

The Precarity of Pitbull-type Dog Life: A Case Study of Contested Companionship in  
Montréal, Quebec

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## ABSTRACT

### **The Precarity of Pitbull-type Dog Life: A Case Study of Contested Companionship in Montréal, Quebec**

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Concordia University, 2018**

In June 2016, Christiane Vadnais was killed by her neighbour's neglected dog, Lucifer. Immediately following the incident the City of Montréal ushered in Breed Specific Legislation (BSL) that enlivened an already conflicted debate surrounding pitbull-type dogs. In this thesis I track BSL as a discourse – that is, as it stems from and shapes broader, shifting discursive constructions of pitbull-type dogs – and as it unfolds on-the-ground in Montréal, with profound effects for the lives of those dogs and their guardians. My theoretical approach draws from critical animal geography, legal geography, and extinction studies to approach BSL as an example of how humans discursively construct and materially affect nonhuman animals through processes of domination. My methodological approach is informed by multispecies ethnography and intimate feminist geographies; as such, it is mutually committed to including nonhuman animals as participants and to pushing the boundaries of conventional methodologies, such as by including personal experience. The thesis is broken into two contextual and two analytical chapters. First, I contribute to the ongoing development of multispecies ethnography by detailing my methodological approach and practices. Following this, I situate BSL in the historiography of pitbull-type dogs. In chapters 3 and 4 I explore both the effects and affects of BSL by tracing the law's performativity. First, I argue BSL is an example of spatial injustice as it denies pitbull-type dogs – and, if applicable, their guardians – access to space. Second, I suggest BSL is a dealer of death through three modes: the physical death (killing), the death of future generations (sterilization), and the death of a relationship (contested companionship) for pitbull-type dogs. The underlying goal of this research project is to re-story pitbull-type dogs as worthy of adoration, love and life.

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## **List of Acronyms**

Breed Specific Legislation (BSL)

Dog Owners Liability Act (DOLA)

People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)

Society for the Protection of Animals Montréal (SPCA Montréal)

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## Chapter One: Introduction

*One evening Clementine, a few friends, and I were waiting outside a Dépanneur. An older gentleman stepped out of the shop to let us know that Clementine, being the kind of dog she is, is dangerous. As if he was performing a civil duty by letting us naïve folks know, he recounted stories he had heard about “pitbulls” through a thick filter of too many beers. He stumbled into his conclusion stating that if we did not get going, she would “bite his dick off”: there would be trouble. Later that evening, or rather early in morning around 3am, I received private messages from him on my Facebook account telling me I better watch out or Clementine and I would be dead (Fieldnotes).*

This story, taken from my fieldnotes, embodies the tone of many encounters guardians of pitbull-type dogs have with other community members. Over the course of this thesis project, I heard dozens of stories like these – stories of disapproval, misplaced fear and harassment. Having a dog companion in Canadian households is unremarkable: in Canada, 41% of households include at least one dog, accounting for 7.6 million dogs as companion animals according to a study conducted by the Canadian Animal Health Institute (2017). Yet, as the stories found in my thesis suggest, not all dogs (or all dogs’ guardians) are treated equally. There is a necessity to complicate and think with more nuance and depth when it comes to caring for dogs. This project investigates just one example of contemporary human-canine relationships in Canada – one concerning pitbull-type dogs and their relationship to increasingly hostile governments and society. Like Dinesh Wadiwel, I argue this relationship is one of war.

Writing about the potential of friendship between humans and nonhuman animals, Wadiwell ruminates on what friendship would be like. He struggles theorizing friendship because “there remains a difficulty in conceiving of friendship with animals when legalised violence and domination form the backdrop for relationships” (Wadiwel, 2009, p. 284). Wadiwel convincingly writes that the relationship between humans and

nonhuman animals is one of war. He starts his analysis from the disheartening position “rather than the violence towards animals as exceptional, I start with the assumption that this is the norm” (Wadiwel, 2015, p. 255). To make his argument Wadiwel refuses to be naïve towards the violence underlying regulation, categorization and containment of nonhuman animals. In particular, he is suspicious of companion animals as the bond is subject to “discipline, surveillance, containment and control” (Wadiwel, 2009, p. 280). Moreover, nonhuman animal life is filtered through the paradigm of “ [buy], adopt, foster, euthanize”<sup>1</sup> creating the conditions in which friendship can be built (Wadiwel, 2009, p. 284). In this thesis I examine how this paradigm shifts and becomes even more lethal and restrictive for pitbull-type dogs under Breed-Specific Legislation (herein BSL), which, in the context of North America, is either the ban or restriction of a dog breed/type, but most often against pitbull-type dogs. But I also keep a trained eye on how love and care between pitbull-type dogs and their guardians persists, even under war-like BSL conditions. To do so I investigate pitbull-type dog and human relations under BSL in Montréal, Québec.

