agency is that it bears the risk of "projection human motivations to animals, thereby humanizing

animals” (Pearson, 2015, p. 713). Therefore, it falls short of a comprehensive understanding of nonhuman agency. Although this thesis does not assume that the traditional studies on animal behavior and their agentic capacities are unworthy, it also takes into account that the agency is not merely dependent on actions, behaviors, and intentions. In fact, animal agency in the new materialist and posthumanist understanding is equated with the very existence of animals (Carter & Charles, 2013, p. 324).

2.3.2 Vital Materialities

New materialist and posthumanist thinking work to overcome the Cartesian thinking of mind or soul that is separate from the body, a non-physical entity. They challenge the binary dualism of body and mind by promoting a relational, affective, and inter/intra-active combination of human and non-human forces in consideration of the human agency (Alaimo, 2010; Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010; Bradiotti, 2013). Simply put, human agency is regarded to be a complex and heterogeneous amalgam of many other non-human (organic or inorganic) agencies (Bennett, 2010).

Bennett, in her book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, creates an estrangement between life and matter by attributing the matter a vitality, which “runs alongside and inside humans” (2010, p. viii). Such an estrangement also shakes the dualism between object and subject; Bennett ontologically regards object as thing, advocating, therefore, a thing-power that establishes a potential of political and ethical transformations. Life and matter binary, in that case, is disrupted by suggesting an

agentic potentiality belonging to the matter, which embodies the Spinozian “affect” and Deleuze-Guattarian “assemblage” (Bennett, 2010, p. 21).

The agency of assemblages, then, is imperative to reflect upon. An assemblage, which is a terminology developed by Deleuze and Guattari in their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, suggests an “increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 8). Assemblages are impromptu arrangements, gatherings, and combinations that are non-hierarchical. Bennett thinks of assemblages as agentic, and further propends that “They have uneven topographies because some of the points at which the various affects and bodies cross paths are more heavily trafficked than others, and so power is not distributed equally across its surface” (Bennett, 2010, p. 95). The agentic roots found in an assemblage are also complex and unpredictable, as “it is often hard to grasp just what the sources of the agency are that make a particular event may happen” (Bennett, 2010, p. 36). In the case of the urban animals in Istanbul, since their lives are presented on the scale of everyday life in the aforementioned documentaries, it is even harder to point out a particular reason that elevated their existence to the present-day, such as the perception of domestication as a single-sided process, considering the complex entanglements of history, biology, and culture.

In order to, then, capture how human and non-human agency is distributed across and as an assemblage, first, it needs to be foregrounded that non-human animals are bearers of agentic capacity. In part, the reason for outlining this agentic capacity of non-human animals is to disrupt the primary attention given on humans who are

regarded as the only possessors of agency in traditional understandings. However, this is not to say that either humans or non-humans are “autonoms,” which are individuals essentially possessing an independent agency (Bennett, 2010, p. 88). Since “agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces,” one can attribute agency to assemblages which are “ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts” (Bennett, 2010, p. 95).

The second correlated reason for considering the urban animals’ agency in this section is related to Bennett’s idea that “[a]n assemblage owes its agentic capacity to the vitality of the materialities that constitute it” (2010, p. 121). To justify this, Bennett in her book looks at the vitality of edible matter, metal, stem cells, and worms to disrupt the rigorous binary between life and matter. Although the boundary between human and animal is not her primary focus, she notes that

Since Kafka’s time, the gap between human and animal has narrowed even further, as one after another of the traits or talents thought to be unique to humanity are found to exist also in nonhuman animals. It is no longer so controversial to say that animals have a biosocial, communicative, or even conceptual life. (2010, p. 163)

Together with the fact that animals’ lives embody biosocial, communicative, and conceptual traits to some extent, one can argue that the qualities that were once thought as exceptional to humans are now being witnessed in animals as well. That said, in Chapter 4, the aim is to showcase how the urban animals are witnessed as agentic actors in a humanized setting in the selected documentaries.

As *Taşkafa* and *Kedi* lend significant attention to human participants that are interviewed about the street animals in Istanbul, the discourse of the interviews surrounding the agentic potentialities of non-human animals has revolved around the

above-mentioned traditional consideration of the cognitive and intellectual abilities, as well as anthropomorphic claims on free will and choice of the animals. Only one documentary in the selection can be justified to embody a thorough non-human gaze and portrayal of the agency from the angle of the non-human, which is *Stray* by Elizabeth Lo. For this reason, this particular feature of this documentary is examined predominantly in Chapter 4 in the context of non-human agency regarding its form and narrative. The other two documentaries, on the other hand, serve as a potential mirror to societal opinions on animal agencies, hence they are analyzed in terms of the discursive aspects that people share based on this issue, which are covered in the following chapter under the headings that concern anthropomorphisms in discourse and practice.

2.4. Against Bestiary Animality: (Nomadic) Becomings

Considering the entangled lives of humans and urban animals in the selected documentaries, this section aims to generate an ontological scheme of Deleuze-Guattarian notions of “becoming” and “becoming-animal”. As such, these notions prove useful in analyzing the transformations that these two separate ontological orders undergo—human and animal—in the chosen documentaries, consequently how the boundaries between the two are prone to vanish. In the following section, besides Deleuze and Guattari’s original concepts, I demonstrate the critical posthumanist developments and criticisms of these particular notions, by specifically looking at Braidotti’s *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (2011) and Haraway’s *When Species Meet* (2008). What all these theoretical contributions have in common is that they resist the commonplace bestiality and Oedipal characteristics attributed to animals with anthropomorphic contentions. Braidotti looks into new

ways to overcome these issues with an affirmative discourse. This section attempts to achieve a posthumanist understanding of human-animal relations, as this understanding proves relevant to the discussions in Chapter 5 in which I examine the reciprocal transformations of humans—including the directors of these documentaries—and urban animals through their encounters, interactions, and exchanges.

2.4.1 Deleuze-Guattarian Notion of “Becoming” and “Becoming-animal”

In Deleuze and Guattari’s process-oriented philosophy lies the central notion of becoming. Given that “[b]ecoming is always double, that which one becomes becomes no less than the one that becomes—block is formed, essentially mobile, never in equilibrium,” becoming in Deleuze-Guattarian lexicon refers to non-fixed, non-essential, and always-in-flux identities and formations (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 305). While affirming the multiplicities of process, mobility, and variations, the concept of becoming also challenges the fixed, unified, established structures of identity and representation. As a result, this notion rejects dualisms and strict boundaries, such as those between self and other, human and non-human, as well as man and nature. It has a particular focus on disrupting the hierarchical order in which human is placed above non-human subjects, entities, and settings.

Deleuze and Guattari define becoming mostly according to what it is not: “Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, ‘appearing,’ ‘being,’ ‘equaling’ or ‘producing’” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 239). Becoming-animal, in this sense, does not mean “imitation,” “resemblance,” or an “identification;” nor does it refer to becoming “something else” (Deleuze and

Guattari, 1987, p. 237-8). Becoming is not “evolution” or “filiation”; it rather happens through “alliance” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 238). The alliance constitutes multiplicities or gatherings among heterogenous orders, realities, and entities through and among which becomings emerge. As such, they assert that “For if becoming animal does not consist in playing animal or imitating an animal, it is clear that the human being does not ‘really’ become an animal any more than the animal ‘really’ becomes something else” (1987, p. 238). Hence, the aforementioned transformations argued to be occurring between humans and animals do not translate to literally humans’ becoming a cat, a dog, or vice versa. The authors lay bare: “Becoming is to emit particles that take on certain relations of movement and rest because they enter a particular zone of proximity” (1987, p. 273). Hence, becoming-animal of the humans and becoming-human of the urban animals are considered to be entering into a zone of proximity through certain observable extensions of movement and rest in Chapter 5.

An amalgam of mainly Nietzschean and Bergsonian philosophies, Deleuze and Guattari formulate the principle of becoming as an “affirmation of the positivity of difference, meant as a multiple and constant process of transformation” (Braidotti, 1993, p. 111). The notion of becoming may take on diverse forms and modalities including “becoming-woman,” “becoming-animal,” “becoming-imperceptible,” which may be extended. What this thesis is concerned about is the notion of “becoming-animal,” since these documentaries primarily highlight human-animal relations which I aim to explore through this particular notion in Chapter V. To understand this concept, it is crucial to look at how Deleuze and Guattari categorize three kinds of animals: Oedipal, State, and demonic. Oedipal animals, or individuated

animals, according to Deleuze-Guattarian formulation, are simply pets that “invite us to regress, draw us into a narcissistic contemplation,” and which “are the only kind of animal psychoanalysis understands” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 240). The second kind of animal is what they call “State” animals who have “characteristics or attributes,” from whom we can extract “series or structures, archetypes or models” (1987, p. 240). The third kind of animal they identify is a category of animals to whom becoming is attributed, and they are “demonic” animals. They come in the forms of packs, or in a multiplicity (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 241). However, they also bear in mind the possibility of an animal, “even the cat, even the dog” (1987, p. 241), belonging to all three categories.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, all becomings befall from “molar” to “molecular” (1987, p. 275). They differentiate between molar and molecular, proposing that molar belongs to those who have set, “unifiable, totalizable, organizable” identities, as well as those who embody binary structures and hierarchies (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 33). Molecular, by “traveling at speeds beyond the ordinary thresholds of perception,” requires non-fixed, continuous, and in flux becomings, with “supple [...] and merely ordered” states of shattered identity formations (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, pp. 196, 41). They consider the first (Oedipal) and the second (State) kinds of animals as molar, and the third (demonic) as the molecular. However, this is not to say becoming-animal is something that should be understood as happening between non-human animals. In fact, there is a tendency in their thinking that prioritize the mutual movement between human and animal: “the metamorphosis is part of a single circuit of the becoming-human of the animal and the becoming-animal of the human; [...] the metamorphosis is a sort of conjunction of two deterritorializations” (1986, p.

35). Furthermore, “It is always possible to try to explain these blocks of becoming by a correspondence between two relations [...]” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 237). In that case, if the task is to cultivate the reciprocal exchange between humans and animals, then one could suggest that the animal also enters into a “line of flight”—a term Deleuze and Guattari define as “the reality of a finite number of dimensions that the multiplicity effectively fills” (1987, p. 9).

As Braidotti argues: “Becoming animal/nonhuman [...] is a process of redefinition of one’s sense of attachment and connection to a shared world, a territorial space” (2011, p. 224). Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of becoming-animal is one of the fundamental shifts being taken from “all-too-human” (Wolfe, 2009) perceptions and human essentialisms to a more de-anthropocentric, less human-centered understanding by vanishing the boundaries between the human and the animal. As such, in Chapter 5, the documentaries in question are analyzed according to the ways in which they situate their human and animal performers into a shared and coexisting becoming. However, there are certain criticisms of this notion due to Deleuze and Guattari’s categorizations of animals, and their scorn towards human-pet animal relations.

2.4.2. The Problem of the “Oedipal” Animal

As mentioned earlier, Deleuze and Guattari’s becoming considers three kinds of animals, the first in which the Oedipal animals are associated with domestic, pet animals, mainly dogs and cats. Despite this categorization, they suggest that even Oedipal animals can perform in multiplicities, therefore can be subject to becomings. Nonetheless, Deleuze-Guattarian idea of becoming and becoming-animal have been subject to certain criticisms, particularly by animal studies scholars. While Haraway

appreciates Deleuze and Guattari's anti-Oedipal, anti-patrimonial attempt in a rhizomatic line of thought—and even though they have a common aim in proposing a non-hierarchical contexture—for her, Deleuze-Guattarian understanding of the animal is problematic. First, they prioritize human-becomings over others: “‘My becoming’ seems awfully important in a theory opposed to the strictures of individuation and subject” (Haraway, 2008, p. 30).

Secondly, Haraway considers the notion of becoming as a “scorn for all that is mundane and ordinary and the profound absence of curiosity about or respect for and with actual animals” (2008, p. 27). In other words, “All worthy animals are a pack; all the rest are either pets of the bourgeoisie or state animals symbolizing some kind of divine myth” (Haraway, 2008, p. 29). Pointing out the wolf-man story in *A Thousand Plateaus* she argues that Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming-animal, in fact, “feeds off a series of primary dichotomies figured by the opposition between the wild and the domestic” (Haraway, 2008, p. 28). Although the dichotomies of “natural and artificial,” “organic and mechanic totality,” and “living being uncontaminated by human intervention and one transformed or produced to meet human needs” are all dismantled in Deleuzian philosophy, the dog-wolf opposition seems to be conflicting these efforts, as Joanna Bednarek argues in *Deleuze and the Animal* (2017, p. 56). It is argued that street cats and dogs fall in-between categories of wild and domestic (Fortuny, 2014), and the companionships formed with these animals in some cases resonate with human-pet relations. These criticisms of Deleuze-Guattarian becoming-animal need to be outlined here to discuss these relations regarding both the Oedipal aspects and their ordinariness, especially in *Kedi* in the next chapter.

2.4.3 De-Oedipalization of Companion Animals

What this thesis aims, in light of the criticisms of Deleuze-Guattarian becoming-animal, is a recontextualization of this concept via Haraway's (2008) notion of "becoming-with" and Rosi Braidotti's idea of "nomadic becomings" (2011). This is, in effect, an attempt to take serious consideration towards urban animals and to justify the need for the de-oedipalization of companion animals. Thus, merging these two theories at hand will be beneficial in conceptualizing the empirical animals in the focus of *Kedi*, *Stray* and *Taşkafa* and throwing a challenge towards the Oedipal, human-superior, and narcissistic inclinations at stake in the logic of some of the human participants in these documentaries.

Thinking a bit beyond the "little house dogs" of Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p.244), I wish to turn to stray dogs in an attempt to indicate their behavioral patterns—whether or not they formulate multiplicities in packs—and their relations with humans.

Bednarek offers a layout for the conceptualization of the de-oedipalization of dogs in relation to Deleuze and Guattari's becoming. First, she looks at "how [...] humans and animals [might] function in naturecultures and what molecular transformations are responsible for the dynamics of these naturecultures" (2017, p.68). She refers to dogs' social behavior in order to understand how they are not necessarily Oedipal, while exemplifying that "Dogs display greater ease in developing a preference for other species – not only humans, but rabbits or cats, as well as greater flexibility in social learning," even without expectations of receiving food from them (2017, pp. 68-9).

When it comes to the urban street animals, she refers to Andre Poyorkav's research on Moscow's stray dogs whose adaptation to the urban life induced their "behaviour and social organization" (2017, p. 69). Accordingly, the dogs either form packs or live

individually depending on the way that they acquire food. However, beyond all these attempts at situating the domestic animals into a de-Oedipalized position, one needs to acknowledge that Deleuze and Guattari do not show scorn for the actual domestic animals, but rather criticize humans forming Oedipal, familial, and cultural relationships with them (Koyuncu, 2020, p. 182).

Braidotti contends that the essentialist, Oedipal, and hierarchical relationship humans form with animals finds its roots in the anthropocentric and systematical masculine tendency to exploit, consume, and abuse other bodies, including animals (2011, p. 81). The western, Cartesian, Eurocentric normality is entrenched in the construction of otherness, and anything that does not fit in this normality is “pathologized and cast on the other side of normality, that is to say anomaly, deviance, and monstrosity” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 82). Animals are also positioned like human-others who do not conform to the ideals of a Eurocentric, masculine subject, hence they are differentiated as “naturalized others” (Braidotti, 2011, p.173). According to Braidotti, what we are trying to figure out today is “how to deterritorialize or nomadize, the human-animal interaction” (2011, p.83) to overcome the bestiary, as well as fantastic delusions towards the naturalized-other animal.

Amid the large framework Braidotti covers in *Nomadic Theory*, I aim to focus on the ethical questionings she offers in relation to animals and “zoe” —a term which she defines as “the affirmative power of Life, as a vector of transformation, a conveyor or a carrier that enacts in-depth transformations” (2011, p. 112). Alongside the urgent need to de-Oedipalize the relations with non-human animal others, Braidotti’s take on nomadic becomings calls for an ethically grounded, zoe-centered, embodied

posthuman subject, one that “is shot through with relational linkages of the symbiotic, contaminating/viral kind that interconnect it to a variety of others, starting from the environmental or ecoothers” (2011, p. 224). The priority she gives to the environmental and ecoothers in the symbiotic relations can be interpreted as a call for the ethical reconsideration of the animal others as well. As such, Braidotti’s nomadic ethics “is a regrounding of the subject in a materially embedded sense of responsibility and ethical accountability for the environments s/he inhabits” (2011, p. 122). In this line, Chapter V analyses the ways in which the human participants and the directors of the documentaries at hand mobilize the nomadic ethics in real life, by positioning themselves in an enchanted world of urban animals in Istanbul.

2.5. Conclusion

The overall chapter serves as a theoretical framework for analyzing the documentaries about street animals in Istanbul—*Taşkafa*, *Kedi*, and *Stray*. All of the conceptual resources introduced in this chapter share a common aim: to dismantle the Great Divide between humans and non-humans. This is also alike even between Haraway and Deleuze-Guattari who have only differing views in terms of the contradiction between companion animals vs. Oedipal animals. The reconceptualization of agency plays a crucial role in the understanding of relations, multiplicities, and processes between human and non-human residents of Istanbul in the selected documentaries. It is significant to reconsider the structured, universalist, essentialist, and sometimes deterministic claims about the binaries of nature and culture, human and animal, life and matter by acknowledging the complex and intermingling relations between these often-sterilized categories. The next chapter reads into the narratives of all the documentaries in question, and considers both the humanistic renderings of urban

animals in Istanbul through anthropomorphisms primarily in *Kedi*, and the ways in which the co-constituted relationships with these animals are portrayed in all of the documentaries.

CHAPTER III

Human and Urban Animal Companionships on Screen

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I look at how human and urban animal relations and companionships are situated in the documentaries, *Kedi*, *Taşkafa: Stories of the Street*, and *Stray*. The sections devoted to each documentary deal with a different aspect of human-animal companionships considering their prominent narrative features. The first section lays bare the recurrent anthropomorphisms in the human understanding and the everyday inter-species practices between humans and urban animals inhabiting the streets of Istanbul, by looking at the interview-driven narrative of *Kedi*. The second section is designed to tackle the issue of animal death and grieving street animals, as well as co-historical embodiments of humans and canines in *Taşkafa*, with further consideration of the hierarchical distinctions between pet and stray animals. The third section elaborates on *Stray*'s prevailing theme of shared homelessness and precarity shared by refugee children and dogs.

The animals living on the streets of this crowded metropolis showcase an important dilemma for the distinction between companion and wild animals. The situated

collective knowledge coming from the co-history, co-habitation, co-constitution, and biosocial interactions of street animals with human residents of Istanbul have made such distinction blurred and complicated. As ecocritic Kim Fortuny expresses this categorization problem regarding the Istanbul street dog:

If a dog is most often defined by his use-value to man - a guardian of property, a herder of livestock, a hunter of game and illegal substances, a status symbol, a pet - the Istanbul street dog lacks a concrete definition. (2014, p. 272)

The in-betweenness of the stray refers to the enigma “animal on the edge” which makes it open to abuse and affection (Fortuny, 2014, p. 272). Regardless of their pet or stray status, in this thesis, the urban animals in the documentaries in question are considered as “companion animals,” as per Haraway’s (2016) formulation. The relationships between humans and urban animals on-screen demonstrate companionships as in the processes of “becoming-with,” “making-with,” and “living-with,” with important illustrations of “companion species,” “significant otherness,” and “naturecultures” (Haraway, 2003; 2016). These concepts and formulations by Haraway are considered in relation to particular selected scenes and narrative-based analysis on the documentaries in the upcoming sections.

