

Pack/Sürü

Stephanie Paine, 2012

My introduction to Istanbul was characterized by overload. The amount of people, sounds, colors, and sites I took in were so overwhelming at times that it was difficult to sort them out. And in so-doing, I realized that it wasn't the differences that stuck with me, but rather the experiences that I could best relate to.

Always having a strong affinity for animals, I immediately recognized something that I had never seen before. Istanbul residents live seemingly unaffected by the packs of dogs and cats in the streets. There were no leashes to hold them back. There were no cages restricting them from the outside world. There were bowls filled with water and food attended by shop owners and street vendors. These animals appeared to live a somewhat natural, or as natural as could be, life; content in their packs of three or four, sprawling on the hot cement in the summers and seeking shelter in the corners of buildings during the winters. I was impressed by their relationship with the people and the people with them.

An online search about the topic of street dogs in Turkey shows outsiders are quick to dispel their anger about the government's handling of them; citing poor shelter conditions and an overall disapproval with the neuter-and-release policy. Yet, this is not an isolated issue, and the act of killing stray animals is a wealthy, worldly business. I come from a country where stray animals are taught to be feared. They are removed from the streets, traumatically; and residents are urged to call animal control when they encounter a stray. The captured are reserved on an adoption list for a few weeks, but in the end are almost always euthanized. What I knew from my past was clashing with what I encountered in the present, and it was enlightening.

Shatner, Leno, and Haraway.

In a television broadcast on 1 May 2012¹, William Shatner had this to say about his experience with horses:

Shatner: *Riding a horse in a competition can be a spiritual experience. . . You're in total communication with an animal that speaks back to you . . .*

Leno: *Now, does the animal ever get a word in edge-wise? I'm curious.*

Shatner: *Noo, no...*

—audience laughter—

This photography series is an exploration of the street dog. It is influenced by my experience living in Istanbul, by learned traits from my past, by the closest and dearest relationships I experienced with my pets, and by the current, copresence I practice with my dog. The photographs were taken with a pinhole camera. Movements of the camera during exposure capture details of the figure, but an overall distortion manifests. What remains is the essence of the dog.

In her 2008 book “When Species Meet”, Donna Haraway titles part one “We Have Never Been Human”, which further opens a dialogue about what it means to categorize one as ‘human’ and the other as ‘animal’.² If we have never been human, and accept that we are animal, then the similarities between ‘us’ and ‘them’ become easier to recognize. She also uses the term copresence to illustrate that as humans living with and among animals, we must identify the animal as somebody as well as something (p. 76). I am living a copresence with my dog. She experiences many of the same, daily activities that I experience, but her perception of them is different than mine: she can see only a limited spectrum of color, but she has a wider field of vision than I have; her hearing and sense of smell are more acute than mine; and she’s better equipped to detect movement. However, by recognizing that she is somebody our shared experiences can lead us to develop a form of communication in both body language and sound. She reacts to me and I to her. As Shatner stated, *in total communication with an animal*. This is an attitude that we, as the human-animal, must take in regards to our treatment of and relationship with our fellow beings.

¹The Tonight Show with Jay Leno (1 May 2012). William Shatner, Part 1. Retrieved from www.nbc.com/the-tonight-show/video/william-shatner-part-1-5112/1399419
Accessed 8 May 2012

²Haraway, Donna, 2008. *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press