BSL was enforced between October 2016 and December 2017 in Montréal. It was implemented in response to the death of Christiane Vadnais, who was killed by Lucifer a neglected dog, in Montréal. After Vadnais’ death, BSL was hurriedly voted in despite lack of support from the animal care industry (CBC, 2016a). In this thesis I document and critically investigate the lived experiences of both humans and dogs entrapped in the

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<sup>1</sup> In my thesis I use the word ‘kill’ in place of ‘euthanasia’ to beget a different perspective. Taking note from legal scholar Leslie Bisgould (2008) in regards to the language we use when discussing harm to animals, we should remember the problem use of the term euthanize is “applied when a life is ended in the individual’s own interest, to bring and to end [their] suffering, and not for somebody else’s financial or other purposes” (p. 11). Explicitly distinguishing the language of euthanasia and killing in relation to what is happening to pitbull-type dogs thus calls upon us differently.

violent geographies of legal and societal disapproval under the governance of BSL. As the anecdote that opens this thesis suggests, pitbull-type dogs are subjected to specific cultural scripts that distance them from conventional human-‘normal’ dog relationships in North America.

My primary thesis question is: *What are the affects and effects of BSL for both human and pitbull-type dog companions?* To answer this question I conducted multispecies ethnography and auto-ethnography to gather stories from both humans and dogs – stories that expose the affects and effects of BSL. It was those stories that influenced the literature I consulted for this thesis, and the trajectory of this project.

Sara Ahmed (2015) has been greatly influential in my thinking for this thesis. In her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, she demonstrates how emotions circulate in what she refers to as an economy. Within this economy of affect, emotions propel certain bodies to be represented as culturally feared, loved, or disgusted. Ahmed (2015) contends that “emotions are intentional in the sense that they are about something, they involve a direct or orientation towards an object” (p. 7). It is not just that these emotions circulate but they have properties of accumulation, or what she calls “stickiness” (Ahmed, 2015, p. 88). As a particular orientation towards a body accumulates layer upon layer, an ontological subject emerges that often functions as a blockade against other subject formations (Ahmed, 2015, p. 117). An economy of emotion therefore functions as an apparatus of subject creation that depending on who you are can either elicit or block one’s flourishing. Ahmed focuses especially on the emotions that circulate around bodies perceived as “dangerous” – and the consequences. She states “there can be nothing more dangerous to a body than the social agreement that body is dangerous” (Ahmed 2015, p.

211). Bodies that become viewed as dangerous become “targets of control... and are sacrificed” through methods ranging from isolation, erasure or death (Srinivasan & Kasturirangan, 2017, p. 441).

My thesis centrally considers an assemblage of dogs referred to as ‘pitbulls’ that have been ontologically charged as dangerous. Throughout the thesis, I use the term pitbull-type dog instead of pitbull to invoke dogs with particular attributes rather than an actual breed. This label remains integral to my study as to be called a pitbull-type dog is ‘sticky’ in Ahmed’s words, as it is charged with “heavy associations and consequences” (Hogue, 2017, p. 7). In particular, the label pit-bull type dog is laden with racialized, classed and gendered histories, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Ahmed’s words weigh heavily in the undertaking of my primary thesis question that I return to again: *What are the affects and effects of BSL for both human and pitbull-type dog companions?* Although BSL is written as a law concerning non-human animals, my analysis argues that it is about governing specific relationships between humans and non-human animals. More specifically, this project interprets BSL as a form of governance that seeks to exterminate a particular canine-human relationship, a relation I refer to as contested companionship.

Contested companionship is a repurposing of Margaret Jane Radin’s concept of contested commodities. Radin (1996) defines contested commodities as commodities subject to moral or political debate that are only made available through carefully regulated circumstances. I repurpose Radin’s concept to hone in on relationships between pitbull-type dogs and their guardians – relationships that are, I show, similarly subject to moral and political debate, and often regulated under tightly controlled circumstances. It

is important for me to go beyond Radin's framing around commodities as dogs are recognized in the context of the law as more than commodities yet straddle legal classification as both property and semi-rights bearing subjects. I also contend living beings and relations inspire a social justice ethics that commodities may not. Still, proposing the concept of contested companionship has purchase. It challenges common canine-human narratives that assume dogs are protected from the cruelty reserved for other nonhuman animals, as witnessed in the adage 'man's' best friend. In this thesis, using the methodologies of both multispecies ethnography and auto-ethnography, I explore how cultural and state norms contest companionship.

Under the umbrella of my primary research question above, two questions follow. The first asks how BSL is deployed on the ground. In response, I investigate the many mechanisms of domination meant to create the conditions for contested companionship: BSL's spatial aspects, legal regulations (registration, fines), visual discourse, and spay/neutering requirements. The intention with this analysis is to trace how the by-law is experienced in ordinary, daily experiences that are not limited to official encounters with by-law enforcement. To explore these themes I engage with critical animal geography, legal geography and animal law to explore how BSL as a law becomes spatialized and performed (Blomley, 2005; Braverman, 2013b).