3.2 In search of similarities and differences: *Kedi* (2016)

Torun’s documentary *Kedi* features Istanbul’s street cats while mainly focusing on seven of them. In this section, I lay out how anthropomorphisms in discourse and practice and multi-species co-existence possibilities are merged in *Kedi*’s narrative. A broad definition of the term, anthropomorphism, would be “the attribution of human characteristics or behaviour to a god, ‘animal’ or object,” as animal and film studies scholar Claire Parkinson provides (2020, p. 1). Despite its contestations, the concept of anthropomorphism, as animal sociologist Nik Taylor suggests, “remains a

consistent and persistent part of modern human cultures and can be seen in folklore, cultural representations as well as the everyday practices of those who interact with animals” (Taylor, 2011, p. 266). Since *Kedi* conveys a representation of daily and ordinary feline-human relations, portrayals of anthropomorphic attributions and interpretations in the documentary are inevitable. For Wolfe, anthropomorphizing non-human animals means humanizing them as he states: “there are those *humanized animals*—pets, primarily—that we exempt from the sacrificial regime by endowing them with ostensibly human features” (Wolfe, 2003, p. 101, emphasis in original). Considering anthropomorphism’s inevitability and ubiquity, *Kedi*, also, for the most part, demonstrates cats as humanized animals.

Dissecting discourse and practice is necessary to analyze particular issues that are related to anthropomorphic traits attributed to urban animals by human participants in the documentary. Anthropomorphism on the discursive level in *Kedi* refers particularly to the human participants’ utterings of their perceptions that humanize urban feline species. Therefore, analyzing these assertions requires a critical interpretation of the interviews located in the documentary narrative with the help of the aforementioned concepts of Haraway. Such anthropomorphic utterings are almost always followed or accompanied by the visuals reinforcing them. After I outline and analyze the discursive-level anthropomorphisms in the documentary, I turn to how anthropomorphism takes a role in inter-species solidarity practices, which include nutrition and adoption in the case of urban companion animals, as portrayed in *Kedi*. In other words, the subsequent sections dwell on how anthropomorphic interpretations and consequent practices that stem from such perceptions take a role in human-urban animal companionships in the documentary.

3.2.1 Humanized Urban Animals

The interviews in *Kedi* bring multiple characterizations focusing on different cats. To begin with, a woman working in a local shop, talks about Sari, the first feline performer in the documentary. “She's a real hunter now” she says, “She wasn't like that before. She changed after giving birth. Before that, all she did was sleep. Chilling here all day,” expressing her observation of Sari’s behavioral transformation after giving birth (Torun, 2016, 00:04:17). Her comments on Sari also include claims on Sari’s personality: that she is a stubborn and a “strong-willed” cat with a character and personality (Torun, 2016, 00:05:27). Hence, she is nicknamed “The Hustler” (Torun, 2016).



Figure 1: The cat named Sari is carrying a piece of meat in her mouth

The visual track consequently portrays Sari in multiple sequences where she demands food from the people eating in cafés and she takes the food to her kittens (See *Figure 1*). Followed by the interviewee’s comments about Sari’s altered personality after giving birth, these scenes serve as the confirmation of these assertions. While such observations on the cats’ changing behaviors require a significant amount of concentration and attention to the patterns of Sari’s behaviors, they also lead the inevitable way to characterize the animal exclusively in human terms. Önder Çetin in

his analysis of the documentary states that, *Kedi* “draws a parallelism between the human world and the animal world to create the awareness that both worlds are similar in terms of motherhood” (2021, p. 51). I argue that this statement is oversimplifying and universalizing motherhood either in human or non-human animal worlds in that it reduces the concept to a singular trait of ultimate altruism mothers employ towards their children. The alleged similarities of motherhood in humans and felines can be resonated with Haraway’s idea of “[...] singular and typological female” who/which “is reduced to her reproductive function” (Haraway, 2008, p. 18). Furthermore, such similarities recurrently mentioned in Çetin’s analysis of the documentary disregard the anthropomorphic traits that are attributed to the feline species in *Kedi*. To fill this gap that Çetin disregards in the case of anthropomorphic elements found in the documentary narrative, I lay out the ways in which the interviewees’ observations humanize the actions, behaviors, and bodies of companion animals in *Kedi*. Anthropomorphism in Sari’s characterization is an attempt to contextualize her actions and patterns in meaningful human terms.

Bengü appears as the second feline performer of *Kedi*. Her image in the movie is accompanied by a couple of men in an industrial manufacturing district. Bengü is nicknamed “The Lover” upon the fascination of several workingmen with her. She is a mother of several kittens she looks after inside a box on a shelf in a confined space similar to a warehouse. Bengü’s long years of presence in their lives presumably is what made her become, as her human companion says, “one of us” (Torun, 2016, 00:13:51). Bengü is an accepted member of the community of working men with her continuous showing up in the workplace. She loves to receive attention and pets, and shows a bit of jealousy when other cats show up, as her human companion, Necati

Özer, suggests. Her nickname, her devotion and loyalty, as well as her jealousy which can all be examples of anthropomorphizing and giving human character traits to Bengü points to the question “what anthropomorphism has the potential to do *for* nonhuman animals” (Parkinson, 2020, p. 2, emphasis in original). These attributed character traits to Bengü’s actions and behaviors enable the human to be empathetic and caring towards her as can be seen in the scenes in which he lovingly pets Bengü. In this sense, the fact that she receives attention and care from her human companions creates a chance for her to choose her territory, as she is seen in the warehouse with her kittens.

Bengü’s human companion, Özer, likens her to a child. “If I don't see her, or hear her voice..., if she's not around when I get here in the morning...” he states, “I get worried and look for her. Maybe she is like a child. People miss their kids, right? I miss her” (Torun, 2016, 00:11:39). This type of analogy between children and companion animals is often contested in the relational ontologies of Haraway, as well as Deleuze and Guattari. Haraway points out that the attribution of “unconditional love” capacity to dogs in particular, has made them seen and treated as “children,” which is, for her, is demeaning and dangerous both for dogs and children (2016a, p. 124). Alternatively, Haraway offers, “We need other nouns and pronouns for the kin genres of companion species,” instead of defining oneself as a mom/dad/sibling of a particular companion animal (2016a, p. 187). In Deleuze-Guattarian sense, such contemplations are seen as Oedipalizing pets or individuated animals, which serve to fill the narcissistic contemplations of humans: “the better to discover a daddy, a mommy, a little brother behind them [...]” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 240).

However, cats are stereotypically and anthropomorphically claimed to be ungrateful in Turkish culture and it is also metaphorically embedded as “nankör kedi” (thankless cat) in the characterization of humans in linguistic communication, as well (Güneş, 2017, p. 1112). This stereotype can be argued to be an instance of human narcissism. Therefore, attribution of a child-like status to cats is a way to formulate a relationship despite their humanistically interpreted thankless actions. As Bennett also suggests: “We need to cultivate a bit of anthropomorphism—the idea that human agency has some echoes in nonhuman nature—to counter the narcissism of humans in charge of the world” (2010, p. 32). Therefore, cultivating a bit of anthropomorphism in Bennett’s view appears necessary to overcome human-superiority, as opposed to Haraway’s and Braidotti’s takes on this issue. Specifically, in Bengü’s case, as a mirror to the cultural opinion and input on the cat behaviors, the interviewee talks about cats’ ungratefulness and contradicts this prejudice with another anthropomorphic claim:

It is said that cats are aware of God's existence... but that dogs are not. Dogs think people are God, but cats don't. Cats know that people act as middlemen to God's will. They're not ungrateful - they just know better.” (Torun, 2016,00:14:28-00:14:46)

According to him, dogs are blinded by their unconditional love so much that they assume that their human is god. However, cats are aware of god’s existence inasmuch as they know that humans are only messengers of god, which is, to an extent, a compensatory claim to negate the mentioned stereotypical ungratefulness of cats to humans. In fact, this demonstrates a feature in *Kedi* described by Çetin: “In the representation of almost every feline character, a prejudice about them is refuted” (2021, p. 52). Yet, the fixed stereotypes attributed to the feline species are attempted to be unfixed again through humanizing features, such as the parental connotations on

human-companion animal relationships as exemplified in Bengü's case, or subsequently, the religion-based cognitive evaluations of cats and dogs.

Anthropomorphic claims about animals as exemplified above carry the intention of creating abstract relations between humans and animals. On abandoning anthropomorphism in her Deleuzian reading, Braidotti suggests that

The problem with our inherited abstractions is not that they are too abstract. On the contrary, they are not abstract enough. The ecological approach to cognition must not rely on representation, which typically comes in the form of a model. The problem is not to understand how to construct a simulacrum of the world, but how to cope with it. Or better, make with it, *sympoietically*. (2019, p. 179, emphasis in original)

To replace a representation with another representation will not suffice in the world of companion species, instead what is needed is an “access to what animals think and feel is wrong” (Haraway, 2008, p. 226). The case of Bengü's attributed child status translates to replacing the stereotypical representation of the ungratefulness of cats with an untruthful religious assumption about them, which in the given comparison sustains the dogs' presumed unconditional love as well—“which Haraway argues against with all her mighty passion” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 93). While this counts as an attempt in refuting the stereotypical interpretation of ungrateful feline behavior by opening doors to new ways of interpretation more affirmatively, it still is problematically anthropomorphic in light of the aspects mentioned above on this issue. In other words, in order to overcome the bestiary animality discourse that has sustained the boundaries between human and animal, the cultural input on cats' behaviors has climbed up layers of anthropomorphisms.

Psikopat (in English “psychopath”) is another cat focused on in *Kedi*. “She is the toughest among all the females. Trouble for all the fishermen. A fish thief. Arch enemy of the dogs. She'll chase any of them, including pit bulls. She is the neighborhood psychopath,” as the interviewee Vecdi Kelav states (Torun, 2016, 00:27:34). The name Psikopat points to anthropocentric and anthropomorphic inclinations in that the characterization of the cat is based on the interpretation of her actions in connection with a mental illness. Yiman Wang, a film studies scholar, in *Kedi: A Docalogue* (2021), asserts that “The caregivers’ naming of these cats based on their quirks further anthropomorphizes them as characters” (p. 29). Psikopat manages to dominate other (male) cats, manipulate other humans with her stubbornness to get what she wants, and stand up to dogs, including Pitbulls, which are fixated as dangerous breeds. The reason behind naming the cat Psikopat points to the fact that the cat’s behaviors are not suitable enough for the humanistic imagination of hierarchies between sexes and species.



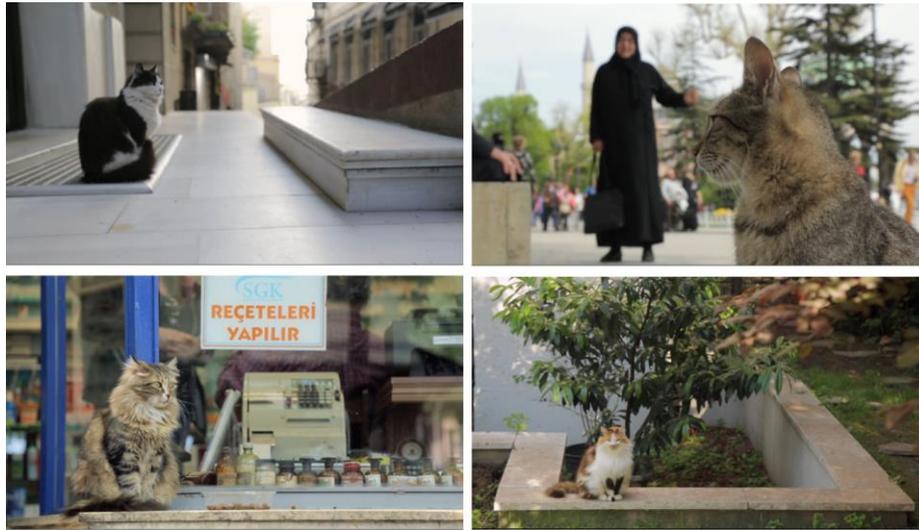
Figure 2: The male cat, another female cat, and Psikopat in a fight.

The intersectionality of patriarchy and anthropocentrism comes next in the discussion of Psikopat's case. As marked by many ecofeminist and posthumanist scholars' insights on this issue (Adams, 2010; Gaard, 2017; Haraway, 2008), it would not be wrong to claim that anthropomorphism leads to sexism (or vice versa). In this vein, Haraway indicates that "It is hard to escape the subject-changing conjunction of gender, age, and species against a background of seemingly taken-for-granted (if not always empirically accurate) race, sexuality, and class" (Haraway, 2008, p. 214). By looking at the interviewee's analogy of Psikopat as a "jealous housewife," arguing that "she doesn't leave her husband alone" is, therefore, an example of such intersectionality (Torun, 2016, 00:30:45). The interviewee's assumption that she is jealous of her partner—humanizing the relation between one male and one female cat as a monogamous relationship—makes Psikopat the subject of a gendered analogy. The visual footage also reinforces this analogy by shooting the cats in a fight as the interviewee talks about Psikopat's jealousy (see *Figure 2*). Another similar issue is witnessed when an interviewee states "And some are pompous... like a lady who can't be bothered to say hello. Cats are exactly the same" (Torun, 2016, 00:35:59-00:36:09), likening a stereotypical representation of women—arrogancy—to cats' behaviors. In this sense, it is crucial to think about how feline and feminine are categories that co-construct one another, and the status of the said hierarchical categories can be explained, in turn, again through Haraway's words:

Species reeks of race and sex; and where and when species meet, that heritage must be united and better knots of companion species attempted within and across differences. Loosening the grip of analogies that issue in the collapse of all man's others into one another, companion species must instead learn to live intersectionally. (Haraway, 2008, p. 18, emphasis in original.)

Haraway lays bare how, in the broader sense, species and other categorizations such as race and sex conjoin in the intersectionality of such domains. Felinity and

femininity, therefore become examples of such intersectionality as in the case of the scene discussed above.



Figures 3, 4, 5, 6 Four shots of different cats sitting in the similar positions

Another important point in this vein is the artist Elif Nurşad Atalay's articulations of the femininity of cats in *Kedi*. She states: "Their posture feels very feminine to me. I don't see that elegance in women anymore. We've lost that, but cats carry themselves so well" (Torun, 2016, 00:32:34). The said postures, as the interviewee speaks in the background, are promoted by the visual track where several cats sitting in a similar position are shot from different angles (See *Figures 3, 4, 5, 6*). Attributing such a connotation to feline posture is a problematic anthropomorphic claim in that it reduces the cats' distinctiveness to a human-like organism. Hence, it generates situations in which cats' and humans' relations are depicted through inter-species similarities and differences—this time manifesting itself in terms of the bodily figurations of anthropomorphism on feline posture.

Deriving from the exemplary scenes analyzed above, one could say that such anthropomorphisms on the discursive level promote the relationships humans and

urban animals have developed in *Kedi*. According to Bennett, as “anthropomorphism can reveal isomorphisms,” by “revealing similarities across categorical divides and lighting up structural parallels between material forms in ‘nature’ and those in ‘culture’,” the term proves useful in promotion of such relations to some extent, since the human is in a continuous attempt at relating to the non-human other through similarities and differences (2010, p. 269). Although the discursive anthropomorphism in *Kedi* still upholds the notion of anthropocentrism that also leads to sexism in some cases, throughout its narrative structure, it does not seem to suggest a “bestiary” (Braidotti, 2011) animality discourse that would further sustain the binary dualisms between humans and non-human animals. In that case, the affirmative stand taken by the documentary voice is supported by similar affable and companionship-based anthropomorphisms. Yet it still bears the deceptions in itself; as Baker states, rendering animal otherness “meaningful in human terms, thus reducing its otherness to sameness, and its wonder to familiarity” is what anthropomorphism contributes (Baker, 2003, p. 160).

In *Kedi*, the anthropomorphism that comes from characterizing particular animals often refers to searching for specificity. Since in *Kedi* there are seven cats that are focused on in the narrative, the observations of the interviewees on them are oftentimes related to their specific characteristics. Looking at Sari’s, Bengü’s, and Psikopat’s cases in which humanizing traits are attributed to these cats, one could say that these observations are not universalizing feline species’ characteristics but making connections to their particular actions, behaviors, and interactions with humans and other urban animals. This is in part similar to Haraway’s view: “Not all animals are alike; their specificity—of kind and of individual—matters” (2016, p.

142). Even though the documentary renders the specificities of animals through a human eye, it points out that each animal can be distinct and individually specific. In this sense, discursive anthropomorphisms in *Kedi* employ “both human empathy for and misunderstanding of other animals” (Parkinson, 2020, p. 2). In the upcoming section, I frame what the urban inter-species solidarity and caring practices are, and the extent to which they embody anthropomorphic inclinations as portrayed in *Kedi*.

One can say that no matter how much they are humanized by the interviewees and the visual track of the documentary, the particular cats’ specific traits, behaviors, and actions are taken into account by their human companions. As Haraway also puts forward: “The details matter. The details link actual beings to actual response-abilities” (2016b, p. 29). This is evident in Psikopat’s case, as her human companion asserts that she does not like to be petted softly. Afterwards, one can see that he pets her in a manner that he is also scratching her. He also states her preference for fish: “She won't take anchovies or mackerel either, she prefers bluefish” (Torun, 2016, 00:28:47). Similarly, in Duman’s case (in English “Smokey”)—another cat focused on in *Kedi* characterized as a gentleman—the workers at the café are aware of the cat’s preferences. One of them states: “No matter how hungry he is, he won't come in, even if the door is open. He lets us know he's hungry by pawing at the window” (Torun, 2016, 01:07:09). Hence, they give him food by the entrance. All these examples resonate with Haraway’s ideas regarding companion animals: “The specificity of their happiness matters, and that is something that has to be brought to emergence” and in *Kedi* the particular traits of the cats are laid out in accordance with their happiness. In these scenes, the humans and cats seem to have learned to “show [...] the corporeal posture of cross-species respect” and ways of communicating with

each other, in turn, their significant otherness become established (Haraway, 2016, p. 134). In a sense, the specific communication strategies between companion species showcased in the documentary echoes again Haraway's term significant otherness: "The truth or honesty of nonlinguistic embodied communication depends on looking back and greeting significant others, again and again" (2008, p. 27). Although the interviews in the documentary highlight the anthropomorphic traits attributed to urban companion animals, one can catch a glance at their actual companionship that accrues from the mundane, ordinary and habitual interactions they have in a daily basis.

3.2.2 Beyond Language and Discourse: Anthropomorphism in Practice

To look at how anthropomorphism shows itself in practice other than discourse, I turn to Taylor who suggests we should begin with addressing questions related to its common-placeness:

For example, if anthropomorphism is a common social practice, what good does it serve? how is it used? by whom? why? These are just some of the questions going begging once we accept its cultural commonplace-ness. To begin to investigate such issues means that we need to start by thinking differently, to see the practice for what it is and move on from there. This means that we need to create a space where such questions can be asked. (Taylor, 2011, p. 269)

Kedi serves as an example of the space where such questions related to anthropomorphic practices can be answered, as Taylor offers. Through the documentary's non-fictional nature and everyday life portrayals of humans and animals, one can witness how humans put anthropomorphism into practice by implementing some routine practices such as nutrition and adoption. While anthropomorphism enables humans to show empathy by attributing human traits to non-human animals, it reduces the chance of considering animal otherness in particular cases. Hence, it stays human-centric, as Haraway states, "[...] resistance to

human exceptionalism *requires* resistance to humanization of our partners. Furry, market-weary, rights bearers deserve a break” (Haraway, 2008, p. 52, emphasis in original). Below, I indicate how the humanization of companion animals is a role-taker in the caring practices towards street animals in *Kedi* and discuss the anthropomorphic deceptions they embody.