In the second major investigation of this thesis I ask: how does BSL and broader conversations of pitbull-type dogs evacuate them from the category of companion animal, and what are the repercussions of this? To do this I rely on literature invested in expanding what is considered extinction by challenging how extinction unfolds, and who is a recipient of such narratives. I trace the ways in which BSL uproots pitbull-type dog's

life through mechanisms of death such as killing, sterilization, and contesting the compatibility of pitbull-type dogs as companion animals. This leads me to suggest that BSL is an attempt to bring about the extinction of both pitbull-type dogs and their relationship to humans. The processes of extinction I explore deal death materially and discursively. Here I focus on the violence perpetuated against pitbull-type dogs' bodies and representations, beginning with their use as colonial 'companion species', in Donna Haraway's words, against enslaved and Indigenous peoples, to the violent regimes of contemporary BSL (Nast, 2015). This is an initial move in asking how this particular type of life is rendered killable in a bio-political regime of life and death.

In the remainder of this opening chapter, I offer a brief introduction to critical animal geography – the primary sub-field of human geography within which this thesis is situated. I then provide a short outline of my thesis, chapter by chapter.

### **Critical Animal Geography**

This research project is first and foremost situated in the discipline of critical animal geography. Critical animal geography centralizes the politics of place, space and encounters between humans and nonhuman animals. Like feminist studies, critical animal geography tracks domination, violence and control as the nexus between nonhuman animals and humans (Hovorka, 2015). Underlying this academic work is a general commitment to the idea that identifying the overarching nature of our relationships with nonhuman animals will help open space for ethical and creative interventions.

My project especially grapples with *dominating power*, defined as “power which attempts to control or coerce others” with the interests of empowering one group over

another (Sharp et al., 2000, p. 2). Wielding such power necessitates, in part, the ability to define these groups. Dominating power demands classification of life in order to make life – or at least, certain lives – legible, and thus governable (Scott, 1998). In response, by interrogating what are assumed to be neat categories, critical animal geography steps in as a framework to account for the spatialization of the power relations between humans and nonhuman animals.

There are three central tenets to critical animal geography. First, nonhuman animals are considered political subjects. Second, the space of encounter is deconstructed to ask what affective values are guiding that meeting. And third, there is a commitment to the goal of shared space. Hobson (2007) argues that nonhuman animals have always been political subjects. She writes, “animals are already subjects of, and subject to, political practices” (p. 251). In her paper she investigates bear bile to pursue this argument. She elaborates on bears’ entrapment in politics through considering the industries that commodify their bodies and circulate the commodities derived from their bodies, and the policies that are in place to govern their conservation. She argues that positioning nonhuman animals as political subjects allows researchers to then “ask a range of questions about institutions and practices enacted through thoroughly uneven processes and diverse forms of power” (Hobson, 2007, 264).

As nonhuman animals are political subjects, so too are their multivariate relationships to multispecies communities. These relationships unfold in and through space. Many human-nonhuman animal relationships involve extensive human efforts to spatially order animals – walls, fencing, cages are all designed to keep some animals out and others in. Of course, these designations are frequently disregarded by nonhuman

animals who have their own agency and intentions (Philo & Wilbert, 2000, p. 5). Often enough, it is this rigid placing of nonhuman animals, and transgression on their part, that dictates the possibility of violence. As Collard and Gillespie (2015) outline, it is necessary to be “attentive to the spaces and places animals inhabit” as it is central to the subordination of those nonhuman animals (p. 6). Key questions then surface: what conditions are in place that keep nonhuman animals relegated to certain spaces and places? For what purposes and to whose benefit? By asking such questions we as researchers can begin to see how violence and domination unfold in our relationships with nonhuman animals.

Consistent with their spatial focus, critical animal geographers also centre encounters. I understand encounters to refer to contact between nonhuman animals and humans. In particular, I find Johnson’s work around “places of encounter” in critical animal geography insightful. She suggests that every encounter is not decided at that exact time, but rather, enrolled in larger stories, histories, and contexts. Johnson sees encounters as a political positionality that can “upset hierarchies, promote more harmonious ethnic, racial, and environmental relations, redistribute power, and reconfigure the way that we see ourselves in relation to others” (Johnson, 2015, p. 7). I find this term has mobility to ask imperative questions about how nonhuman animals arrived and become fixed to certain places and spaces. It is with this knowledge we can reevaluate and disrupt the current conditions and relations humans have with nonhuman animals.

Speaking to the third goal of critical animal geography, Wolch and Emel (1998) in their first publications equivocally centered the goal of liberation. In their words, “our

political project is the creation of many forms of shared space” (p. xii). Corroborating a commitment to liberation, Philo and Wilbert (2000) state that critical animal geography is invested in forging space to allow nonhuman animals the “decencies of life, space, and place” (p. 25). While all three tenets of critical animal geography are actively deployed in my thesis, it is this central commitment to shared space that inspires my alignment with the discipline, as it takes seriously the subjects of our research. Being both a caregiver and advocate for pitbull-type dogs, I recognize the power of re-defining narratives in an effort to promote and support different stories of those dogs, and how these different stories might prompt more generous and caring ways of living together.

The re-storying of pitbull-type dogs has high stakes. Pitbull-type dogs are trapped in a narrative that claims inherent dangerousness is contained in their bodies, which are thought to be untrainable and untameable. In this masters thesis and beyond – through the relationships that have grown with participants, and in my community both online and offline – I hope to reflect a different story of those dogs. Focusing on pitbull-type dogs reveals a tale of brutalized creatures who deserve care, solidarity, and to be released from the narratives of dogfighting/dangerousness that haunt their every movement.

## **Chapter Outline**

After this introduction chapter, my thesis proceeds with two contextual chapters that provide foundational knowledge about my research approach and the social location of pitbull-type dogs. Chapter 2 outlines my methodological approaches. This chapter also includes a positionality statement where I articulate why and how I arrived at this research project, and what responsibilities became mine as I researched the

companionship relationship between humans and pitbull-type dogs. In this chapter I centre literature invested in developing multispecies ethnography, as well as feminist research practices to both make space for nonhuman animal participants while foregrounding my responsibility as a researcher.

In Chapter 3 I investigate the basic contours of BSL as well as the longer historical and cultural context out of which it emerges. Through a historiography of pitbull-type dogs, I piece together the material and discursive creation of the pitbull-type dog, beginning in the coal mines of Victorian England and the colonial frontier of North America. Following colonial legacies I present the contemporary North American culture surrounding pitbull-type dogs that concretizes the myth of dangerousness stuck to those dogs. From there, I discuss the animal management program dedicated to the control of pitbull-type dogs, referred to as BSL. To expand on BSL, I present my case study of the City of Montréal's escalation of the dangerous dog narrative after the death of Vadnais in the summer months of 2016. The core aspect of my project is the exploration of Montréal's legislation but it is vital to embed what happened in a lineage of campaigns against pitbull-type dogs. Those campaigns that pre-existed Montréal's legislation are responsible for circulating the discourse that pitbull-type dogs are uniquely dangerous, and that they are un-domesticated dogs: un-dogs.

Chapters 4 and 5 consider participants' and my own stories of living with pitbull-type dogs in Montréal. Chapter 4 consults legal geography to analyze the spatialization of BSL. Guided by Ahmed's articulation of fear, orientations and the transference onto social spaces, I examine the performativity of law, by tracing how law unfolds in society. I conclude that BSL is a form of spatialized injustice, that actively shrinks the space

pitbull-type dogs and their guardians can access. More specifically, I propose four expressions of BSL's spatial injustice, or four spatial effects of BSL related to use of public space: changed walking patterns, increased street harassment, decline in community membership and, the result of these and other conflicts, the burden of considering the decision to stay or leave. My goal in this chapter is to animate the law in order to illuminate the multivariate effects cast from this legislation that redefine and confine pitbull-type dogs and their guardian's movement and access to space.

Chapter 5 investigates another set of effects of BSL, this time through a close reading of extinction studies to expose the ways in which pitbull-type dogs are evacuated from the position of companion animal. This has profound consequences, for in North America a dog that is stripped of their relationship to humans is dead. Furthermore, I contribute to the ongoing efforts to unpack extinction as a slow process that if given attention, opens up moments in time for intervention. In this chapter I argue BSL is responsible for a *desired* extinction-in-progress through three death-modes: the legislated death (physical); the prohibition of future generations (sterilization); and the death of pitbull-type dogs as companion animals (death of a relationship, or the creation of contested companionship). It is in this chapter that contested companionship, having been a scaffold throughout my thesis, takes its most prominent shape.

I conclude this thesis with an overview of my research project while turning to the limitations I experienced during the research process, offering prompts for further research in conducting multispecies ethnography. I also reflect on the great importance of the stories we tell about nonhuman animals. As we are prone in settler North American

culture to homogenize an animal species or type to a set of characteristics, it is no wonder that the dangerous dog discourse is possible.