Nutrition

Regarding the feeding routines of caregivers of cats and dogs, there are instances where human and cat/dog nutrition overlap. For example, in *Kedi*, one of the caregivers states: “We don't feed them dried cat food or anything artificial” (Torun, 2016, 00:42:10). Instead, the footage of cooked pasta and chicken prepared to be delivered to the cats is witnessed. Assuming cats should be nurtured well enough brings the fallacy that so-called human food is suitable for them. This specific example indicates a situation where it is assumed cats should consume such human food to be well-cared for. Acknowledging that cat food is industrial and not suitable for them leads to using yet again industrially produced animal-derived and plant-based products as a substitute. Another obvious example from *Kedi* regarding anthropomorphic feeding practices could be the fisherman feeding the motherless kittens with cow's milk. There are numerous examples where we see cats being fed with so-called human foods, such as Duman, the cat of a fancy restaurant who frequently eats specialty cheese and smoked meat, or Aslan Parçası who also lives by a fish restaurant where he “earns his keep”—fish—by keeping the rats away (Torun, 2016, 00:25:30).

In either case, however, it is no doubt that cats or dogs due to their proximity to human lives have become part of the speciesist chain of consumption. Also, a similar

case is at stake with industrially produced pet food. They are made with ingredients derived from animals, most of which cannot be hunted by cats/dogs in either wilderness or urban environments. This situation indicates that “Dogs [and cats] in capitalist technoculture have acquired the ‘right to health,’ and the economic (as well as legal) implications are legion” (Haraway, 2008, p. 49). As per Haraway’s formulation, naturecultures bring about co-evolution and co-constitution. The co-habitation of urban animals and humans as documented on the streets of Istanbul is a legacy of cohistory of domestication, which has put these animals in an entangled knot of proximity to humans. As Haraway writes: “Relations are constitutive; dogs and people are emergent as historical beings, as subjects and objects to each other, precisely through the verbs of their relating. People and dogs emerge as mutually adapted partners in the naturecultures of lively capital” (2008, p. 62). Therefore, their present-day nutrition needs are also naturalcultural end products of the long periods of coevolution with humans. This means that veterinary medicine and canine/feline food “become historically situated bodily needs” of companion animals (Haraway, 2008, p. 49). Due to their proximity to humans, cats and dogs have also become consumers in the “Capitalocene,” yet this proximity exposes a dilemma that “the calculus of suffering and choice won’t solve,” since “all the alternatives carry their own burden of assigning who lives and who dies and how” (Haraway, 2016; Haraway; 2008, p. 298). As such, not only the specifically produced nutrition for felines, but also substituting them with so-called human foods carry the inevitable dilemmas of choosing between species in terms of which one dies and lives.

Adoption

Similar to the in-between state of the street dog belonging to neither wild nor friendly states, the distinction of household animals and the street animals as either captive or

free is a debated subject in the documentaries *Kedi* and *Taşkafa*. Previously mentioned feline performer Sarı's case indicates a consideration of her and other street cats' agency, as well. Sarı's human companion explicitly mentions street cats' free will and freedom by explaining why humans ought not to hold captive of animals by adopting them just for the purposes of petting them. Instead, she proposes a solution to be with them, pet them whenever we want, on the condition that they remain outside the household. Therefore, she asserts that humans will not deprive them of their freedom. Similarly, in *Taşkafa*, an interviewee named Denet states, referring to the street dog, "You're hungry and thirsty, but you have no collar. You're not someone's dog or property. [...] Street dogs mean freedom to me, but of course with a cost. So, every time I see a street dog, I don't pity them. On the contrary, I feel how free they are and, from time to time, I envy them" (Zimmermann, 2013, 00:44:15-00:44:38).

Regarding the ambivalent position of some participants in *Kedi* to the practice of taking animals into one's household, Çetin argues that the documentary:

implicitly underlines the fact that we do not have to take companion animals into our households since there are thousands of them already living on the streets and they are waiting for our attention to help them survive the sometimes harsh winter conditions and other factors such as mistreatment and health issues. (2021, p. 50)

However, Çetin's point does not sound very critical of this fact. I argue that the interviewees' mentions about freedom and free will of urban animals in *Kedi* and *Taşkafa* resonate with traditional views on agency, which I introduced in the theoretical chapter. As I have argued in that chapter, structure-agency debates dwell on the power of the structures in limiting one's free will and independency. Not only these debates prove to be human-centric, but also when considered in line with human

and non-human hierarchical structures, they reduce the consideration of animal agency to a scale in which their agency is regarded on the mere ground of intentionality and free will, which exposes the potential anthropomorphic allegations. These utterings of the interviewees in the two documentaries, in turn, prove to be anthropomorphic in that they relate the household pets' situation to captivity and slavery. For this, I turn to Haraway's opinion about Vicki Hearne's companion animal happiness: "Hearne's arguments about companion animal happiness, reciprocal possession, and the right to the pursuit of happiness are a far cry from the ascription of 'slavery' to the state of all domestic animals, including 'pets'" (Haraway, 2016, p. 143-4). Therefore, instead of celebrating *Kedi's* or *Taşkafa's* voice—providing a binary situation in which household companion animals are claimed to be in the position of captive animals, or street animals are the lucky ones, since they have more freedom—rather, it should be criticized. The anthropomorphic discourse on freedom proves to be a potential obstacle in the inter-species practices of adoption.

Furthermore, Çetin's argument is also problematic due to the supposition that taking companion animals into one's household prevents adopters from helping street animals survive through harsh conditions. On the contrary, neither adoption from shelters or streets prevents a contribution to that animal's survival, nor does it entail an adopter to no longer offer help to other urban animals. Haraway indicates her stand on stray and shelter animal adoption in the case of "Save-a-Sato Foundation" in Puerto Rico, as such: "I also vigorously support adopting rescue and shelter animals" even though she criticizes how adoption success stories "regularly refer to siblings and other multispecies kin as mom, dad, sister, brother, aunt, uncle, cousin, godfather, etc" (Haraway, 2016, p. 186-7). Drawing a binary that presupposes whether to choose

one or the other puts a limitation on inter-species solidarity practices, since adoption is one of the key actions in them (Meijer, 2021). This point here proves a negative consequence of anthropomorphism, because downgrading street and household animals' agency to a humanistic approach on freedom falls into the trap of anthropomorphism that would, in turn, maintain the hierarchical relations between humans and animals. Emerging all the way through co-constitutive domestication that involves non-harmonious agencies of the human and the non-human animal, adoption, as a current day inter-species caring practice, turns out to be a way “to inherit the consequences of coevolution in natureculture” (Haraway, 2016, p. 103). On the whole, adoption as a caring practice is also an outcome of naturalcultural legacy of coevolution, while rendering it as otherwise as a demeaning practice of freedom of companion animals stay on the ground of anthropomorphizing them.

Even though these ambivalent situations exist in the documentary narrative, I argue that the *Kedi*'s highly positive and affirmative standpoint on the cats living on the streets sheds light on the multi-species encounters and the possibilities of co-existence. The documentary with this voice manifests that what Istanbul's significant urban population needs from its human residents is a commitment and attention to them. A specific speech in *Kedi* makes it all clear: “It would be easy to see street cats as a problem and handle them as a problem. Whereas if we can learn to live together again, maybe we'll solve our own problems as we try to solve theirs” (Torun, 2016, 01:10:50 - 01:11:07). With respect to Haraway who states “Maybe, but only maybe, and only with intense commitment and collaborative work and play with other terrans, flourishing for rich multispecies assemblages that include people will be possible. I am calling all this the Chthulucene—past, present, and to come” (2016, p. 101), *Kedi*

as a documentary justifies its response-ability by shedding light on the potentials of Chthulucentric co-existence in one of the utmost humanized environments, Istanbul.

3.3 When Humans Remember Animals: *Taşkafa: Stories of the Street*

The first feature-length documentary of Andrea Luka Zimmerman, *Taşkafa: Stories of the Street* (2013), is a documentary/essay film about Istanbul's street dogs. Although the documentary's theme is similar to *Kedi* and *Stray* in terms of its portrayal of urban animals in Istanbul, it differs from the rest of the documentaries in foci of this thesis since it embodies a more historical perspective. Apart from the co-history of dogs and humans, the memory of humans regarding the recently deceased dog *Taşkafa* carries importance in the narrative. In the documentary, memory is recognized in two ways. One is the group of locals remembering the deceased street dog *Taşkafa*. The other is the historical memory that is shared collectively in the present-day co-habitation and co-existence of humans and urban animals in Istanbul.



Figure 7 - The opening and closing shot of Taşkafa - a dog lying on his back

In *When Species Meet*, Haraway points out the necessity of learning to grieve upon the death of a companion animal by introducing Alice A. Kuzniar's work, *Melancholia's Dog* (2008). She indicates that Kuzniar invites us to acknowledge the

issues regarding “the depth, difficulty, and urgency of canine-human relations,” through which “we might learn at last to speak properly about such matters as pet loss and death, shared vulnerability, and resonating empathic shame” (Haraway, 2008, p. 332). To start with the remembrance of Taşkafa by the locals of the Galata district, the visual track of the documentary brings Taşkafa to mind in the opening scene with the dog who lays on his back, paws pointing to the sky, under the sun. The visual track substitutes Taşkafa with the image of another dog that appears to be the lead figure of this documentary (See *Figure 7*). However, in the diegetic narrative, we find out that Taşkafa recently died. The interviewees at the beginning of the documentary, Cevat, Bill, Bülent, Varol, and Aylin convey their memories of Taşkafa and help the audience picture him as the leader of his pack and as making decisions about people and other dogs who can be allowed in the area his pack lives.

Stray animals living close to where people reside and work can form multiple companionships with them (as well as with other non-human urban animals). This, in turn, allows a collective situated knowledge to be shared by the people who know that particular stray animal. Since pets are enclosed mostly within the familial network, pet death and mourning practices differ from a stray animal’s death. In another case, those which live distant from human settlements but still recognized as urban animals often stay unrecognized upon their death. Even in the case of Taşkafa, even the people who knew him closely did not take the chance to bury him by themselves. Instead, the municipality workers took him after he died.

While the status of the pet animal has the potential to ensure the mourning of the animal after its death by perpetuating its symbolic and material presence in various

ways, how stray animals that are companions to humans—albeit with a different status than pets—are mourned is yet to be studied. *Taşkafa*, in this sense, enables an audiovisual insight into what these mourning practices are and what they are limited to, yet through a narrow perspective since it does not visualize the immediate death of Taşkafa nor the mourning practices right after his death. The image of Taşkafa instead is substituted with another dog which provides a symbolic representation that it is made semiotically present by the memories of his human companions. The memories about Taşkafa at the beginning of the documentary can give an angle to this issue—however narrow as it may be.

Wolfe suggests that, in the scope of Judith Butler’s questions regarding whose lives are grievable in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, non-human animals should be included. Accordingly, he asks: “Why shouldn’t *non-human* lives count as ‘grievable lives,’ particularly since many millions of people grieve very deeply for their lost animal companions?” (Wolfe, 2012, p. 18, emphasis in original). In line with Wolfe’s argument, *Taşkafa* serves as a challenge to the hierarchical statuses of pet and stray animals by demonstrating a deceased stray dog as grievable. The significance of the memories about the deceased stray dog in *Taşkafa* can be reiterated through Haraway’s take on grieving companion animals: “Grief is a path to understanding entangled shared living and dying; human beings must grieve *with*, because we are in and of this fabric of undoing” (2016, p. 39, emphasis in original). Therefore, in the documentary, memories of interviewees about Taşkafa showcase how the path of grief is carried on to a level of remembering in a situated and collective manner. Mobilizing Haraway’s conceptualization of significant otherness, the documentary highlights the fact that the canine-human relations are not limited to

the household, but are shared more widely and collectively experienced when it comes to a stray animal (Haraway, 2016, p. 187).

The second issue worth mentioning regarding *Taşkafa*'s theme of memory is instead a historical one which interviewees and the visual track of the documentary depict. As Haraway makes clear, "In cities, villages, and rural areas all over the world, many dogs live parallel lives among people, more or less tolerated, sometimes used and sometimes abused. No one term can do justice to this history" (2016a, p. 105).

Taşkafa brings to the fore that despite the violent past, dogs have concurred along with the people, and they remain an important part of daily life in Istanbul. The demonstration of joint histories of dogs and humans in Istanbul highlights the dogs' belonging in naturecultures. Hence, the documentary justifies their existence as naturalcultural composites emerging through entangled and interconnected relations, interactions and encounters with humans. Braidotti thinks cats and dogs "as nature-cultural compounds qualify as cyborgs, that is to say as creatures of mixity or vectors of posthuman relationality" (2013, p. 73). Since Haraway's naturecultures embody the co-constitutive knots of a shared history, the documentary signifies a manifestation of the term. The co-historic legacy of dogs and humans is delivered through interviews in the movie, as well as the visual footage of the memorial stones that condone the Hayırsızada Massacre. For example, an interviewee named Mete states, "Dogs are the ritual presence of the streets from the past. In a sense, they are the owners of this place" (Zimmermann, 2013, 00:28:37). By "owners" he refers to Istanbul dogs' belonging in the city as much equally as human residents of this city. By inheriting the dogs' historic presence in human lives, the interviewee in a sense recalls a promise of "how to shape becoming with them in a potentially less violent future"

(2008, p. 105). In this sense, the historic human acts on street dogs of Istanbul are layered in the present and future.

Taşkafa's partial focus on the violent histories serves as a recollection on the naturalcultural legacy of the present-day co-habitation of urban animals and humans in Istanbul. However, Wang criticizes *Taşkafa*'s attempt at the portrayal of the historical specificity of urban animals by stating,

Whereas *Kedi* pushes toward a zoetic experience through a mesmerizing erratic feline rhythm that circumnavigates the capitalist economy, *Taşkafa* enmeshes the audience in a fundamentally human-oriented discourse that subsumes street animals' existence as an epiphenomenon of human history and society. (Wang, 2021, p. 20).

Wang's criticism recalls what Haraway says about dogs: "Dogs are not an alibi for other themes [...] Dogs are not surrogates for theory; they are not here just to think with. They are here to live with" (2016, pp. 97-8). Although I would agree with Wang on the level of dogs' utilization as outliers of human-oriented problems in society and capitalist economy in some of the interviews, the historical focus of *Taşkafa* demonstrate itself as a constitutive force on today's co-existence. In this sense, I would not argue that *Taşkafa* disregards the urban animal agency by integrating a historical perspective, because it puts Haraway's point into motion that "we are bound in telling story upon story with nothing but the facts" (Haraway, 2016, p. 94). The documentary, in fact, touches upon the more formidable fact that despite all the efforts of modernity and humanism, street animals have found a way to maintain their presence in urban environments. This signifies their agentic capacity and their status as companion species considering Haraway's statement: "The term companion species refers to the old co-constitutive link between dogs and people, where dogs have been actors and not just recipients of action" (2008, p. 134). Wang's criticism of

Taşkafa's historic narrative probably stems from the fact that the documentary partially focuses on the Hayırsızada Massacre, which is a violent human act on urban animals in then-Constantinople in 1910.

Briefly, the massacre is a cornerstone in urban dog history in Istanbul and points to the modernization and cleansing of the dogs from the city. Allegedly, Cemalettin Topuzlu reports that 30,000 dogs were exiled to Sivriada, an island in the Marmara Sea upon which it is named Hayırsızada (meaning Wicked Island), and had been left there to suffer and die (as cited in Khayyat, 2019, p. 166). Gülen, an interviewee in the documentary, states, “The people reacted so badly and so strongly. They paid the boatman secretly and took the dogs back” (Zimmerman, 2013, 00:07:02). *Taşkafa*'s focus in this historic event proves to be not only on the massacre itself, but also on the people's reaction to what had continuously been attempted by the authorities during the early 1900s. By making an attribute to Haraway, L.E. Van Patter argues, “Though no easy task, we have a responsibility to ‘stay with the trouble’ and work to make visible the violent histories, and ongoing injustices and dispossessions in the post-/settler colonial city” (Van Patter, 2021, p. 368). *Taşkafa* by integrating such violent histories in its narrative regarding the exile of the street dog from Istanbul has, in fact, found its way to “stay with the trouble” (Haraway 2016).

The dogs' agency in shaping the histories becomes clear in a story told by Gülen:

In the Ottoman times, there were 80-100 thousand dogs people sometimes couldn't even walk they have to some or of jump over them. There was an English gentleman who wanted to take a little walk at night with his walking stick. Dogs didn't like people wearing different clothes. So they barked at him. The guy got so scared and he started shaking his walking stick: ‘How dare you bark at me?’ and then they barked more. The guy gets panicky and he starts running and the dogs of course start running after him. He falls off a wall and he dies. He must have been an important person; the ambassador of Britain

tells the Sultan to get rid of the dogs immediately. The Sultan asked his men to gather all the dogs and take them to one of the remote island in the Marmara sea. (Zimmermann, 2013, 00:06:01-00:07:12)

One can infer from this story that dogs are not merely passive objects in the human history. In fact, as Bennett suggests “There was never a time when human agency was anything other than an interfolding network of humanity and nonhumanity; today this mingling has become harder to ignore” (2010, p. 113). The barking and territory protection of few of the dogs as instinctual acts simply played a role in a massive violent act against urban dogs. Accordingly, the documentary narrates the co-history of the Istanbul street dogs and humans with its means of portraying the relationship between them. In fact, this relationship “is not especially nice; it is full of waste, cruelty, indifference, ignorance, and loss, as well as of joy, invention, labor, intelligence, and play” (Haraway, 2016, p. 103). No matter how much are they recipients of violent acts by humans, the dogs of Istanbul constitute as an agent in shaping the histories of modernization in 19th century, and at times their mere presence proves agentic in these acts. According to the ongoing manifestation of the documentary, the task, today, has become how to cultivate multi-species responsibility which is “about both absence and presence, killing and nurturing, living and dying—and remembering who lives and who dies and how in the string figures of naturalcultural history” (Haraway, 2016b, p. 28). In this way of thinking, Fortuny argues in line with Haraway’s ideas that “Istanbul dogs, because they have maintained their historical place on the city streets, bear peculiar witness to such a notion of co-constitution” (2014, p. 287). Accordingly, *Taşkafa* provides an insight into what it means to be companion species in the present through the narration of the recollections of the past.

It is made clear in the interviews that both in the present and in the Ottoman times dogs have served as protectors of particular neighborhoods. In another interview, Gül states: “In Ottoman times, dogs had the job of protecting the neighborhood. People valued them for that as well” (Zimmermann, 2013, 00:33:42). When it comes to the present-day co-habitation, the dogs and the humans share similar companionship patterns as another interviewee, Gülru states: “In autumn, I always see, when the schools open, that they accompany the kids to the school buses. Or if there’s an ambulance coming for an elderly person, they pretend as if they also work, as if have a job” (Zimmermann, 2013, 00:34:53). This resonates with the idea that the Istanbul street dog does not belong to a concrete definition (Fortuny, 2014). They are neither working dogs or guardian dogs but perform similar behaviors that coincide with these categories. Therefore, the free-ranging urban dogs fall in-between the various categories of dog titles: pet, guardian, therapy, police dogs, etc. In this sense, the Istanbul street dog does not carry the risk of abandonment as if it was a pet dog. However, its habitation on the streets does rely on “an economy of affection” like pets, but not with a singular person (Haraway, 2016, p. 129). It often requires a collective affection and sometimes resistance by the humans for the dog to keep its territory, as it is portrayed in the documentary. The street dog performs similar actions of protection, guardianship, and company to humans and territories but it does not have a guarantee for “being respected for the work they do” (Haraway, 2016, p. 129).

By any means, *Taşkafa*’s inclusion of a historical narrative remarks the fact that “Nonhuman animals are also material-semiotic and historical presences with whom we live our lives; as animals are inextricably bound up with human activity, they are historical not only like humans, but with them” (Ioannides, 2013, p. 109). Therefore,

the historicity of the documentary does not necessarily prove an “all-too-human” approach by looking at the historical acts of humans on urban animals (Wolfe, 2009), instead it serves as an urgent call for “learning again, or for the first time, how to become less deadly, more response-able, more attuned, more capable of surprise, more able to practice the arts of living and dying well in multispecies symbiosis” (Haraway, 2016b, p. 98). Therefore, *Taşkafa*, at its core, as an audiovisual tool for “multispecies storytelling” which “is about recuperation in complex histories that are as full of dying as living, as full of endings, even genocides, as beginnings,” challenges human exceptionalism by condemning the historic human acts that have changed urban animals’ lives in Istanbul (Haraway, 2016b, p. 10). The interviews regarding this issue in the documentary proves a resistance and denunciation towards such violent histories. It also demonstrates urban animals’ historic co-presence and their being co-actors in the co-constructions of present-day co-habitation in Istanbul by partially taking the attention to the dogs’ actions, behaviors and so-called roles in the human society.

3.4 Sympoietic Living via Homelessness and Precarity in *Stray*

The most recent documentary discussed in this thesis is *Stray* (2020) by Elizabeth Lo. Unlike the other two documentaries under scrutiny, *Stray* does not include interviews in its narrative, and isolates its portrayal to the navigation of three stray dogs. Lo, with her camera, follows Zeytin, Nazar, and Kartal in Istanbul and manages to create a secular gaze of and at them. In this section, through the conceptual framework of “becoming-with” and “making-with” of Haraway, I aim to scrutinize the prevailing theme of the documentary: homelessness and the co-existence of humans and dogs on the streets.

The several homeless young refugee boys are accompanied by Zeytin, Nazar, and Kartal, as well as other stray dogs that are unnamed in the movie. Through the documentary's eye, the audience witnesses the shared lives of humans and non-humans without a home or shelter. The refugees sleep in a construction site with the dogs knowing that it is not a permanent residence and that it will be demolished after one or two years. In another scene, a man in charge of the construction zone tells the boys to no longer sleep there. From this point on, they start to sleep on the street. One can deduce these issues from hearing their conversations while seeing the dog on the screen. This shooting technique provided by the visual track of the documentary that has secluded its gaze at the dogs enables the non-human gaze to be a dominant aesthetic feature of *Stray*. With this in mind, the non-human animal gaze and its connotations to agency will further be examined in Chapter 4.

The dogs' and refugee boys' interactions on-screen indicate that they create worldings together through co-constituted kinships. This type of inter-species kinship could be an example of Haraway's concept of "sympoiesis," which is defined by her as such: "*Sympoiesis* is a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems. It is a word for worlding-with, in company" (Haraway, 2016b, p. 58, emphasis in original). The schemes of sympoietic living in *Stray* can be exemplified by the selection of scenes I provide in this section. The first scene is when the dogs walk with the group of refugee boys along the shoreline. The young men talk about selling tissues. One of them says to another: "Come here and sell tissues, but don't force people to buy. Say, 'Would you buy a pack of tissues?' If they say no, that's okay" (Lo, 2020, 00:12:44- 00:12:49). They concede that their insistence of selling

tissues might cause terror to people. Correspondingly, these lines express the boy's acknowledgment of being an outsider, an other in Turkish society. When this speech is also considered together with the next scene where the camera follows Zeytin and embodies its gaze, the two scenes express the otherness as a status shared by the dogs and the refugees. That is because when the camera embodies Zeytin's gaze, it shows three people looking at him in a disturbed and stressed fashion. Furthermore, the next sequence shows Zeytin from behind, and a person slightly pushing him with her walking stick. The conjunction of the two scenes demonstrates how shared unwantedness is witnessed on the streets of Istanbul. This shared situation can be argued to be enabling a formation of an inter-species contact zone in which the organisms co-constitute each other through becoming-with and make their worlding sympoietically.

The co-experienced otherness of refugees and stray dogs unfold into a "significant otherness" between them (Haraway, 2016). This significant otherness flourishes a human and animal company in precarious situations in the documentary. Accordingly, another scene accompanies Nazar in its visual track while the soundtrack reveals the conversations the boys have with the man in charge of the construction zone. He kicks the boys out, tells them not to hang out or sleep there, and advises them to go home, probably knowing they do not have a home. The precarity and the displacement from place-to-place refugees have experienced are all witnessed through the dogs' visual presence in the focus of the camera, which bespeaks for not only an other-than-human viewpoint but also for a multi-species precarity. This type of precarity is often addressed by posthumanist scholars in relation to ecology, global warming, climate change, and species extinctions (Tsing, 2015; Haraway, 2016). These co-shared

situations, in turn, have become in Tsing's word "the condition of our time" (2015, p. 20). *Stray* demonstrates this co-precarity in the frames of non-human animals' survival in urbanized environments. Not only the dogs' actions in surviving in a highly humanized environment come to matter in the documentary in the form of non-human agency which is analyzed in the next chapter, but also their inter-dependence with humans and other dogs are portrayed with their world-making practices. Species inter-dependence is analyzed in this section with emphasis on their significant otherness with the refugee boys.



Figure 8: Nazar, Kartal, and a refugee boy sleeping on the street sharing the same blanket

The relations of the refugees and the dogs spread to the entanglements of co-experienced and co-constituted daily practices through which they become-with and make-with each other. Haraway elucidates that:

Companion species play string figure games where who is/are to be in/of the world is constituted in intra-and interaction. The partners do not precede the knotting; species of all kinds are consequent upon worldly subject- and object-shaping entanglements. (2016, p.13)

In this sense, their everyday life interactions between themselves are portrayed in the forms of caring for, playing with, and sleeping next to each other. These practices of daily interactions enable them to constitute a worlding together. This worlding

appears in an urban environment in the forms of “species interdependence” which “is the name of the worlding game on earth, and that game must be one of response and respect” (Haraway, 2008, p. 19). This interdependence does not necessarily come in the shape of the guardianship of the dogs, which is especially evident in the scene where the boys struggle with the people to get Kartal the puppy. They negotiate with a person to get the dog but it turns out to be futile, the reasons for which extend to the refugee status of the boys. They, instead, kidnap the puppy to live with them. The reason to do that is not because of acquiring a beneficial utility from the dog; it is portrayed as purely out of the loving and caring for in the documentary. Loving and world-making *Stray* play hand in hand. That is to say, “To be in love means to be worldly, to be in connection with significant otherness and signifying others, on many scales, in layers of locals and globals, in ramifying webs” (Haraway, 2016a, p. 172). In this sense, the inter-species everyday routines of the refugee boys and dogs as world-making practices is necessary to dwell on.

The daily practices of making-with and living-with engenders looking into their associations in companion species. Haraway states: “Accountability, caring for, being affected, and entering into responsibility are not ethical abstractions; these mundane, prosaic things are the result of having truck with each other” (2016a, p. 36). In other words, they become-with and make-with each other through daily encounters and interactions—touching, sharing a space, playing, protecting, feeding, attention to health, etc. In a simplest sense, touching the dogs is an enabler of “multispecies becoming-with to cultivate the capacity to respond, response-ability” (Haraway, 2016, p.78). Inter-species interdependence in the documentary can be resonated with Haraway’s “response-ability,” “which is always experienced in the company of

significant others” (2008, p. 89). In another way of looking, “Touch does not make one small; it peppers its partners with attachment sites for world making. Touch, regard, looking back, becoming with—all these make us responsible in unpredictable ways for which worlds take shape” (Haraway, 2008, p. 36). Touching as an interaction constitutes a becoming-with, which consequently emerge the possibility of sympoiesis, or in other words, making-with. All these daily practices alike offer a transformative account in both parties of the significant others by bringing on the inter-species response-ability.

Unlike *Kedi*'s rather affirmative stance on the non-human life on the streets, *Stray* creates a dubious perspective on the free-ranging concept of urban animals. Instead of merely celebrating the free-ranging dogs in a humanized environment, it also focuses on the materiality of freedom, which is expressed through relations and processes the dogs and the refugees share. As Elizabeth Grosz suggests, freedom “is not a state one is in or a quality that one has, but it resides in the activities one undertakes that transform oneself and (a part of) the world” (2010, p. 152). Accordingly, *Stray* does not portray their performers as unitary beings that struggle to free themselves from precarity, but it shows how their practices come to matter within this situation. In this sense, it also resonates with Grosz's formulation: “I develop a concept of life, bare life, where freedom is conceived not only or primarily as the elimination of constraint or coercion but more positively as the condition of, or capacity for, action in life” (2010, p. 140). In the documentary, the dogs are portrayed with their capacities for action and for living in an environment where they are unwanted by the dictates of biopower, which calls for their consideration of agentic capacities which is analyzed in the upcoming chapter.

Considering the worlding the human and the non-human co-creates in the urban setting of Istanbul, their situation resonates with Haraway's words: "Right now, the earth is full of refugees, human and not, without refuge" (Haraway, 2016, p. 100). The stray dog is portrayed in *Stray* as without security and certainty. Tsing sees precarity as "being vulnerable to others" as she writes:

Unpredictable encounters transform us; we are not in control, even of ourselves. Unable to rely on a stable structure of community, we are thrown into shifting assemblages, which remake us as well as our others. We can't rely on the status quo; everything is in flux, including our ability to survive. (2015, p. 20)

It is possible to tie Tsing's view of "shifting assemblages," resulting in the transformation of the self and the other, to Haraway's co-constituted "worlding" regarding *Stray*. For example, co-constituted worlding enables the dogs in the documentary to maintain closeness to refugee boys as human companions, hence improving their chance of survival with their proximity to protection, food, and a shelter of sorts. But when the construction site has been taken away from the boys—an action which might make an attribute to "shifting assemblages" of Tsing—the dogs have started to sleep with them under a blanket on the street. The dogs' and the boy's inseparability, despite this displacement, recalls the animals' agency to maintain the proximity to humans. Especially Zeytin and Nazar, visiting various places in the city, are free-ranging dogs on the streets of Istanbul, while Kartal is a little puppy which is carried around by the boys. The fact that Zeytin and Nazar show up and sleep with the boys on the street after their location is shifted portray the "dogs as agents of multispecies kinship formation" (Haraway, 2008, p. 296). Therefore, not only the refugees count as human agents in inter-species kinship formations with their elaborate attentiveness to co-habitation practices with their canine companions in the

construction site or elsewhere, but also the dogs are portrayed as agents in this companionship in the documentary.

The co-constitutive relationships of the dogs and the refugees also resonates with Haraway's statement on Tsing's argument: "Tsing proposes a commitment to living and dying with response-ability in unexpected company. Such living and dying have the best chance of cultivating conditions for ongoingness" (Haraway, 2016, p. 38).

The ongoingness of survival on the streets are connected to living-with in company in *Stray*. Deploying in this scene on Haraway's "living-with," *Stray* demonstrates their performers as "Chthonic ones":

Chthonic ones are not safe; they have no truck with ideologues; they belong to no one; they writhe and luxuriate in manifold forms and manifold names in all the airs, waters, and places of earth. They make and unmake; they are made and unmade. (Haraway, 2016, p. 2)

In this sense, Haraway's "Chthonic" ones—in the form of humans and non-humans—are portrayed in *Stray* in terms of their living without security, their struggle against their unwanted status, and their prospering in company. Haraway's idea of "response-ability" can also be rendered as a way of prospering in company. As Haraway lays bare: "Instructed by companion species of the myriad terran kingdoms in all their placetimes, we need to reseed our souls and our home worlds in order to flourish [...]" (2016, p. 114). The scene in which the refugee boys get the free food distributed by a humanitarian organization and share it with the dogs mobilizes this argument of Haraway by portraying the refugees' cultivated response-ability in an ordinary yet precarious situation. In this sense, this case recalls for the acknowledgment of the fact that not everyone can be responsible for multi-species flourishing in the same way. As Haraway states, "We are all responsible to and for shaping conditions for multispecies flourishing in the face of terrible histories, but not in the same ways. The differences

matter—in ecologies, economies, species, lives” (Haraway, 2016, p. 116). The refugees’ possibilities of receiving the basic needs—shelter, food, and security—determine the conditions for their practices of response-ability towards their canine companions.

The forced displacements that the refugee boys have to endure in company with the dogs, Zeytin, Nazar and the puppy Kartal, showcase Tsing’s “disturbance” (2015). She refers to disturbance as an “opening for action”: “Disturbance realigns possibilities for transformative encounter. Landscape patches emerge from disturbance. Thus, precarity is enacted in more-than-human sociality” (Tsing, 2015, p. 152). The forced displacements the inter-species small group had to have gone through can be considered as a starting point for action. That is because the first displacement from the construction site plays a role in the selection of a new place to sleep, which is the street. While this group is flourished with the addition of Kartal the puppy after this incident, their displacement from the construction site cultivated another displacement, as seen in the documentary’s finale. They were arrested for sleeping on the street. If such displacements are connected with Tsing’s conceptualization of “disturbance,” one can infer that not only the documentary portrays a “disturbance” which makes “new landscape assemblages possible” but also it shows that “disturbances follow other disturbances” (Tsing, 2015, p. 160). Wang similarly argues that regarding the other two documentaries,

Kedi and *Taşkafa* are productive examples for considering the documentary form’s potential for probing what Donna Haraway calls the Chthulucene and what Anna Tsing sees as the possibility of hope ‘in capitalist ruins,’ following the collapsing anthropocentric ‘progress’ discourse. (Wang, 2021, p. 23)

I claim that *Stray* can also be added to this argument of Wang since the documentary enables the audience to bear a close eye on the three selected dogs’ lives in company

with their homeless-alike human companions. It also embodies this small inter-species group in the frames of forced displacement and prospering in company.

Finally, the documentary's ending does not foreclose on what happens after the boys get arrested due to their sleeping on the street, and what happens to Kartal, which is also taken by the police. Not only the finale signifies the co-experienced "disturbance" of Tsing, but it also carries implications on the inter-species love, respect, and trust which all constitute the relationship between companion species. As Haraway lays bare: "Significantly other to each other, in specific difference, we signify in the flesh a nasty developmental infection called love" (Haraway, 2016, p. 94-5). Other than this significant otherness which resonates with love, the human and animal companionship in *Stray* unfold on the basis of human-urban animal co-existence and co-habitation. The companionship of the refugees and the dogs embody "[r]espect and trust" which, other than love, "are the critical demands of a good working relationship" between companion species, specifically in this case between humans and dogs (Haraway, 2016, p. 131).

I argue that this ending with its ambiguity and uncertainty demonstrates the beginning of a multi-species action despite the arresting and displacement. Even if the documentary's finale connotes the forced demise of material companionship which the dogs and the refugees have lingered, it also demonstrates a metaphorical appreciation of "dying-with" (Haraway, 2016, p. 2). After this dissolution of inter-species group, Zeytin, the canine protagonist of the documentary, is shot in the morning sleeping in front of a building door. Right after this scene, one witnesses many shots of other dogs that are not in Istanbul but in various cities of Turkey

playing and wandering together. Then, the following quote on a black screen from Orhan Pamuk appears: “The state has launched campaign after campaign to drive dogs from the streets, but still they roam free” (Lo, 2020, 01:05:33). On the whole, as Haraway marks, “Living-with and dying-with each other potently in the Chthulucene can be a fierce reply to the dictates of both Anthropos and Capital” (2016, p. 2). One might say that *Stray* and their performers as human-others and animal-others qualify as resistants to Anthropos and Capital on the grounds of challenging human exceptionalism and Western notions of humanism by closely portraying what it means to be living-with on the streets of Istanbul.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has foregrounded diverse aspects that the three documentaries embody regarding companionships humans and urban animals have co-constituted with each other in Istanbul. The documentaries in question, with their diverse perspectives on the streets of Istanbul, focus on the present-day co-existence, co-habitation, and situated cultural practices and knowledge. The partial gaze at these companionships stems preeminently from the limited selection of urban animals that live in Istanbul to be traced after with a camera. Even *Taşkafa* in which there is not a selection of animals like in *Kedi* and *Stray*, traces the memories of the deceased dog Taşkafa and uses a dog (see again *Figure 7*) that is seen at the beginning and the end of the documentary, which is utilized as a symbolic presence for Taşkafa. Thus, such a selection of urban animals in the documentaries provides a closer angle on their companionships with humans sharing the same geography with them. In light of what this chapter has offered in terms of human-urban animal companionships as represented in the documentaries in foci of this thesis, the following chapter will focus

on how these documentaries disrupt the conventional human gaze by integrating the gaze of and at urban animals in their visual tracks. Therefore, how this non-human gaze ensures the portrayal of relational and distributed human and non-human agencies will also be under scrutiny in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

A Vibrant Screen: Urban Animals and Agency

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the visual tracks of the documentaries as potent manifestations of agency, gaze, and point of view of urban animals. These issues are covered with respect to relational and distributive agencies of human-animal assemblages, non-human animals alone, as well as the vital materialistic conception of Istanbul as portrayed in documentaries, *Kedi*, *Taşkaşa*, and *Stray*. The discussions in this chapter rely on new materialist notions of agency, particularly of Bennett's vibrant matter. While Bennett's influential book coins a vitality to the non-human matter, by developing an object-oriented ontology in the new materialist realms, its formulations on agentic capacity and distributive agency of humans and non-humans are considered in relation to animals' social, intelligent, and perceptual lives in this section. Correspondingly, this section peruses how cats and dogs perform agency in an urban environment, how agency is distributed among various human and non-human forces of the city, and the ways in which the multiple ways of the employment of animal and human gaze in the aforementioned documentaries can be considered in relation to non-human agency.

4.2 More-than-Human Agency on the Streets of Istanbul in *Kedi*, *Stray*, and *Taşkafa*

This section aims to discuss how urban animals and humans in Istanbul, as portrayed in the documentaries *Taşkafa*, *Kedi*, and *Stray*, showcase a “distributive agency” as per Bennett’s (2010) formulation *Vibrant Matter*. In order to do that, I aim to vitalize the interconnections between three conscious species’ agency—dog, cat, and human—bearing in mind that their consciousness does not work/function in the same manner insofar as their different body sensorium, biological and physical characteristics. In this sense, this section considers the interfolding lives of humans and urban animals merging the traditional views on agency, which are related to free will, intentionality, and ability, with a new materialist approach to the term which would regard both human and animal, lively and unlively matter as agentic.

4.2.1 Agentic Life of the Animals in an Urban Environment

In this section, I aim to highlight the ways in which non-human urban animals are bearers of agency on the grounds of biosocial, communicative and cognitive levels, yet not suggesting that their agency is autonomous just as that of humans by examining the selected scenes coming from the three documentaries, *Kedi*, *Taşkafa* and *Stray*. That said, this section’s aim is not to cut the ties with the relational and collaborative traits of new materialist agency, but to showcase how the urban animals are witnessed as agentic actors in the documentaries in a humanized setting.

As a first instance, I look at the scene where the group of dogs waits together with a human in order to cross the road in *Taşkafa* (see Figure 9). When the traffic light turns green for the pedestrians, they all together move and cross the two-side road. In

this instance, one can tie the notion of agency to the dogs' intellectual capabilities. As McFarland and Hediger suggest: "Many animals, it appears, may have the intellectual capability and self-awareness necessary to be considered agents in their own lives" (2009, p. 2). The particular scene in question reveals that the urban street dogs of Istanbul or at least the three appearing in the scene have developed a response to the cars' movement, the traffic lights, and the human companion to be trusted in the case of crossing the road. Such intellectual capability of the dogs, then, problematizes the definitions of the humans as animals "with an extra added ingredient called 'intellect'" as Richard Rorty writes (as cited in Bennett, 2010, p. 68). Through this response, one might possibly conclude that dogs can make intelligent decisions by evaluating a situation that is presumably related to a human-only construction.