Ultimately, I hope to contribute to the ongoing discussions that families, communities and the state embark on when in dialogue about pitbull-type dogs. As Josephine Donovan (2006), when writing about feminist care ethics, states: it is about “listening to animals, paying emotional attention and taking seriously—caring about—what they are telling us” (p. 305). The following thesis takes very seriously the responsibility that comes with writing about life and death. By including narratives about dogs and dogs themselves in this project, I challenge the disembodied literature and law that is written about these creatures as if it was about remote others, abstract disembodied beings with little interest in living: it is this disembodiment I argue that must be reconciled to restart the heart of discourse in our contemporary world, if we truly want to build together a multispecies community that holds everybody.

## **Chapter 2: Methodology and Doing Multispecies Ethnography**

This chapter presents an overview of how I conducted my research in an effort to deposit another example of what doing multispecies ethnography looks like. The chapter includes a positionality statement followed by a literature review of multispecies ethnography.

Next, I discuss the overarching methodology of this thesis: multispecies ethnography. I then describe the research methods I employed under the umbrella of multispecies ethnography, which included participant observation, interviews and analysis, auto-ethnography and intimate feminist geography, and collection of secondary data. Finally, I reflect on what responsible research meant in the context of this project.

### **Positionality**

A reflection on one's positionality is common practice when conducting critical research in order to make known that the "researcher is a part of, rather than separate from, the research" as knowledge production is inherently a political process (Strega & Brown, 2015, p. 8). With this acknowledgement comes reflexivity as researchers: how we arrived at our research projects (why does it matter to me? To the community?); why we think we are good candidates to do this research (what is my relationship with the subject?); and what relationships we rely on or cultivate in the research process. Locating oneself is an important step towards accountability, responsibility, and most importantly, establishing relationships (Strega & Brown, 2015, p. 8).

I am a white cis-gendered woman who grew up in St. Catharines, Ontario and moved to Montréal, Quebec to pursue my graduate studies. Upon moving to Montréal I

found employment at Bark Avenue Montréal, a boarding and training facility for dogs that brought me rapidly into the canine world. At that time, my bosses owned five pitbull-type dogs. Debra and John are well known for working with pitbull-type dogs and other dogs discriminated against by facilities who refuse them service. Two months in to my employment I began to feel strongly compelled to rescue a pitbull-type dog. Having not previously spent much time around dogs before, I was overcome by what it meant to know and care for such complex social beings. I felt and continue to feel incredibly supported by my workplace and community in my adoption of pitbull-type dogs.

A close friend who worked at the Kitchener-Waterloo SPCA contacted me about two pitbull-type dogs who were granted a chance at life having been grandfathered in under Ontario's BSL which otherwise bans owning pitbull-type dogs. Upon meeting both dogs, it was clear that one of them had a very slim chance of being put up for adoption due to extreme allergies and medical conditions. Clementine (known as Halo in the shelter) left that day with me on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016. She is a proper elderbull (the nickname for an elderly pitbull-type dog) with a raspy-smoker's bark and a crocodile snap. During the adoption process I received clear instruction to have her out-of-province within 48-hours because her safety blanket of the grandfather clause would no longer be applicable as I was not a resident of Ontario. After that 48-hours she would be considered an illegal pitbull-type dog. According to the Attorney General of Ontario's frequently asked question forum (DOLA, 2018):

You will be in contravention of the law if you are found to have imported a pit bull into the province. Your pit bull may be subject to seizure and you may be subject to a fine and/or jail time. Please note that exceptions exist for Ontario residents who are out of the province with their pit bulls for less than three months. Limited exceptions also exist for individuals coming to Ontario for purposes of participating in recognized dog shows and flyball tournaments.

This was my first introduction to what it is like to experience BSL.

I was relieved to be headed for Montréal, a place considered to be a sanctuary city for dogs like Clementine. As it turned out, we had only a short period of reprieve: April to June 2016 was the duration of us safely experiencing Montréal as a duo of pitbull-type dog and human. In June 2016, as mentioned earlier in this thesis, Montréal began an action-oriented dialogue to introduce BSL after the death of Vadnais. Overnight, Clementine and our relationship was called into political debate.

Living with and doing care work for pitbull-type dogs while Montréal underwent its speedy application of BSL transposed my world. At that time, it was my lived experience but not my proposed master's research project. After completing my first year of graduate studies with the intention of studying the pest industry, it became evident that I had an ethical response-ability to research what it is like to live under BSL from both human and dog perspectives as well as the intersubjectivities between. Moreover, I had been informally researching and building relationships with the anti-BSL community in Montréal. Doing this brought much of the activism and the relationships I had been building into center-focus in my academic career, and was a key move to doing activism informed scholarship. As Potts and Brown (2015) suggest, "a commitment to anti-oppressive research means committing to social justice and taking an active role in that change" (p.18). In other words, our research – my research – has a political purpose and a following set of actions. This project means as much to me as it does my participants, both human and nonhuman, and I hope to represent them to my best of abilities and to keep them safe through anonymity.