Figure 9: Three dogs and a human are waiting together to cross the road in Taşkafa (2013)

Similar scenes are also witnessed in *Stray* but with a more emphasis on the dangers of the traffic. At the beginning of the documentary, Zeytin crosses the road without traffic lights, sleeps in a junction where heavy traffic is going on, and manages to take a step at the last moment when a tram is about to hit her. But she always manages to

get rid of the danger. Lo, the director of the documentary, in an interview, talks about this issue:

Zeytin is not human, but she's still finding her way through our world. We don't tend to trust dogs to navigate traffic because it's run by very human signals. But many dogs are able to slip through these cracks of humanity and thrive. (Wang, 2021, para. 6)

It is also possible to tie this developed survival skill by the dogs in an urban environment to the outcome of and the ongoingness of co-evolution. Seeing domestication and co-evolution playing hand in hand in companion species, Haraway connects these terms together as an emergent co-habiting process that includes various agencies more than the human (Haraway, 2016, p. 122). In the present day, the multiplication of transportation vehicles and established traffic systems in urban environments has become an actor in the co-evolutionary processes of street dogs. As qualitative responders to the complexity of urban environments, these animals help us to question “the human tendency to understate the degree to which people, animals, artifacts, technologies, and elemental forces share powers and operate in dissonant conjunction with each other” (Bennett, 2010, p. 121).

Similarly, in *Kedi*, the feline species' agency shows up in particular scenes in which they perform territorial decisions, interact with their human companions or with the same species, or respond to a specific situation. To exemplify how the agency is an observable factor in representing the feline species in everyday settings, I look at the scenes in which cats ask for food, and are responders to a particular caregiver's feeding. At the beginning of the documentary, one can see Sarı wandering around the street to collect food for herself and her kittens. She goes to a shop where a human gives her a piece of pastry, visits the people eating at cafes and restaurants, and finds cat food and water on the street. Hence, Sarı is familiar with her territory and the type

of actions that bear the potential of acquiring food from humans. Likewise, Duman, the cat of an artisan restaurant, displays an agentic feature to mark its territory. As his human companion states, he does not prefer to go inside the restaurant. Instead, he developed a way of asking for food by continuously scratching the window while the door is open-wide. In another case, by terrorizing the neighborhood fishers, Psikopat manages to get her preferred type of fish. In a similar manner, two scenes in *Kedi* showcase the caregivers' distribution of food to the cats. Whenever the caregiver arrives in the area and shouts out to the cats to gather, they pile up around them potentially knowing that they will provide them with food. In these cases, one can argue that the cats developed an accustomed response to the caregivers' communication signals. Thus, these distinct reciprocal inter-species communication strategies provide a glimpse into the “interfolding network of humanity and nonhumanity” in the daily interactions of humans and urban animals in Istanbul (Bennett, 2010, p. 96).

As a further demonstration, one can see that Gamsız's new orange rival in the neighborhood adopts the route Gamsız uses to climb up to a resident's balcony. After seeing Gamsız climbing down from the balcony using the canopy and the tree to reach the ground, the orange cat uses the same route to reach the same place. This scene in particular demonstrates that the cat is able to make observations and respond to this observation by imitating the action. In the assumption that Gamsız and his rival's scenes are an outcome of editing techniques that would concede a touch of anthropomorphism—by representing the cat as possessors of observation capacity and granting them a responder identity when it is not quite the case—it still serves as a mobilizer of Bennett's vibrant matter. As she states: “A touch of anthropomorphism,

then, can catalyze a sensibility that finds a world filled not with ontologically distinct categories of beings (subjects and objects) but with variously composed materialities that form confederations” (2010, p. 269). In this sense, this scene would not be as anthropomorphic as the ones used to characterize animals, as I have discussed in the previous chapter. Rather, by limiting human participation in the scene, *Kedi* portrays the cat as performing the abilities that are thought of as unique to humans, thereby subverting the humanist notions of hierarchies between species.

These scenes suggest that not only each animal potentially has different performances of agency, but is also capable of making intelligent decisions. In turn, the selected scenes challenge human exceptionalism by rattling “the conventional hierarchy of brain function and intelligence that universalizes a humanist notion of ability, with humans on top of course” (Hediger, 2009, p. 325). Like Bennett’s aim to “theorize vitality intrinsic to materiality [...], and to detach materiality from the figures of passive, mechanistic, or divinely infused substance,” these scenes configure that “humans are not as different from other animals as we have historically thought—even animals with whom we share very few physical similarities” (2010, p. 23; McFarland and Hediger, 2009, p. 2). Even when thought in the traditional understandings of agency that define the term according to intentionality, ability, and free will, the animals in question still share the features that are thought as intrinsic to humans only. Furthermore, in the next section, I aim to show how the documentaries in question demonstrate a distributive and relational type of agency that further disrupts human exceptionalism.

4.2.2 Distributive Agencies of the Human, Animal, and the Non-Human Matter

The distributive quality of human and other-than-human forces plays a vital role in Bennett's work. As she describes it: "A theory of distributive agency [...] does not posit a subject as the root cause of an effect. There are instead always a swarm of vitalities at play" (2010, p. 114). In this sense, bearing a close eye on the agentic lives of animals in Istanbul provides an angle into vital materialism, which demonstrates that human agency is not enclosed and is interplay with non-human forces in everyday life.



Figure 11: Zeytin is shown from a low angle while eating a bone in a crowd of humans in Stray (2020)

As Bennett asks regarding the distributive agency of humans and nonhumans: "How can this ontological imaginary square with our everyday encounters with what greet us as stable bodies?" (2010, p. 174). In light of this question, I turn to the scene when Zeytin and another dog scavenge for food in the trash bags, taking out several pieces of raw bone from them. As Bennett suggests, the thing-power can even rise from a pile of trash (2010, p. 42). In Zeytin's case, the trash serves as an edible matter. Given

that trash is constituted as a throw-away object, a waste by humans, in this scene it is animated by the dogs, by being transformed into an edible matter. As Bennett suggests,

The quarantines of matter and life encourage us to ignore the vitality of matter and the lively powers of material formations, such as [...] the way our trash is not “away” in landfills but generating lively streams of chemicals and volatile winds of methane as we speak. (2010, p. 10)

In line with her argument, Zeytin’s scavenging provides the audience with an encounter with the quarantined-to-be organic and inorganic matter and makes it visible. Then, the refuse collectors arrive to take out the trash from the bins. Seeing the dogs start to fight over the bones, the driver gets out of the truck and tries to break up the fight. He enables the dogs to share the pieces of bones. The scene provides an acknowledgment of an agentic assemblage in which the human, the dogs, the trash, and the edible matter come to play.

A similar concern for the urban animal life on the streets would be the concept of waste regarding distributive agency. Food leftovers, for example, have become an actant in the complexities of the survival of urban animals. It is encountered in *Stray* that the previous human companions of Kartal-the puppy and his family mix up what is leftover from their dinner to give it out to the dogs. In *Taşkafa*, this situation is delivered verbally by one of the interviewees named Zaza, who addresses the pet and stray animal hierarchies coming out in the daily practices of humans: “They love them, they take care of them, but they always remind them where they belong. They show that with the food too. They buy expensive dog food for their pets, and give the leftovers to the stray ones” (Zimmermann, 2013,00:42:25 00:42:44). In *Kedi*, while most of the people featured in the documentary prepare or buy food for their feline companions on the streets—reiterating its voice that supports multi-species

flourishing in an urban setting through “intense commitment and collaborative work and play with other terrans” (Haraway, 2016, p. 101)—, there are instances where cats are fed with food leftovers. As seen in Figure 12, the man cleaning the fish throws down their inner parts that would not be consumed by humans. The cats wait for him to drop the pieces so they can eat them. The category of urban animals is indeed not limited to cats and dogs only, as seen in various scenes of *Kedi* the pigeons, the seagulls, and the crows also eat the food leftovers. All these scenes, in fact, contribute to the new materialist understanding of thing-power. Accordingly, the throw-away matter to be disposed of by humans has turned into a vibrant edible matter that would contribute to the urban animals’ survival in a very humanized setting. Since edible matter is an actant, according to Bennett’s formulation, the act of “eating constitutes a series of mutual transformations between human and nonhuman materials” (2010, p. 96). The waste’s transformation into the edible matter made possible by the animals’ act of scavenging and eating portrays “a swarm of vitalities at play,” and “agency of assemblages” (Bennett, 2010, p. 114). In other words, the agency of the organic/inorganic, human/animal, life/matter can be rendered as distributive by looking at the interplays between human actions of disposal, the vibrant materiality of trash and edible matter, as well as the urban animal agency as a transformative force.



Figure 12: A man cleaning up fish and two cats are waiting behind him in Kedi (2016)

Correspondingly, the metabolism of the urban animal bodies disposes of the edible matter by leaving feces in the city's various places. Bennett, while looking at the "productive power" of edibles in human bodies, states that "once ingested, [...] food coacts with the hand that places it in one's mouth, with the metabolic agencies of intestines, pancreas, kidneys, with cultural practices of physical exercise, and so on, food can generate new human tissue" (2010, p. 97). Looking at Zeytin's case, once she scavenged and ate the bone that was going to become a waste, her body is also coacted with the edible matter. Though not demonstrated linearly within the documentary editing in line with this eating activity, Zeytin is also shot while defecating in a public space. The action, therefore, is an example of contingency that consequently affect other materialities other than her body. In this sense, Zeytin's body can be rendered as an affective one. Its connotation on the agency of the urban animals can therefore be that "the efficacy [...] becomes distributed across an ontologically heterogeneous field, rather than being a capacity localized in a human

body or in a collective produced (only) by human efforts” (Bennett, 2010, p. 68).

Zeytin’s agentic non-human body and the various sources inside and outside of it are a way of seeing other-than-human forces that constitute an urban environment alongside human factors.

In fact, it is more appropriate to consider this urban terrain as a materiality rather than a simple environment as per new materialist understanding. Bennett suggests, “if the environment is defined as the substrate of human culture, materiality is a term that applies more evenly to humans and non-humans” (2010, p. 296). In this sense, the choice of framing non-human beings and things at the center enables a disruption of the urban setting as a human-only construction. One of the most definitive scenes that portray how dogs are in focus rather than the humans playing a part in the frame is when Zeytin is shot in a crowd of humans. Particular streets in Istanbul are usually crowded and the wanderings of the dogs on these streets are shot from a low angle in *Stray*. For example, as can be seen in Figure 11, Zeytin eats the bone she scavenged and fought over with another dog, lying on the ground when a crowd of people walks past her. This wide shot that centers Zeytin within the scenery of mobile humans establishes the dog’s co-existence with humans, which is far beyond one-to-one companionships. *Stray*, with similar scenes like this, establishes the in-between state of the street dog’s visibility and invisibility. The shot that centers Zeytin in the frame makes her more visible than the crowd of humans, but in the mobility of the crowd, Zeytin’s presence is hardly noticed by people. The inconsistency between being visible on-screen and not being visible by the people in the scene, therefore resonates with an intertwined worlding that is not in unity. Hence, it can be rendered as an instance of “manifoldness in space” (Bennett, 2010, p. 204). The low angle that

centers Zeytin in this scene portrays such manifoldness as observably composed of humans, a non-human animal, edible matter, and several inorganic matters, instead of a human-only environment. It is also possible to consider this scene's complex materiality as "a rubric that tends to horizontalize the relations between humans, biota, and abiota" (Bennett, 2010, p. 297) by framing the people off-center, since it draws attention to the interaction of a non-human animal and non-human matter.

The demonstrations of distributive non-human animal and human agency in the documentaries—witnessed via their technique that centralizes the animal in the frame—provide the audience with an "encounter with lively matter" which in turn deflate[s] the "fantasies of human mastery" (Bennett, 2010, p. 322). The scenes outlined above allow space for "the rubric of material agency" which "is likely to be a stronger counter to human exceptionalism" by treating "nonhumans—animals, plants, earth, even artifacts and commodities—more carefully, more strategically, more ecologically" (Bennett, 2010, pp. 87, 83). In other words, the selected scenes employ a more-than-human vitality and affect, with passing portrayals of various entanglements of the humans, dogs/cats, and other non-human forces.

4.3 Gazing-with Canine-/Feline-others

In this section, the aim is to situate the discussions on the non-human animal gaze in visual media in relation to the gaze's potential disruptions to human exceptionalism. To employ a rather relational way of looking at the said discussions, I turn to new materialist approaches to non-human agency and situate the non-human animal gaze as the bearer of the agentic capacity. The provided corpus help uncover the

ecodocumentaries in question in relation to their employment of human and animal gazes, as well as their respective connotations on the non-human animal agency.

I borrow the term “gaze *with*” from media studies scholar Heidi Mikkola’s insightful article titled “In the wings of the dove: bird's-eye view and more-than-human gaze in the wildlife documentary series *Earthflight*” (2019, emphasis in original). In this article, Mikkola associates the expression with the birds’ vision of aerial view which points out “a territory or a landscape that is not defined by humans’ needs, but rather birds’ needs” (2019, p. 210). However, unlike Mikkola’s association of the non-human gaze with the attached cameras to the bodies of the birds that allow them to shoot the images themselves, the selected documentaries do not utilize such shooting techniques, except in a short scene in *Stray*. They employ mostly a dog’s/cat’s perspectives which also enables an animal’s gaze to be witnessed. The directorial decisions play a major role in framing the non-human gaze in the three documentaries. For example, *Kedi*’s director Torun states in an interview,

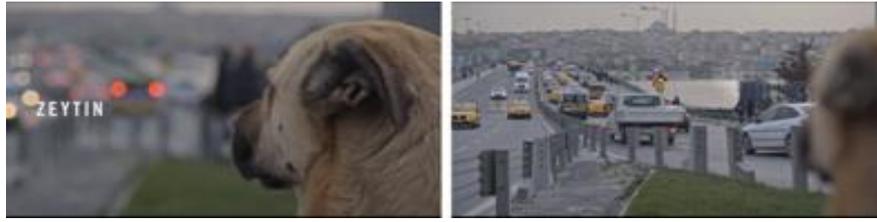
We discovered that it was too intrusive to try to get a camera on the cat. We tried to get one of those cat harnesses, which we thought we could equip with a GoPro or a mini camera. We explored a lot of options, but that defeated the purpose of what I wanted to achieve. I wanted to make a film that was respectful to the cat but putting a harness and a camera on it is disrespectful. (Fuhs, 2021, p. 88)

The amalgamation of the directorial decisions and inputs, the particular inducements of the animals in the shooting processes, and the camera eye correspond to a “human-animal-technology assemblage” that “has the capacity to decentre human vision” (Mikkola, 2019, p. 203). These assemblages also prove to be agentic in the sense that they are the creators of the shots.

Stray's embodiment of the canine gaze starts with the introduction of Zeytin, the protagonist of the movie. The shot frames Zeytin's face and then the focus shifts to the background, showing the heavy traffic of Istanbul from the dog's eye-level (See *Figures 13&14*). Mentioning the premise of the film, Lo explains what the world looks like from a dog's perspective: "These first few shots establish the precariousness of her existence" (Wang, 2021, para. 6). As argued in the previous chapter, the theme of multi-species precarity on Istanbul's streets is established through the dog's eye perspective. Of course, the directorial input on the scenes enables the establishment of the frame as such. However, the agents in the creation of these shots are not human-only. Zeytin's agentic capacity is witnessed through her decisions on the territories, when to eat or sleep, or whom to interact with. Lo, by tracing Zeytin's navigation, explores her world and her closeness with the group of refugee boys. She makes clear that Zeytin was the one who guided her to the refugee boys:

It was Zeytin who led me to them. I found their on-and-off relationship and the warmth they found in each other very moving. To exclude it would've been to deny reality, as Zeytin's life was so intertwined with that of these young men. The edits were a struggle, because we didn't know much about their lives, even though we became so intimate with them through the camera, witnessing moments like them waking up in the morning. (Wang, 2021, para. 19)

As Bennett argues, "human agency is always an assemblage of microbes, animals, plants, metals, chemicals, word-sounds, and the like" (2010, p. 318), and looking at the initial scenes that introduce Zeytin, one can assert those scenes are established through many "agentic contributions of nonhuman forces" (2010, p. 31) of Zeytin's, the camera's, the technical equipment's, and the post-production, as well as the city's non-human forces and assemblages in itself such as the influx of the traffic and the refuge Zeytin is sitting at, in the middle of the road.



Figures 13&14: Two consecutive shots where Zeytin is introduced and the focus shifts to the background in Stray (2020)

Human and non-human assemblages' agentic contributions to the movie are not limited to the introductory scenes; in fact, the majority of the movie embodies such assemblages which I analyze through the technique of dog's eye-level in the documentary. Through the application of this technique, the documentary takes a close look at the stray dogs' lives in "the rubric of material agency," along with humans and other nonhuman forces of the city (Bennett, 2010, p. 121). Lo's continuous tracing of the dogs enables the agency of the dogs to be witnessed on-screen as they become the navigators of the narration of the movie. Although the narrative is not edited linearly and chronologically, the audience is first introduced to Kartal the puppy and its family through Zeytin's guidance. It is not possible to know exactly if the boys or Zeytin led the director to Kartal's territory, but placing Zeytin's navigation to that area before the boys' arrival is a way of highlighting the significance of the dog's navigation. After the scene, in which the interaction between Kartal's family and Zeytin is shown an extreme close-up of Zeytin's eye is integrated into the visual track, recapitulating the importance of her seeing. The objectifying human gaze on animals in modern visual culture is criticized by the influential essay of Berger (1980) and by animal and cultural studies scholar Randy Malamud who also discusses the ethics of the human gaze which ignores the actual animal through its recurrent representation as "a caricatured and objectified entity" (2009, p. 5). As Pick

notes, “Voyeurism, [...] belongs to an economy of looking where the other appears as a definite object (of desire) with particular (fetishized) traits” (2011, p. 467). The fragmentation of shooting techniques that bear mostly the dog’s eye-level, at times point-of-view, and close or wide shots centering the dogs in the frame intercepts the possibility of the animal gaze to be “voyeuristic, eroticized and objectifying,” since it offers diversity in filming the animal without contextualizing it within a fixed story (Burt, 2004, p. 105). The ways of storytelling of *Stray* are mostly determined by the dogs themselves, thus their agency enables an interception of these conventional ways of seeing animals.

Looking at a similar scene framed at the dog’s eye-level, during a women’s protest on February 14th, two dogs start to mate among the crowd of humans in the protest. A woman having seen them addresses the male dog: “Do it only if she wants to. Ask her first” (Lo, 2020, 00:27:02). As I analyzed *Kedi* in the previous chapter in the frame of anthropomorphism, even if *Stray* does not include interviews in its narrative, the portrayal of anthropomorphism is inevitable. However, beyond anthropomorphism, this scene disrupts human exceptionalism with its embodiment of the differences between human and non-human animal worlds. Dogs are not aware of the purpose of this march and their actions prove to be incongruent with the human understanding of feminism, sexual consent, or women’s rights. In a parallel manner, human exceptionalism is disrupted by drawing “human attention sideways, away from an ontologically ranked Great Chain of Being and toward a greater appreciation of the complex entanglements of humans and nonhumans” (Bennett, 2010, p. 297). The anthropomorphic rendering of the mating of the dogs by the women in the scene is disrupted through the dog’s eye-level perspective and the distortion of the

conversations among the women in the scene. Thus, by not equating “sameness with otherness” which “results in calling into question accepted ideas about what constitutes the boundaries of our common humanity,” gazing with dogs has the potential to rupture human centrality since it enables the human spectator to dive into their worlds that are not always congenial with the human understanding (Braidotti, 2011, p. 130).

Yet, the protest scenes in *Stray* and *Taşkafa* differ from each other in relation to their employment of gazing with. In *Stray*, the low angle that captures the height of the dog’s eye-level is maintained throughout the scene. The protest scenes start with people who are shot bottom-up, echoing the dog’s gaze. Then, Nazar appears in the shot from behind, with a close shot on the back of her neck and head. One person pets Nazar’s head while s/he is walking past her. The scene ends after Nazar looks back at the camera and joins the crowd of people. Then, the mating scene of the other dogs starts, which is also shot with similar techniques. In addition to the visual track that traces the dogs’ eye-level, the soundtrack plays a significant role in the embodiment of the dogs’ gaze. The voices of people marching are distorted to some extent, and it is hard to hear what they are saying without the subtitles, which also applies to other scenes that contain human speech. Lo explains the soundtrack’s ambiguity as such:

The dialogue floats in and out of your attention. As humans, we’d be glued to tidbits of gossip or drama about people’s love lives. But the film always leans away from it right when you might typically lean into it, because I don’t imagine a dog would be interested in conversations about Instagram, or even women’s rights. (Wang, 2021, para. 17)

While the height is maintained at the dogs’ eye-level echoing the dog’s gaze, the soundtrack also enables the human spectator to stick with the dogs’ experiences.



Figures 15&16 Two protest scenes from *Stray* (2020) and *Taşkafa* (2013)

Whereas in *Taşkafa*, a protest scene is integrated into the narrative towards the end of the documentary, and this protest is done against the sheltering of street animals. Yet, the focus is on the people marching for the animals' rights and the shots capture the banners and the people. The two documentaries differ on the scale of the embodiment of the human and canine gaze. Accordingly, their prominent shooting and narrative techniques determine their voice. As argued in the previous chapter, *Taşkafa's* narrative is constructed by relying more on human interpretations than *Stray* and *Kedi*, since the emphasis in this documentary is more on the people's opinions, historical facts, and activism regarding urban animals in Istanbul. Through this voice, *Taşkafa* manages to disrupt the hierarchical order between humans and urban animals, as well as between pet and stray animals. However, in comparison to *Stray*, *Taşkafa* relies more on what Haraway (1988) called the "god-trick" vision. As she states, "I am arguing for the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity" (1988, p. 589). Wolfe also contends about whether to abandon non-human vision as it suggests that "the figure of vision is [...] ineluctably tied to the specifically human," but he also states:

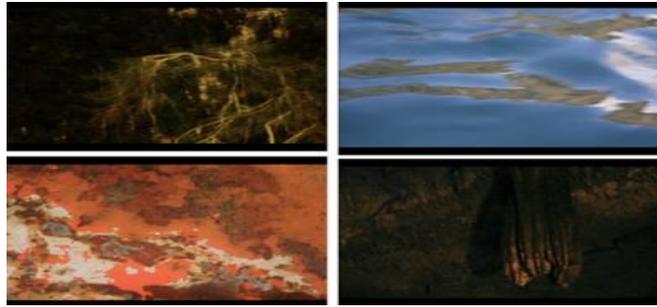
I am sympathetic with attempts, such as Haraway's, to reorient it toward what she calls 'situated knowledges' and away from its traditional phallic associations with 'a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze

from nowhere,’ a gaze with ‘the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation. (Wolfe, 2003, p. 3)

In this sense, *Stray*’s embodiment of gazing with through the agentic contributions of the dogs to the protest scene enables the emergence of situated knowledges. By virtue of the situatedness of this gaze to the dogs, one can render the complexity of their actions as non-corresponding to the human life, and non-rationalized simply by humanizing.

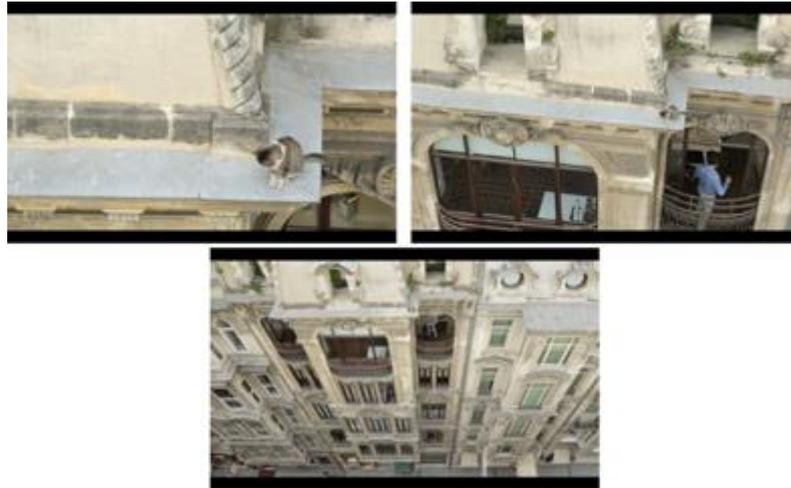
Taşkafa has particular scenes that can be construed to echo the dogs’ gaze, and these scenes are accompanied by the voice-over narration by John Berger reading excerpts from his novel, *King: A Street Story*. In these scenes which visually appear blurred and clouded, (see Figures 17, 18, 19, 20), animal consciousness is associated with “strange capacities associated with the animal mind – vague presentiments, hazy sensations and intuitions” (Coole, 2013, p. 459). The voice-over narration by Berger in these scenes does not appear to be didactic or explanatory, instead, it comprises soliloquies told from the dog’s first-person narration in his novel, providing an ambiguity to the narrative of the documentary. However, the merging of these hazy visuals and the soliloquies from *King* enables a space for anthropomorphism. Unlike *Stray*’s and *Kedi*’s (partial) gazing with techniques that call for an assemblage of human, animal, and technological apparatuses, *Taşkafa*’s embodiment of the canine gaze lacks the dog. Those visuals are borrowed from Özge Çelikaslan’s video installation, entitled “Who Left / What Behind” in 2012, thus visualizing the canine-gaze most often relies on the camera and post-production, and these scenes are an attempt to imitate the dog’s gaze without the dog being present in them. While other shots in *Taşkafa* gaze at the dogs and make them present in this sense, the embodiment of canine vision lacks the signature made by the animal itself. As Baker

states, “For there to be an animal-made mark, the animal has to be present, and has to participate actively (if unwittingly)” in artworks (2002, pp. 88-89). In turn, these scenes lack the agency of the dogs but instrumentalize technology to embody the canine gaze.



Figures 17, 18, 19, 20: Hazy and blurred visuals imitating dog's vision in Taşkafa (2013)

When it comes to *Kedi*, the feline gaze and the human gaze are more distributed throughout the movie. The movie incorporates the height of felines in most of the scenes that portray cats. However, this height does not necessarily stay near the ground all the time. Since cats climb up to high places like trees, balconies, roofs, and canopies as portrayed in the documentary, the camera's height shifts occasionally from the ground to various spaces above. Figures 20, 21, 22 emphasize this quality of cats in three consecutive shots. This feature of *Kedi* demonstrates the distinctiveness of cats from dogs when compared to the other two documentaries.



Figures 20, 21, 22: Three consecutive—medium, long and extreme long—shots of the cat sitting on the upper cornice of the building

Most of the time, *Kedi* gazes at the cats, and when it embodies the gaze of the cat, it is linked to those specific scenes' particular context. For example, the introduction scene of *Aslan Parçası* pictures hunted fish. The consecutive shots that gaze at the cat's face in close-up and echo its gaze afterward, establish the gazing-with delineated in this chapter. The combination of the two enables the audience to witness the interaction between the documentary's (human) eye and the cats' eye. While the cat's eye is also rendered with human selections of what is to be gazed at from the cat's perspective, the feline agency in terms of cats' reactions to particular occurrences and things also plays a role in this selection. In the case of *Aslan Parçası*, one can infer from the consecutive shots—showing the cat's waking up and dilation of its pupils—that the cat gives a response to the fish parts that are being thrown on the ground. In this example, the director is catching the cat's response.

In another scene of *Aslan Parçası*, he goes down into a vent to chase a rat. Instead of looking at the vent from a human's length, a night camera is placed inside the vent to

capture the interaction between the two animals. This reciprocal action is delivered with enthralling Oriental music coupled with the azan sound in the background. By keeping the audience engaged through music and the diegetic sounds of the city, the scene creates a witty and suspenseful *mise-en-scène*. While doing so, the scene combines the gazes of the rat and Aslan Parçası, while presenting them in the frame at the same time. This technique of gazing-with, traces the cat's navigation and enables the audience to see places that would normally be overlooked. Overall, this scene pays attention to the cat's distinct navigation in the city and disrupts the conventional human gaze by "chang[ing] radically what people can 'see'" (Bennett, 2010, p. 286).

This scene also highlights the cat's distractions from its goal to prey on the rat, as Aslan Parçası is distracted by the camera's presence there and looks at the lens capturing him. Afterward, he is seen climbing back up from the vent and leaping toward an unseen prey/object. The distraction of the cat also recalls the difference between humans' and cats' intelligence, not to say one is more or less intelligent than the other. The gaze in this line echoes an "asymmetry between the human and animal look," which, in fact, when appreciated turns out to be a "mutual recognition" of such disparateness (Burt, 2004, p. 71-2). Burt continues to suggest that unseeing these differences results in "merely a fantasy or idealization of human-animal relations" which "is mitigated by the fact that film also constantly exploits the limitations of seeing and plays on the disjunctions between what we see and what we know" (2004, p. 72). While Burt's argument may better apply to fictional films that frame the animal performers in idealized or fetishized contexts, through the documentary medium this is partially subverted. Why I claim this subversion is only partial is because the scene still employs suitable music to contextualize this interaction

between the cat and the rat, ensuring an easier human interpretation that would suit the idealized cat-mouse relationship. However, the scene's framing without direct human intervention in the animals' actions and performances enables such a subversion of Burt's claim. That is because the agency of the animals in their creative decisions—since the cat does not catch the rat and leaps for another unseen prey at the end—is brought to the fore by enabling a vision that would not normally be employed in real life.

Another possibility the documentaries *Kedi*, *Stray*, and *Taşkağa* bear by the employment of gazing-with is the recognition of mutual gaze between two animals. Again, Burt contextualizes the mutual gaze between humans and animals in film as a means of relating between the two species. He states, “the exchange of the look is, in the absence of the possibility of language, the basis of a social contract” (2004, p. 39). Once more, this possibility of a social contract is more applicable to fictional narratives that enclose the animal and the human in a particular relationship within a pre-established story. However, the audiovisual media that convey a dominant human gaze even when portraying the non-human, enables an interpretation of human-animal relationships focusing on one side only, the human. Kara White, analyzing the feline gaze within the framework of multispecies ethnography, acknowledges this gap and addresses cats' sensory abilities and stimulations of their gazes that are not necessarily recognized by the human. As she argues, the feline gaze “implies not only that the cat is a subject but also that her subjecthood is conveyed by her own methods, not by the human who recognizes the gaze” (2013, p. 95). Taking this further, and placing the human as an outsider, I aim to look at the ways in which the gaze among non-human animals in the documentaries is conveyed and framed in their visual tracks. In this

way, one can bear a clearer understanding of their distinct body sensoriums and what looking does (not) connote in their interactions. The documentaries at hand offer a special emphasis on the relationships among the non-human animals along with their interactions with humans. Hence, it proves significant to scrutinize the exchange of the look among these animals in order to highlight “the capacity of these bodies [that are] not restricted to a passive ‘intractability’ but also includ[ing] the ability to make things happen, to produce effects” even without direct human mediation (Bennett, 2010, p. 52).

Firstly, in *Kedi* the fight between Gamsız and his orange rival stresses a distinct exchange of looking between the two cats. As detailed above, the orange tabby is new to the neighborhood and tries to establish his territory. After a tense fight with Gamsız on the street, the orange cat observes him climbing up and down from Laçın’s balcony, and adopts the same route to discover what is there. Further pushing the limits of Gamsız’s acclaimed territory, they fight on the balcony as well. What is common between these two scenes picturing the fight between two cats is—besides their growling loudly—their fixed gaze on each other. This mutual fixation of the gaze signals a tension between the two, but beyond the contextual interpretation, it signifies that cat-to-cat interaction includes gazing back at each other, even without the human to exchange the gaze with. Hence, within the interview-driven narration of *Kedi*, the particular scene decenters the human from its visual track by “elid[ing] what is commonly taken as distinctive or even unique about humans” (Bennett, 2010, p. 13). Though still considering the animal gaze as positioned to the human, Burt notes, “[...] in many critics’ accounts of the animal gaze it is the theme of fragmentation that dominates over the theme of bonding” (2004, p. 40). As such, the scene in question

disrupts the interpretation of the mutual gaze as a bonding technique via the absence of the human in this exchange also by dissuading that “such communication is possible only through the intermediary of humans” (Bennett, 2010, p. 124).

Yet, one can exemplify the reciprocal gaze between two dogs as a theme of bonding, but not in a conventional sense, looking at a particular scene in *Stray*. Around the beginning of the documentary, Zeytin wanders in the park and encounters another dog. The dog is far from her, and Zeytin sits down and looks at the dog which is approaching and fixing its gaze on Zeytin. The very slow movements of the other dog potentially generate tension in the viewer, enabling an expectation that they will get in a fight once s/he arrives near Zeytin. However, whence the other dog arrives they start to play with each other. The fore-played tension through the mutual gaze between the dogs is disrupted when they bond with each other. In this sense, the peculiarity of the gaze between dogs is brought to the fore, relatively overcoming the species barrier through such visualization by “noting the distinctive capacities or efficacious powers of particular material configurations” of non-human animals (Bennett, 2010, p. 13). Instead of Derrida’s approach in his fundamental essay (2008)—which allows much more room for the consideration of human consciousness than the cat’s specificity, and also remains on the ground of the mutual gaze between the animal and the human (Driver, 2010, p. 2)—the scene through the visualization of the unfamiliar mutual gaze between the dogs opens up a rumination on the animals’ own way of interacting with each other. As Bennett argues, “there is no necessity to describe these differences [between human and nonhuman] in a way that places humans at the ontological center or hierarchical apex” (Bennett, 2010, p. 68). Correspondingly, the aim of highlighting this unfamiliarity of the dog’s gaze is not correlated to the

hierarchical centrality of the human, but to unsettle the Cartesian view of the animal as mere mechanisms without consciousness, subjectivity, and sensibility without invoking any further similarities to humans.

Reiterating *Taşkafa*'s voice that challenges the hierarchies between pet dogs and stray dogs, a scene from this documentary employs the gaze between a stray dog and a pet dog which is humanized through Denet's statements in the background about the freedom of the stray dog and the captivity of the pet dog as quoted in the previous chapter. Diminishing the pet dog's existence and happiness to a collar that serves as a symbol of slavery, this statement exemplifies an understanding of freedom and agency within the structure-agency paradigm. This structure resonates with human mastery and overlooks the agency of the pet dog within this deterministic discourse. As Bennett suggests, "the category of 'structure' is ultimately unable to give the force of things its due: a structure can act only negatively, as a constraint on human agency, or passively, as an enabling background or context for it" (2010, p. 108). The structure as a constraint on human agency in Bennett's formulation can be applied to the overall hierarchical relationship between humans and animals, which is attempted to be challenged by *Taşkafa*. However, in accordance with this structure-agency paradigm, pet ownership serving as a structural hindrance to animal agency is deemed to be only a constraint, a human mastery, a negative consequence that serves to an understanding of determinism. The pet dog has no escape from this structural constraint, but the stray dog symbolizes an outstanding agency that is rendered as freedom. The visual track of *Taşkafa*, passing a mutual gaze between the pet dog with a collar and the stray dog without one, is utilized as a reification of this structure-agency paradigm, thus ascribing a human meaning to this shared gaze. *Taşkafa*'s

visualization of the mutual gaze between two dogs by contextualizing the scene in a manner that reduces the pet dog's freedom to a symbol of a collar, and romanticizes the stray dog's free-ranging life on the streets remains to be human-centric.

Overall, the discussions of the employment of gaze in the documentaries above highlight prominent comparisons between them. While *Stray*'s techniques bring out the dog way of living in Istanbul, *Kedi* apportions its portrayals among humans and cats in the city by embodying a more distributive means of visualization. *Taşkağa*, on the other hand, remains more prone to human interpretation of the contexts, lives, and agencies of the urban animals through the combination of its visual and sound tracks. In this sense, the techniques of gazing-with are stressed more prominently in *Stray* and *Kedi* than in *Taşkağa*, bearing in mind that the techniques of the former two also differ from each other.

4.4 Conclusion

All things considered, the documentaries at hand are, to some degree, navigated and structured by the urban animals themselves, allowing room for their consideration of agency. This chapter discusses how the agency performed by urban animals is similar to and different from that of humans. While highlighting the animal agency as a challenge towards human exceptionalism, this chapter also considers the ways in which the non-human animal and non-human inanimate matter are interconnected, thereby justifying the vital materialistic conception of life on the streets in line with Bennett's idea to "stretch[...] received concepts of agency, action, and freedom" (2010, p. 16). In another, yet corresponding, account, the implementation of the techniques of animal gaze, point-of-views, and the distribution of vision between humans and animals are discussed considering their implications on agency. Accordingly, the next

chapter focuses on how and to what extent the documentaries in question demonstrate the vanishing boundaries between humans and animals in line with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming and Braidotti's nomadic becoming.

CHAPTER V

Human-Animal Entanglements in Zoöpolis

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the documentaries *Kedi*, *Taşkafa*, and *Stray* are discussed in terms of their portrayals of the reciprocal becomings of humans and urban animals in their narratives, visual tracks, and production stages. It is also considered how the directors of these documentaries devote an engagement to urban animal worlds that alter their experiences and identities. This chapter analyzes these aspects with special consideration of Deleuze-Guattarian notions of “becoming” and “becoming-animal,” and Braidotti’s conceptualizations of post-anthropocentrism as a vital brand of posthumanism. Therefore, the theoretical corpus of this chapter help outline particular elements in the documentaries’ de-anthropocentric voices during all stages of their productions.

5.2 Becomings-Animal in the Documentary Narratives

Though differently, all the documentaries under scrutiny in this thesis provide an attempt at challenging species hierarchies in the extents of urban animal and human co-existence in Istanbul. While it is a given that the documentaries at hand focus on

the everyday life of humans and urban animals in the city, one can also consider their performers, human and non-human alike, as engaged in the process of becoming-animal through their daily encounters, and ordinary yet complex interactions.

One of the most discernible process of becoming-animal, considering the urban animal and human interactions, can be witnessed in the interviews of the documentaries *Kedi* and *Taşkafa*. Discursively put, in *Kedi*, animality in humans is brought to the fore by one of the interviewees, Elif Nurşad Atalay. As she states,

When you're alone for long periods of time your animal instincts get sharper. I really believe that. Maybe it's a quality that ought to be developed more in all of us. As if it's better to be so human, so modern. There's a power you can feel within you of a wild creature. I think everyone needs to discover that in themselves. Cats' existence is enough for them. And they're very sure of their character. But it's not enough for us. We always want more. That mentality poisons us and destroys everything. (Torun, 2016, 00:33:28-00:34:05)

Atalay's comments on humanity and animality place both ontological orders into reconsideration and generate a criticism towards the concept of modern human. The connection between Deleuze-Guattarian becoming-animal and the concept of animality can be established first by looking at the term animality itself. The ontological grasp of the animal is based on difference. It is argued that the animal cannot be thought of without invoking an impasse: "the human only sees the animal as something that either *is* or *isn't* like itself," as Deleuzian scholar Felice Cimatti writes (2020, p. 26, emphasis in original). Thinking animality, on the other hand, as he continues, "means seeing the animal—and animality itself, not limited to that of the animal—as a vital *affirmation* that implies no negation" (2020, p. 26, emphasis in original). In the case above, the animal (cat) still serves as a metaphor to unleash a reason to criticize humans. While the animal is used as a tool for comparison, animality in this example is untied of negatory bestiality and serves as an affirmation,

invoking that the animality as a greater difference should be embodied by and within the modern human as well. In this sense, with her openness to the thought of animality, the interviewee calls into question what it means to be human by affirming the otherness of the animal.