It is important to clarify that I have used an initial capitalized letter and she/her

pronouns to refer to my participants and the name of their dog(s), who are also referred to with she/her pronouns. I make an exception for Justin, Scottie and Meeshka, as per Justin's request.

In the time since beginning this project in earnest, my community – and those to whom I am accountable - has expanded. Through my relationship with a friend-turned-long-term-participant in my project, I adopted Eleanor, an abandoned American Staffordshire terrier. I move through this research project as both a caregiver and companion to pitbull-type dogs, and thereby a member of the BSL-impacted community in Montréal and more broadly. Having been a part of the ongoing activism in Montréal beginning in June 2016, doing care work and living with these dogs afforded me access to an incredibly resilient group of beings and their stories. In the following section I will describe the methodological approach I took to engage with this group and their stories.

### **Multispecies Ethnography**

Ethnography has traditionally referred to the study of people and human culture. If nonhuman animals did make an appearance in traditional ethnographic study, they were depicted as auxiliary to a human story, as a part of the landscape, food sources, or symbols, but rarely subjects in their own right (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010, p. 545; eg. Morris, 1998; Cormier, 2003). Multispecies ethnography is an attempt to overcome the anthropocentric notion that assumes only humans can be subjects of ethnographic study. At the very core of multispecies ethnography is an acknowledgement of the more-than-human worlds in which we dwell, to “centre on how a multitude of organism's livelihoods shape and are shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces” (Kirksey & Helmreich,

2010, p. 554).

Fixing ‘multispecies’ in front of ethnography serves two purposes: first, to challenge the rigid binary between human and nonhuman animal, and second, to bring to the forefront the active and political subjectivities of nonhuman animals. In this section I will provide an overview of multispecies ethnography by examining the methodological toolkit, matters surrounding representation, and questions of ventriloquism that emerge in research that “re-turns” to more-than-human beings (Kirksey, Scheutze & Helmreich, 2014, p. 1; Whatmore, 2006; Hurn, 2012).

Ethnography is a multidisciplinary practice. Looking specifically to the discipline of geography, an encyclopaedic companion *The Dictionary of Human Geography* presently defines ethnography as “people writing” (Kirksey, Scheutze & Helmreich, 2014, p. 1; Gregory et al., 2009). This illuminates that the “human animal distinction,” understood as a product of colonial ontologies, remains (Dalke & Wels, 2016, p. 181). Upholding the human/animal binary in the humanities attests to the moment when the “animal” was given up to natural sciences and particular mechanist methods (Buller, 2015, p. 375). But recent shifts in researchers engagement with nonhuman animals suggests sciences no longer hold a monopoly on animal research. In a recent contribution to the canon of critical animal geography, editors Julie Urbanik and Connie L. Johnston (2017) assembled a handbook entitled *Humans and Animals: A Geography of Coexistence*, which includes an entry about multispecies ethnography. Ivan Sandoval-Cervantes (2017) offers the following definition: “use of ethnography to understand how different species construct different relationships among each other in specific times and geographies” (p. 248). As ethnography is often depicted as a method that subverts

traditional paradigms, while questioning epistemological, ideological, and ontological productions of knowledge, it is a generative methodology to employ in multispecies research (Hamilton & Taylor, 2012, p. 43). Humans' lives are in large part defined by their relationships with nonhuman animals and the meaning assigned to those encounters, making multispecies ethnography a timely endeavour.

The rise of multispecies ethnography has brought attention to key challenges in multispecies research. A central challenge is how to meaningfully incorporate nonhuman animals as research participants. Considering nonhuman animals as research participants prompts the question of what methods ought to be in the tool kit considering the challenge of working within the speech-text complex of traditional academia. Shifting from conventional practices of studying nonhuman animal life, multispecies ethnographers re-work and re-combine methodologies to create new ways of researching across the species barrier.

Dowling and Suchet-Pearson provide one of the clearest articulations of such a re-worked methodological toolkit, assembling a tripartite model of methodologies to choose from when doing multispecies ethnography. The first category includes conventional methods such as discourse analysis, field journals, and written notes (Dowling and Suchet-Pearson, 2016, p. 2). The second category is nuanced in that it contains methods that are "doing more", going further into the murky terrain of de-centering the human (Dowling and Suchet-Pearson, 2016, p. 3). This includes participant observation, autobiographical reflections that tend to matters of relation and affect; and bearing witness to films, or interactive media (Dowling and Suchet-Pearson, 2016, p. 3). However, Hamilton and Taylor (2012), both researchers with over a decade in conducting

multispecies ethnography ring the alarm on the ethics surrounding participant-observation research in field sites such as zoos, vet clinics, farms, or slaughterhouses (p. 45). Living this tension, Collard's (2015) role in a primate rehabilitation facility conducting participant observation enrolled her in a project of co-producing captor and captive that was at odds with her broader goal of liberation (p. 155).