In a similar manner, in *Taşkafa*, one can witness how collective and individual memories come to play with Deleuze-Guattarian becoming. A particular memory about Taşkafa told by the interviewee Bill coincides with the second principle Deleuze and Guattari outline in the context of becoming-animal: “wherever there is multiplicity, you will also find an exceptional individual, and it is with that individual that an alliance must be made in order to become-animal” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 243). Accordingly, Bill tells his meeting with Taşkafa for the first time,

It was late at night, after midnight, and I couldn't get through the square because I was corralled by the dogs, growling and pushing me out of the square. A taxi driver got out of his taxi and came over and said to me ‘What are you doing, where are you going, who are you? You shouldn't have come here without having been introduced to the dogs.’ He called this top dog, the head dog over, Taskafa and said ‘Shake hands with them!’. I did that and then the dogs just backed away. I was introduced. (Zimmermann, 2016,00:05:16-00:05:49)

In this case, the exceptional individual with whom one has to form an alliance to become-animal is Taşkafa. This individual that Deleuze and Guattari conceptualize can come in the shape of “a leader of the pack, a master of the pack” and an “*anomalie*” which the authors define as “a Greek noun that has lost its adjective, designates the unequal, the coarse, the rough, the cutting edge of deterritorialization” (1987, p. 243). Without being introduced, Taşkafa, as the leader, would not let any stranger in the neighborhood, as another interviewee named Bülent states as well. This example also showcases that becoming-animal of a human is a necessity in order to walk on this particular street.

Becoming-animal does not translate to imitating or resembling an animal, neither does it imply that animals should resemble humans. In this sense, the examples discussed in Chapter 3 regarding the anthropomorphization of cats are not exemplary of this notion. However, besides these anthropomorphic renderings of cats' characteristics, the aforementioned chapter also considers how humans are prone to paying attention to their feline companions' distinct qualities. Accordingly, they develop distinct ways of communication with one another which could be considered as an instance of becoming-animal. As Deleuze and Guattari make clear, "Becoming-animal, becoming-molecular, becoming-inhuman, each involves a molar extension, a human hyperconcentration, or prepares the way for them" (1987, p. 34). This molar extension and human hyper concentration can be understood via the attentiveness of human participants to the feline world in *Kedi*. For instance, one of the interviewees in the documentary talks about how fascinating it is to have a common way of communication between these two very distinct species:

Even though we don't speak each other's language we immediately form a shared language. I imagine having a relationship with cats must be a lot like being friends with aliens. You make contact with a very different life form... open a line of communication with one another... and start a dialogue. And they're very foreign to us, very different. Whether physically, mentally, or in capacity - they're very different. (Torun, 2016, 00:15:30-00:16:18)

The language she mentions is a metaphorical one used to substitute how cats and humans share a distinct way of communication, rather than making the animal speak as in "making the subaltern speak" which Haraway also sees as a trap in human-animal relationships (Haraway, 2008, p. 20). It is highlighted that the human has to get out of the comfort zone that language provides in order to facilitate a form of communication with other species.

The appreciation of the cat's otherness can be constituted as a way of abstaining from human narcissism since it would constitute an openness to an inter-species alliance that is to be formed non-anthropomorphically. As Deleuze and Guattari condemn the cultural and familial bonds formed with what they call individuated animals, namely cats and dogs, a particular interview in *Kedi* disrupts this Oedipal and narcissistic connection humans tend to form with cats. In the interview, the famous caricaturist Bülent Üstün—the creator of *Kötü Kedi Şerafettin* (in English *Bad Cat Şerafettin*)—talks about the cultural interpretation of cats' ungrateful behaviors. As he states,

Any ungrateful behavior on their part is really an act of sincerity. They don't need to apologize. I guess there are people who expect that from a cat. "I gave you all that food and you won't even come to my lap." A relationship where they expect a return of investment. (Torun, 2016, 00:46:07-00:46:23)

As Deleuze and Guattari write, individuated animals "invite us to regress, draw us into a narcissistic contemplation" (1987, p. 240). The rendered conception that cats are ungrateful clearly exemplifies what Deleuze and Guattari condemn regarding human narcissism. By challenging this conception, Üstün also appreciates these distinct behaviors of cats through which he gains the potential to form an alliance with them, to engage in a process of become-animal. As Braidotti contends, "Only potential or joyful affirmation had the power to generate qualitative shifts in the processes of becoming [...]" (2011, p. 151). Üstün's interpretation of such behaviors as acts of sincerity serves as an affirmation that allows himself to be emptied out of narcissistic contemplations, thus becoming open to the otherness of cats.

In *Stray*, since the worlds of the refugees and the dogs are intertwined on the streets of Istanbul, their formed group can be interpreted as an alliance-based multiplicity, an inter-species pack. According to Deleuze and Guattari's formulation, becoming-animal "always involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a

multiplicity” (1987, p. 239). In an interview, Lo talks about Jamil, one of the boys in this group: “Perhaps born out of an urge to care for others despite the harshness of his own circumstances, Jamil felt a deep and constant desire to acquire more puppies. He wanted to grow their pack...” (Lo, 2021, para. 4). This keenness to grow their group is also visible in *Stray* when Jamil and the other boys negotiate with the person working at the construction site to get Kartal the puppy, then decide to steal the dog instead. Like Willard’s favorite rat, Ben, in the movie *Willard* (1972) which Deleuze and Guattari write about, Kartal—perhaps due to its one radiant blue eye—becomes the favorite of not only the refugee boys but also of the people working at the construction site. Being seen petting Kartal and shooing the other puppies away, the working man’s “sinister choice” becomes that particular dog (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 233). Among other puppies, the boys also choose to steal Kartal who becomes their “‘favorite’ in the pack with which a kind of contract of alliance, a hideous pact, is made” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 233). The expansion of their inter-species pack can be linked to becoming-animal, afterall the notion is made possible by alliance, multiplicity, and fascination with the pack.

The scene in which the boys go to steal the puppy from the construction site also bears the potential of making the viewer engage in a process of becoming-animal on the grounds that it is shot with a camera attached to Zeytin’s body. Creating shaky and shady images, Zeytin disrupts a conventional way of seeing the animal on screen and embraces the point of view of the dog. One can also contextualize these shaky and fast-moving images with the mission of the boys. From Zeytin’s point of view, it is understood that the dogs also get involved in this mission. For a short time, the structural pace of the documentary—established with stabilized images, mostly—is muddled by the inclusion of this scene in the timeline. With this technique, The

viewer is truly engaged in this theft plan through the fast pacing body of Zeytin and its obscure surroundings. With the speed and movement of the dog carried on screen without the help of any stabilizer or any intrusion of human assistance, the comfort of watching the animal within an established frame is disrupted. In Deleuze-Guattarian terms, the scene deterritorializes the experience of watching this documentary. Since deterritorialization is “the movement by which ‘one’ leaves the territory,” and “the operation of the line of flight,” one can constitute the dog’s point of view, which ends up creating images that are hard to follow, as enabling the viewer’s departure from the continuous and similar ways of watching the animal (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 508). Dispositioned from gazing at the animal and the manually shot frames by the director, one can enter a greater zone of proximity with the animal on-screen through the usage of a GoPro camera. Hence, the encounter of the viewer with the animal world even through such a mediated version not only alters their conventional experience of seeing the filmic animals but also engenders them with a particular way of becoming-canine through Zeytin’s unusual navigation.

5.3 Engagement with the Animal World during Filmmaking

Having discussed the ways in which the particular scenes and narrative elements can be considered as an instance of Deleuze-Guattarian becoming-animal, I aim to look at how these documentaries’ directors engage with the urban animal world in a way that their fixed states of being come into contact with a transgressing force of other-than-human lives. In light of Baker’s argument that “art’s becomings animal do generally involve the pressingly real interaction of artist and living animal,” it is also considered how directors’ engagements with their animal performers intervene with their practices of filmmaking, and at times degenerate the established principles of a

documentary (2002, p. 69). Although the documentary medium, as traditionally thought, implies mere objectivity and representation of the real as much as possible with little to no intrusion into the real world that is being documented, the directors of these documentaries do not comply with these rules all the time. The pioneering scholar in documentary studies Bill Nichols also questions the issue of whether a documentary can be objective since it has a voice of its own nonetheless (2016). In this section, alongside the particular voices of the aforementioned documentaries, the direct intrusions of the directors or the film crew on the subjects—human and non-human alike—participating in the films are taken into account.

To start with *Stray*'s director, Elizabeth Lo's filmmaking experience is mostly guided by Zeytin, Nazar, and the other stray dogs. Lo situates her experience in this process in-between states of dog land and Turkish society. As such, an interview conducted with the director is entitled "Elizabeth Lo: 'Like the dogs, I existed in a limbo where I wasn't entirely part of human society'" (Wang, 2021). Lo's finding her fixed identity shattered in the middle of the entangled lives of humans and urban animals in Istanbul can be told by her words:

My experience of Turkey and Istanbul is so skewed because I only know a stray dog's preferences for where to eat and sleep! I had a terrible sense of direction, so when I followed Zeytin for the shoot, I had to completely trust the fact that she would know how to get us back to where we started. And she always would. I loved surrendering to her desires and rhythms through the city. If she took a four-hour nap in the middle of the afternoon, I would just hang out beside her. (Wang, 2021, para. 31)

While this statement lends a lot to stray dogs' agency that is something to be relied on by the human, it also speaks to the director's own process of becoming-animal. As "[...] becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between, the border or line of flight or descent running perpendicular to both," Lo's proximity

to and engagement with the dogs' world is closely linked to her position in the midst of humanity and animality (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 293). Pertaining to the dog's navigation and rhythms, Lo experiences Istanbul differently from a tourist, or even from most of the human dwellers in the city since her filmmaking mission is a stimulating force on her commitment and involvement in the dogs' lives. This experience grants her the possibility of becoming-animal, considering the operation of a line of flight from the human world to the urban animal kingdom, and belonging to the neither absolutely.

Her interactions with the dogs during the filmmaking process can be considered a molar extension of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of movement and rest. It becomes much clearer as Lo further states,

It was exhausting at times, because the stamina of dogs is pretty incredible. They go and go, in whatever direction they want. We just had to follow, chasing her around while crouched low. Throughout the film, you'll see the camera shaking occasionally: Those were the moments I lost control or the stabilizer failed me. But it was such a joy to be enveloped in their world. (Wang, 2021, para. 31)

Such commitment to the dogs' rhythm which either entails constant mobility or long hours of taking a rest, enables the director to "enter into composition with *something else* in such a way that the particles emitted from the aggregate thus composed will be canine as a function of the relation of movement and rest, or of molecular proximity, into which they enter" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 274, emphasis in original).

Hence, it could be argued that the director's ultimate engagement with the dogs' lives means conceding to their peculiar ways of navigation, daily practices, and entering into their territories, all of which set the becoming-animal of the director in motion.

A similar case may very well be applied to the other two directors' filmmaking processes. As Zimmerman clearly puts filming *Taşkafa* "involved a lot of walking and

encounters at all times of day and night,” the engagement with the real world of human and non-human proximities is also made possible mainly by walking which is done with active and engrossing encounters with urban animals (Guz, 2018, para. 10). However, since their filmmaking techniques and choices encapsulate more human and non-human participants both in quantity and in diversity compared to *Stray*, *Kedi* and *Taşkafa* look at Istanbul as well as its human and non-human residents from a greater and overarching lens. This might entail that they are less engrossed in a particular animal’s life. Nonetheless, there are inextricable relations being formed with non-human animals that lead the way to the directors’ becomings-animal in Torun’s and Zimmerman’s filmmaking journeys.

In most of the interviews conducted with Torun, she talks about how their initial filming of the cats from a low angle with a camera operator failed since the cats were disturbed by the sound that the mechanism creates. Unable to gain proper footage from the startled and running-away cats, the cinematographers Charlie Wuppermann and Alp Korfalı crafted a “rig where they had the camera on a platform that was really close to the ground and they could still hold it while standing and walking upright,” as Torun states (King, 2017, para. 20). Through the implementation of this technique with two cameras, they become successful in capturing their desired footage, thus maintaining the feline eye perspective while filming the cats. Hence, it can also be argued that Torun and *Kedi*’s film crew get involved in the particularities of the demands of filming strays with careful observations prior to shooting and without intrusions into their actions. Indeed, this technique entails the manual holding and movement of the cameras with assistance while requiring adaptable mobility to feline rhythms. Instead of attaching cameras to the bodies of felines which they find intrusive, the documentary crew sticks to this creative solution, even though it is

demanding. In line with Braidotti's question, "how can we respect animals' otherness?" by portraying a particular solution that would not go against the well-being of the cats, they show their respect for the otherness of the cats in a creative way (2011, p. 94).

Filming these free-ranging cats require intense commitment and energy considering their often-times fast-moving rhythms and navigations in the city, and the long hours cats spare for sleeping and cleaning themselves during the day. Just as *Stray*'s director Lo, *Kedi*'s crew has also become enmeshed in stray cats' way of living in Istanbul while trying to portray it. Consequently, yielding to the rhythms of urban felines posits a possible transition from the fixed humanist notions of animality that bear witness mostly to anthropomorphisms, to the actual entailments of interacting with animals. No matter how much the documentary's soundtrack is loaded with anthropomorphisms uttered by the interviewees—an inevitable condition while capturing the cultural aspects of human-animal relations—the layer in which the cats steer the scenes shifts the perspective from the cultural aspects to animals themselves.

In this light, the scene of Organic Deniz—another cat spotlighted in *Kedi*—evidently exemplifies this rhythm of movement and rest. Young and quite energetic, Organic Deniz lives in Feriköy Organic Market, hence the name. The scene in which he runs around and scavenges the market is captured from the cat's height and accommodates its speed. After a minute of running with him around the booths, the energetic song *Fındık Dalları* by Mavi Işıklar comes to an end, showing the cat fast asleep. The scene in question showcases what it takes to follow the cat, with its accelerating speed, movement, and ultimately rest. Drawing on the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari, Baker associates "how to operate as an artist" with "speeds" (Baker, 2002, p. 77). "To

‘make your body a beam of light moving at ever-increasing speed’,” he quotes from Deleuze and Guattari, “is something which ‘requires all the resources of art, and art of the highest kind’—the kind of art, that is to say, through which ‘you become animal’ (187)” (Baker, 2002, p. 77). Capitulating with the speed of the animal engenders a transition from the human way of engaging with the world to the way of an animal, which is akin to Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of writers as “sorcerers” (1987). The scene in question, without false imitations, visualizes their statement “either stop writing, or write like a rat,” by seeing like a cat (1987, p. 240).

Deleuze and Guattari further state on this issue: “Writers are sorcerers because they experience the animal as the only population before which they are responsible in principle” (1987, p. 240). The documentarians in question embrace a responsibility that sometimes goes beyond the film itself. While Torun was interviewing Bahri Artuğ, they get interrupted by someone bringing a wounded kitten to Artuğ to take care of him. Seeing the kitten immobile, Artuğ gets upset and the next scene shows them inside the car, Artuğ holding the kitten in his hands. While the scene speaks to the harsh conditions the street bears for the cats, it also highlights the documentary crew’s attentiveness to such issues as it is obvious that they provided the transportation to the vet. As Braidotti contends: “Postanthropocentrism [...] generates new perspectives that go beyond panic and mourning and produce a more workable platform” (2011, p. 341). This single event itself demonstrates a postanthropocentric approach to life in an urban environment, as it delineates from determinism and goes for a solution-oriented principle. By playing with the boundaries of the principles of documentary, the crew portrays what Braidotti calls a “nomadic subjectivity” (2011). The ways in which the goal of the documentary filmmaker is disoriented from capturing the real and is leaned toward intervening in what is happening can be

construed as destabilizing the fixed position of the identity formations to a more ethical, responsible, and political nomadic becomings.

While it is a criticized issue by some reviewers of *Kedi* that it does not portray the political environment in Turkey elaborately (Hepkaner, 2017; O'Malley, 2017), I argue that the political engagement of this documentary ought not to be necessarily reduced to the governmental and regime-oriented confrontations. Delivering the issue of co-existence affirmatively can be equally or perhaps more importantly needed to draw attention to the “vital politics of life” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 133). As such, Torun’s nomadic becoming-animal, becoming-stray cat “offers a materialist framework that emphasizes the proximity of zoe—stressing both immanence and vitality—and of ‘life’-centred perspectives—and situating them both outside the boundaries of anthropocentrism” (Braidotti, 2011, pp. 100-101).

Torun, while expressing her views on the negative impacts the anthropocentrism in an interview, criticizes the Western notions of human exceptionalism. When she was asked about cultural differences that play part in the relationships formed with stray cats, she states as follows:

Especially in the United States, this situation has a lot to do with the priority of the individual; the respect for the rights, safety, and personal space of individuals. The harm that may be caused by cats, and the disease that they may spread is more significant for them than the relationship to be formed with them. I'm talking about strays, of course. On the other hand, opinions on this matter are changing. That was one of the things we were aiming to accomplish with our movie, *Kedi*. There is a trend towards sharing the world and nature with animals, sharing our existence together. (Hatunoğlu, 2017, para. 17)⁸

Zimmerman also focuses on this peculiar relationship humans have with animals in Istanbul along with its historicity captured in *Taşkafa*. As she states, “I realized that

⁸ Translated by Ezgi Altınöz and Ronay Ahmet Cemaloğlu

[...] the street dogs [are] so sensual, right as a sensuality of another being around you in a city, you feel it. [...] there's the sense that we don't have here, for example, in Europe or North America” and the question becomes how to maintain this “level of care that we all afford to these creatures” (Smith & Johal, 2021, para. 11). In this light, Braidotti provides an outline of how Western interaction with animal others is characterized by three categories in reference to Borges: “those we Euro-humans eat; those we watch television with, and those we are frightened of (wild, exotic, or untamed ones)” (2011, p. 81). According to Torun’s and Zimmerman’s observations, it can be suggested that the stray cats and dogs fall into the third category in the Western understanding, and by elaborating on the in-between states of stray animals within the wild and domestic in their documentaries, they offer a disruption of binary oppositions of these norms.

5.4 Becoming-Human, Becoming-Urban: A Reciprocal Transformation

The peculiar ways of communication of cats and dogs such as sniffing, touching, scratching, biting or vocal signals make the humans give different responses towards them compared with human-to-human ways of communication. While it is much about the transformation of humans because they experience an inhuman change in the way they communicate, and enter into the world of their animal others through their attentiveness and togetherness with them, there is also the side of the animal in this reciprocal interaction. In this fashion, Deleuze and Guattari suggest: “We believe in the existence of very special becomings-animal traversing human beings and sweeping them away, affecting the animal no less than the human” (1987, p. 237). Furthermore, acknowledging “the fact that nonhuman animals do not have a (human) language does not entail that other forms of communication are uncommon among

them” is necessary to dig into their peculiar means of communication also with humans (Cimatti, 2020, p. 110). The three documentaries at hand provide footage for human-human, human-animal, and animal-animal communications that bear differential aspects from each other. Focusing on the latter two for the sake of the corpus of this thesis, I aim to highlight the ways in which the animal way of communication can be considered as a process of becoming-human.

Becoming-human of the animal does not translate to anthropomorphizing them. Rather, it portrays the intricate relations the urban animals form with their human companions as leading the way to their untypical interactions with humans. To demonstrate, I look at Bengü’s case in *Kedi*, which highlights the differences in the means of communicating with other cats and humans. Bengü’s human companions suggest that Bengü loves to be petted, and in the scene in which Necati Özer pets Bengü on the head and the cheeks “she nearly passes out” from the pleasure it gives. Bengü’s appearance in the office is also captured when she is “kneading” without having something to knead, which is also referred to as “making air biscuits” on social media platforms such as Youtube and Reddit. The cat performs the gesture by continuously “opening its toes to expose its claws, then closes its claws as it lifts its paw” (*Kneading (Cats)*, n.d., 2022). While the gesture is commonly interpreted as the cat feeling calm and secure, she performs the gesture when she enters the office and sees the human companion. On the other hand, one of the subsequent scenes shows her in the warehouse beside her kittens. Another male cat approaches, she gets aggressive and beats the male cat. While there might be cases in which the interactions between humans and animals can prove otherwise—considering a more feral cat might show aggression towards a human as well—these examples highlight

the trust granted to her human companions by Bengü. This relation extends beyond the Oedipal connections formed with companion animals, when Bengü's side is taken into account. Becoming-human of Bengü closely resonates with the reciprocity of this relation and can also be tied with Haraway's becoming-with: "becoming human, becoming humus, becoming terran, has another shape—that is, the side-winding, snaky shape of becoming-with" (2016b, p. 40).

The different or in some cases similar ways of communication between humans and animals should not be misconceived as the cat's becoming-human or the human's becoming-animal in the literal sense, nor does it translate to imitation. In fact, these different ways help one recognize the creativity of these interactions. For example, as covered in the previous chapter, the animals' agentic actions in the setting of Istanbul, the scenes in which the dogs cross the road crowded with the cars, the cats' responsiveness to the human communication signals, and the creative abilities of cats and dogs to the man-made artifacts in the city all can be considered as a process of becoming-human and becoming-urban. While these actions and interactions are as much about co-evolution, one can consider them as equally about creative involution.

Deleuze and Guattari contend:

the term we would prefer for this form of evolution between heterogeneous terms is "involution," on the condition that involution is in no way confused with regression. Becoming is involutionary, involution is creative. To regress is to move in the direction of something less differentiated. (1987, pp. 238-9)

To exemplify this involutionary creativity that values differences and processual interactions, one can look at how cats navigate within the cracks of the urban environment that humans would not be able to enter or overlook at. As Torun

clarifies, cats “have access to an experience of being present in a place in a much more flexible and open way than humans do,” continuing as such:

These cats know their neighborhood in a way that human beings would never know because they’re not using them in the same way. The cat knows exactly where that hole is in the fence so she can make a quick escape. It’s a hole that you’ve never noticed, and you’ve lived there for 20 years in that very spot. You eat lunch there every day and you’ve never noticed that spot because you never had to think about using it. (Fuhs, 2021, p. 88)

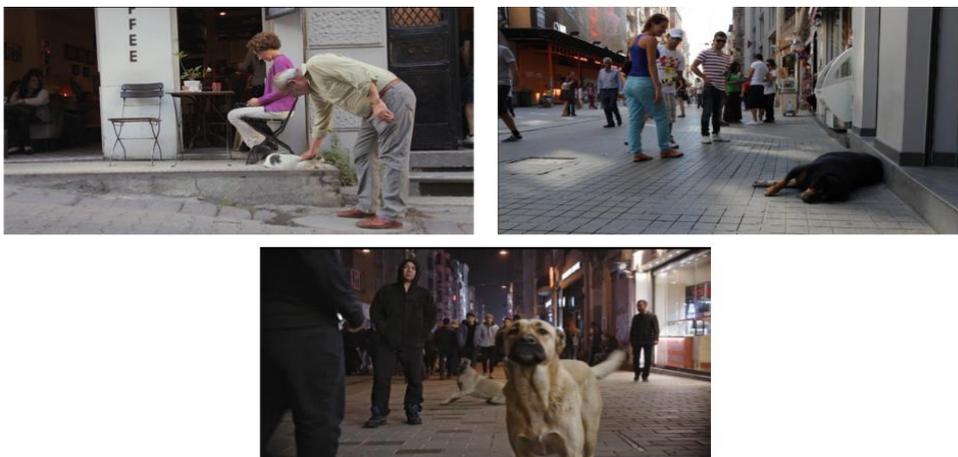
Along similar lines, *Kedi* also portrays how cats’ distinct familiarity with the space they live in is different than that of humans (see Figures 23, 24). This exposition of distinctive navigations of cats enables the viewer to recognize the feline way of living in an urban environment and the ways in which they get involved in a process of becoming-urban. In reference to Deleuze’s understanding of cinema, the scenes in question allow “the kinds of openings that allow us to glimpse, through cinema, the possibility of different worlds, including animal worlds” (McMahon, 2019, p. 54).



Figures 23 and 24: Bengü sweeping through a small hole and Gamsız’s orange rival coming down from Laçın’s balcony in Kedi (2016)

Becoming-human of the animals can also be characterized by their agentic contributions to the production of the movies. Zeytin’s scene in which she shoots the images by herself with the attached camera on her body can be an example of her agency and becoming-human. As such, Weltzien and Ulrich question particular doubts that the animals give way to by producing art, including falling of the term authorship: “Such a ‘becoming human’ on the part of animals raises doubts about

whether certain anthropological criteria, for example, the ability to create and to function within a culture, should be limited to humans” (2009, para. 10). Alongside its ruminations on the validity of human exceptionalism, the question of authorship can also be extended to the participants of the documentaries. The cats’ reactions to the cameras shooting them in *Kedi* can be considered as an indicator of their processes of becoming-human; as such Torun states that the cats “responded really positively because they’re used to people and our cameras weren’t imposing” (Sheehan, 2017, para. 20). Considering the fact that the cats being filmed are already in close interactions with various people in their daily lives, they do not find it strange when the film crew surrounds them. Torun also mentions the orange cat featured at the end of the documentary walking along the edge of a rooftop during the sunset: “he did it five or six times and we were amazed that he kept hitting his mark, whatever mark it is you could put in front of the sunset!” (Sheehan, 2017, para. 20). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the territorial choices, the selection of the people to be interacted with, the stamina, and the cinematicity of the dogs and cats also prove agentic in filmmaking.



Figures 25, 26, 27: Interactions of passers-by with urban animals on the streets respectively in Kedi (2016), Taşkaşa (2013), and Stray (2020)

Needless to say, distinctively from most cities worldwide, Istanbul's streets bear witness to different ways of coexistence. Since "[e]very becoming is a block of coexistence," each companionship that is formed outside the household in Istanbul with urban animals exemplifies a disparate, mutual, and transformative lines of flight, which is an aspect that all the documentaries in this thesis portray in different ways (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 292). From particular neighborhoods to shopkeepers, bazaars, warehouses, construction sites, different restaurants, and boats, one can witness the ubiquity of the coexistence of humans with cats and dogs in the documentaries. Even so, the street itself is the most vibrant, active, and transient among all of these places. "In that vectorial space, shaped by movements, trajectories, and transits," Farias and Höhne write, referring to the street, "the users of public space have no fixed identity" (2016, p. 22). The ordinariness of everyday life that bears movement, mobility, and nomadism of the passers-by encountering urban animals on the street showcase a pausing point, a distraction, a difference, an "*an-omalie*" (1987, p. 244, emphasis in original). The scenes (see Figures 25, 26, 27) in which the documentaries capture the passers-by on the street stopping for or slowing down to touch/to look at an urban animal they encounter add another dimension to what Delgado writes: "The passer-by is always absent, in something else, with the head somewhere else, that is, literally, in trance" (as cited in Farias and Höhne, 2016, p. 22). Alongside the process of deterritorialization that the act of walking on the street brings about, the human subject is deterritorialized further through its brief encounter with its animal other.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter portrays and discusses how the documentaries and the documentarians in question reveal particular processes of becomings-animal/human/urban and nomadic. In line with the post-anthropocentric ideas of Braidotti and Deleuze-Guattari, the documentaries in question necessitate a direction “towards multispecies spatial justice—towards the Zoöpolis” which translates to “recognizing the many nonhuman Others who live alongside us in our shared urban ecologies, and developing creative solutions aimed at flourishing in the more-than-human city” (Van Patter, 2021, p. 362). Accordingly, all the discussions in this chapter, revolving around the human and urban animal entanglements that come into sight in everyday life settings and conditions, situate Istanbul as a complex “zoe-centered” environment that hosts possibilities for multi-species flourishings (Braidotti, 2011).

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This thesis examines three documentaries that share a similar theme and setting with their focus on the urban free-ranging felines and canines in the city of Istanbul.

Taşkafa, *Kedi*, and *Stray* are analyzed in conversation with Haraway's concepts of companion species and Chthulucentric world-view, Bennett's formulations of non-human agency, and Deleuze-Guattarian notions of becoming and becoming-animal in combination with Braidotti's nomadic ethics and nomadic-becomings. As clarified at the onset of this research, the main aim is to explore and discuss the human-urban animal relations in the context of Istanbul through the aesthetics, narratives, and forms of the selected documentaries. In relation to this aim, this thesis pursues to clarify and compare the techniques of the documentaries portraying and embodying feline and canine gazes in terms of their positions against the dominant human gaze. The overall chapters enable the comparison among these documentaries considering their voices, particular thematic concerns, techniques, and portrayals of human-animal relations.

After the introduction chapter of this thesis, Chapter II outlines the conceptual framework of critical posthumanism and new materialism. Particular concepts by Haraway—naturecultures, companion species, becoming-with, situated knowledges, multi-species response-ability, and Chthulucene—are introduced and discussed in

relation to the issues of domestication, companionships, and cohabitations of Istanbul's human and non-human residents. After introducing and questioning the traditional understandings of agency, the chapter lays bare new materialist perceptions of the concept that help generate generous attention to the agency of the non-humans. To ground these concepts with their processual ontological roots, the chapter also brings in the notion of becoming by Deleuze and Guattari. In this particular section, the certain clashes between the notion of becoming and Haraway's becoming-with are brought to the fore. In line with these discussions, the chapter also concentrates on Braidotti's nomadic ethics and becomings to lay out why the material, ethical, and political engagements with the non-human world are needed, and how the Oedipal relations humans tend to form with cats and dogs tend to be problematic.

To recapitulate, in Chapter III, the particular thematic concerns of the aforementioned documentaries are analyzed. While *Kedi* presents an affirmative and luminous portrait of humans and cats in the city of Istanbul, its narrative capitulates to the recurrently performed anthropomorphic renderings on the feline species. While the chapter problematizes these understandings with an emphasis on Haraway's, Braidotti's, and Deleuze-Guattari's takes on this issue, it also acknowledges that anthropomorphism as a cultural practice is inevitable. Hence, it formulates that the reasons for characterizing particular cats through anthropomorphisms yield a close inspection of their peculiarity and individual specificity. In this chapter, *Taşkafa* is predominantly analyzed through its thematic priority of history and remembering in portraying urban canines in Istanbul. It is claimed that *Taşkafa* furnishes its narrative with these themes to challenge the violent acts on the dogs of Istanbul and provides a vantage point on the present-day co-existence of street dogs with Istanbul's human inhabitants. The

chapter lastly analyzes *Stray* with its prevailing theme of shared precarity. It recognizes that the intricate relations the refugee boys and the dogs have on the streets is a powerful instance of Haraway's significant otherness considering their cultivated response-ability and sympoietic living.

Chapter IV grants particular significance of the portrayals of animal agency in *Taşkafa*, *Kedi*, and *Stray*. It stresses that the documentaries provide sufficient footage to portray the animals' similar and different agentic actions compared to humans. This chapter also highlights the ways in which these agentic actions are interconnected with the human world and non-human matters, by stretching the traditional definitions of agency to a more distributive and intermingling account of the term. This chapter offers a comparative approach to the techniques of gazing-with of the aforementioned documentaries, concluding that *Stray*'s secluded vision captured from the dog's eye-level stresses the agency of the dogs, while *Kedi* provides a more distributive apportioning of the human gaze and the animal gaze. Yet, capturing the feline height in *Kedi* appears more significant than the human gaze. *Taşkafa*, on the other hand, evades the agentic contributions of the dogs in particular scenes outlined in that chapter.

Chapter V probes the reflections of Deleuze-Guattarian becoming-animal in the documentary narratives and their production processes, considering the transformations stemming from communicating with other species and fascinations with the otherness of these animals. It also considers the ways in which becoming-animal in the selected scenes are reciprocal and mutual, therefore it argues that urban animals in the documentaries are as much affected from this transformation as their

human counterparts. This chapter also recognizes that the documentarians in question showcase ethically and materially embodied responsible subjects in relation to Braidotti's nomadic ethics and becomings. It concludes by arguing that the instances of mobility, rest, and yielding to the feline/canine rhythms and navigations, as well as fascination with the pack and the otherness of these animals showcase Deleuze-Guattarian becoming and the materially and relationally embodied ethical positioning towards these animals of the human participants and the directors of these documentaries resonate with Braidotti's nomadic subjectivity, which all situate the city of Istanbul as a composite zoe-centered terrain.

In retrospect, all the discussions revolving around the issues outlined above posit an affirmative stance towards multi-species co-habitation in Istanbul. The peculiar bonds humans and urban animals have in the cultural and material context of Istanbul are brought to the fore in these documentaries. Instead of a control-oriented and authoritarian governmental and NGO perspectives towards urban animals, the cultural portrait of Istanbul seems to provide a unique co-existence that bears witness to the individual and collective companionships entangled in the daily settings and situations of the city. Yet, especially *Kedi* is prone to idealize the present-day co-habitation of humans and urban animals in Istanbul by leaving out the harsh conditions of and violence towards street animals in Turkey. As Braidotti also puts it, "positivity [...] is not supposed to indicate a facile optimism or a careless dismissal of human [and nonhuman] suffering. It involves compassionate witnessing of the pain of others" (2011, p. 290). Hence, the idealization of human-animal relationships specifically in the documentary medium is prone to generate a perspective that disregards a more

comprehensive answer to the question of what it means to be a stray animal in Turkey.

No matter how idealized these relations are portrayed in *Kedi*, all the documentaries in question, in their own unique way, are fierce resisters to the modernist urge to sweep these animals from the city. As the architect Nalân Bahçekapılı rightly puts it, “Stray dogs and cats will probably be in trouble as long as modernisation in Istanbul is understood as an inane ‘non-place’ification, sterilisation and the adaptation to an image of a human and civilised city” (2015, p. 349). Considering all the recent propaganda tailored against the free-ranging dogs of Turkey⁹, it is now more urgent to speak about these issues as much in the academia as in our daily lives. As such, this thesis is a small attempt at identifying and challenging the human-centred position we take towards these stray animals through the close analysis employed on the aforementioned documentaries.

This thesis, hand in hand with the documentaries under scrutiny, is an attempt to make due Haraway’s cardinal call: “These are the times we must think; these are the times of urgencies that need stories” (Haraway, 2016b, p. 37). By enacting, visualizing and mobilizing the critical posthumanist and new materialist theories in the context of the human and urban animal relations at play in the documentary medium, this research, first and foremost, contributes to these fields of inquiry. It also adds a further

⁹In December 2021, president Erdoğan made a call to the local municipalities for driving the stray dogs to the shelters, by also accusing the pet owners as elitists. See the article: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/turkey-erdogan-dogs-imamoglu-istanbul-gaziantep-b1983338.html>

Months after this call, many citizens formed online communities regarding the “stray dog problem” (Başiboş Köpek Sorunu) of Turkey (see the prominent one on Twitter: @KopekSorunu) in which the current law protecting street animals (#5199) are labeled as #Katil5199 (in English “Murderer5199”). See the recent news article for further debates on this issue: <https://www.dailysabah.com/turkey/stray-dogs-stir-safety-debate-in-turkey/news>

dimension to the concerns of these realms through its emphasis on stray animals, since cats and dogs in the formulations of these theories are oftentimes classified as pet animals. Considering the status of strays as an in-between category between feral and domestic, this thesis highlights that we do not need a Euro-centric categorization of animals (pet, feral, or industrialized) in order to be able to live with them. The novelty of this research can also be tied to its mobilizing the new materialist concepts in relation to human-animal encounters. As human-animal relations are oftentimes regarded as composed of two counterparts, this thesis also enables an insight into many sorts of agencies projecting from viewing the animals on screen.

This thesis also contributes to the literature of ecocinema, by conceptualizing the urban animal documentaries of Istanbul as belonging to the ecodocumentary genre, since these documentaries suggest that the urban environment is not separate from nature, but rather emerges as an entangled realm of naturecultures that bears witness to collaborative work and cultural appreciation for multi-species flourishing in the city. While the most recent and relevant academic input on primarily *Kedi* as appeared in *Kedi: A Docalogue* covers many aspects from ecocinema, human-animal relations, distribution, musicality to politics, this thesis enlarges the corpus of human-urban animal relations in Istanbul in regards to *Kedi* as well as *Taşkafa*, and *Stray*. As Wang's chapter in this book compares *Kedi* and *Taşkafa* mostly in relation to their voices, in this thesis I conceptualize *Taşkafa*'s theme of remembering as a way of Harawayian staying with the trouble, and analyze *Kedi*'s portrayals of cats from a critical stance considering the recurrent anthropomorphisms in its narrative. With the inclusion of *Stray* in these discussions, this thesis encompasses the documentary representations of street animals and their relations with humans in Istanbul up to

date. It also stretches the corpus of this genre from sustainability, waste, climate change, disasters, etc. to a more ordinary and entangled context of human-animal relationships in an often-thought as human-exclusive environment. While contributing to the field of ecocinema on these levels, this study also provides a perspective on Turkish urban ecocriticism by challenging the European-inspired gentrification of cities through the cleansing of urban animals. Turkish urban ecocriticism concerning urban animals is mostly studied in the literary disciplines as generally appearing to be about travel writings (Dubino, 2020; Fortuny, 2014), and urban animals in Istanbul are often studied from a historical perspective in existing studies (Gündoğdu, 2018; Hart, 2019; Khayyat, 2019). As such, this thesis offers a film studies approach to the corpus of these scholarly work by also integrating an inquiry towards everyday life co-habitations of humans and street animals in the present day.

The corpus of this thesis can be enlarged for future research directions by comparing the urban animal documentaries in Turkey with other similar documentaries around the world, such as *Napoli Dogs* (Barbara Fally-Puskás, 2005), *Street Dogs of South Central* (Bill Marin, 2013), and *The Dogs of New York* (Kim Wolf, 2007). It can also be expanded into a further angle on the receptional experience in watching these urban animal documentaries. As Ivakhiv rightly notes, moving image “reshapes the ways viewers perceive themselves (as individuals and as groups) and the world (including the landscapes, places, nations, civilizations, and ecologies that make it up), the earth that subtends them, and the relationships connecting all of these” (2013, p. 100). As such, these relationships “ought to be the focus for ecocritical film studies, and a study of film that would analyze all of these would, in fact, be a comprehensive study that would re-ecologize our understanding of ourselves as cinematic, world-

bearing beings” (Ivakhiv, 2013, p. 100). As a part of the possible future studies that go beyond the cinematic representations, the contents produced on social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Reddit that reinforce the association of Istanbul with street cats and dogs can also be put into research for adding a new level of concern for the imagery of urban animals. These various aspects that can be covered in terms of street animals in Turkey showcase future study vectors that this study provides a glimpse into. As clarified at the onset of this thesis, we need to move beyond the human-exclusive perspectives towards non-human animals by appreciating and affirming our co-existence, and rather than seeing them as a danger and a burden, we need to stay with the trouble together in these times.

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