The third category offered by Dowling and Suchet-Pearson is collaboration and authorizing. This takes shape in experimentation, typically enrolling technology. A good example is recent research by Hodgetts and Lorimer (2015), who are keen on addressing the 'real-time spatiality' of nonhuman animals in multispecies ethnography (p. 285). They call for multispecies ethnographers to fashion themselves with conservation-based research tools, such as technologies of monitoring that track 'inaccessible' moments, creating an auto-biographer out of the animal involved (Hodgetts & Lorimer, 2015, p. 286). Another noteworthy example of utilizing technology comes from the ethnographic research on companion human-dog relationships that studied how technology mediates certain relationships and how this provides a framework for multispecies semiotics to shape the research design (Mancini et al., 2012, p. 145). Undoubtedly, technology offers an access point to gain the perspective of nonhuman animals; however, textual analysis remains the primary expression of most research (Dowling & Suchet-Pearson, 2016, p. 6).

Regardless of the mode of expression – textual or technological – one of the greatest questions is how nonhuman animal life is represented, made legible and placed in relation to broader political projects of liberation in our research. Researchers “place” nonhuman animals along anthropocentric trajectories of expression – expression that is

meaningful for humans, such as written words – yet the nonhuman animals themselves cannot access the meaning produced. Holmberg engaging with this challenge defends her methodological approach of zoo-ethnography in *Urban Animals: Crowding in Zoocities* (2015) arguing it is worth our while to critically examine methodological orthodoxies with the intention of creatively engaging with them in ways that de-centre human subjectivities. It is important to note that her intention is not to challenge anthropocentrism to only replace it with a non-human centric standpoints; she is most interested in “humanimal relations” through traditional methods such as interviews and text analysis in order to move towards de-centring humans in these conversations (Holmberg, 2015, p. 18). Although not addressing the issue of nonhuman animals’ inability to access this research, the zoo-ethnographic approach ensures they are “nearby” and made legible through humanimal relations (Holmberg, 2015, p. 18). In my own research practices I found Holmberg’s approach useful to capture the core relationships between human and nonhuman animals in my project.

Another key challenge is the debate of speaking for our research participants. Often the species-centric gaze in ethnography valorizes the speaking subject, rendering nonhuman animals’ ‘silent’ as normative communication mediums are not shared between human and animal subjects (Dalke and Wels, 2016, pp. 182-3). Perhaps the greatest challenge in multispecies ethnography is how to construct research spaces that can register different forms of communication in order to create a seat at the table for nonhuman animals, an effort to move beyond the “ventriloquism” embedded in the aphorism which plagues the animal liberation movement, “the voice of the voiceless” (Corman, 2016, p. 475).

Animal scholars have much to learn, here, from Indigenous scholars, critical race theorists and feminists who have a long history of raising important questions about knowledge production pertaining to who is entitled to create meanings about the world (Strega & Brown, 2015, pp. 1-2). Arundhati Roy (2004) poignantly said, “There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard”. This sentiment reverberates in the spaces where scholars actively center marginalized knowledge-production and worldviews as a form of “cognitive justice” (Strega & Brown, 2015, pp. 1-2). For projects that hold animals as research participants, Roy’s words also ask us to reconsider what we can do in our research design that create opportunities for nonhuman animals to assert themselves.

Some promising leads are emerging by binding ethnography and ethology – the study of animal behaviour. Such a union promises the possibility of striking a harmony that resonates a “qualitative trans-species research methodology” (Dalke and Wels, 2016, p. 183). Lauren Corman (2017), a sociologist of critical animal studies, has critiqued this field of scholarship as having failed to incorporate “field-based cognitive ethology” (p. 258). Corman identifies this lack of engagement as maintaining the victimhood status of animals. She suggests that if we combine critical scholarship with ethology we can move “beyond the suffering approach” (Corman, 2017, p. 252). As she so eloquently states, pairing research that critically incorporates nonhuman animals with ethology “deepens the sense of what is lost when other animals are harmed” (Corman, 2017, p. 255). Corman identifies a necessary shift to then actively research within multispecies communities prioritizing meeting animals on their own terms.

Multispecies ethnography is similarly committed to holding space for nonhuman animals as active participants in the research process, engaging in experimental research to innovate best practices. Barbara Smuts' work is an exemplary model of this commitment to animals as active participants. Smuts, an esteemed primatologist and sociologist, returned to America after years of conducting research with primates and began to adopt her canine family, immediately becoming interested in canine research. In her influential paper "Between Species: Science and Subjectivity," Smuts offers insight into doing multispecies ethnography. The greatest strengths of her research are her ability to emphasize and meaningfully maintain animals as unique beings with individual subjectivities who actively shape the world around them. Smuts (2006) allowed herself to engage in subjectivities apart from her own, with attention to and a willingness to draw scientific observations sourced from "what matters to them" – where "they" are her nonhuman animal participants (p. 124). It was this methodological approach that paved the way for conducting multispecies ethnography that meaningfully centres nonhuman animals' knowledge.

By centering relationships I established through my research to both humans and dogs I learned early on in my project that this project is not just about the dogs. Rather, it is about dogs' relationships to their guardians and the communities in which they dwell. Smuts (2006) too learned from her research that dogs "challenge our tendency to think of individuals as primary, and relationships as secondary phenomena that are 'caused' by the actions of individuals" (p. 124). My ethical responsibility in this project is thus representing pitbull-type dog relationships with their humans as important and worthy of consideration alongside other companionships.

## **Doing Multispecies Ethnography**

An overarching goal of my thesis is to contribute to scholarship on doing multispecies ethnography. By conducting a multispecies ethnography and participant-observation research, I remained malleable to the ever-changing nature of doing a project that involves the lives of others. In the following section I outline how I executed my research. This section includes a detailed description of my methods, including participant observation, interviews, auto-ethnography and intimate feminist research, as well as a breakdown of the secondary material I consulted.

### *Participant Observation*

My main research method in this thesis is participant-observation. The definition for participant-observation that I subscribe to is “getting close to people [and nonhuman-animals] and making them feel comfortable enough with your presence so that you can observe and record information about their lives” (Bernard, 2011, p. 256). My participant-observation research occurred through two main sites and capacities: first, as an activist at multiple anti-BSL demonstrations and events; and second, as an employee at a boarding, training, and dog daycare facility that specializes in care for pitbull-type dogs.

Since June 2016 I have participated in and conducted observation at over a dozen demonstrations in opposition to BSL. The events mostly took place at the Montréal City Hall to ensure visibility and an audience of politicians to hear our dissent. Engaging with politicians was paramount to making the animal by-law a primary debate issue in the 2017 municipal elections. Other events were organized as demonstrations throughout the

city to allow for further engagement with the Montréal community. I am also a member of the Pin-up for Pitbulls (PFPB) Montréal branch. PFPB is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization whose mission is “to educate people about the history, temperament, and plight of the pit bull-type dog” and to raise “awareness to rally against Breed Specific Legislation (BSL) and Breed Discriminatory Laws (BDL). PFPB’s goal is to restore the image of the pit bull-type dog to its former reputation of America’s companion animal, war hero, and family member (Pin Up For Pitbulls). In Montréal PFPB has successfully hosted events to raise money for the SPCA-Montréal legal fund, tabled at various pet stores and conventions, and adorned hundreds of people in the city with T-shirts featuring flattering images of pitbull-type dogs’ with accompanying phrases such as ‘Take my Leash, Not my Life’. This has proven to be an effective tool of activism; individuals become signposts equipped with knowledge to empower pitbull-type dogs in their day-to-day lives.

The second main site of my participant observation research is my work at Bark Avenue Montréal, a boarding, training, and daycare facility for dogs. Since November 2015, I have oscillated between full-time and part-time work fostering longitudinal relationships with individual dogs. Importantly for my project, Bark Avenue has served as a sanctuary for pitbull-type dogs and their humans in light of the fact that most boarding facilities in the area of Montréal prohibit extending services to pitbull-type dogs for liability reasons. These same dog daycares have policies that discriminate against socializing pitbull-type dogs. For example, PetSmart (2018), a leading companion animal retailer, discriminates against the “bully breed” as explicitly stated in the company policy for dog requirements for dog-daycare:

for the safety of all animals and associates, we cannot accept dogs of the “bully breed” classification or wolves/wolf hybrids including American Pit Bull Terriers, Miniature Bull Terriers, American Staffordshire Terriers, Staffordshire Bull Terriers, American Bull Dogs, Bull Terriers or mixed breeds that have the appearance or characteristics of one of these breeds.

The owners of Bark Avenue are both guardians to pitbull-type dogs and have individually facilitated rescues and worked with pitbull-type dogs for over a decade. They share a preference for working with rescued large-breed dogs that struggle with trauma and idiosyncrasies. My work at Bark Avenue has served as an abundant research field site, affording me thousands of hours of observing the social worlds of dogs, especially pitbull-type dogs. Like Harlan Weaver, I consider my relationship to the dogs I work with a form of kinship. Weaver (2015) takes a page from queer kinship scholarship and pairs it with his research on trans affect and pitbull rescue to describe the importance of recuperating “intimacy as a productive category” (p. 351). Queer kinship “stress[es] the fluid and contingent nature of kin relationships and how they are instituted and nurtured over time” (Weaver, 2015, p. 349).

### *Interviews*

Interviews are another key research method for this thesis. Inspired by Gillespie and Lawson (2017), who approach their research participants (people without homes with canine companions) as experts, I intentionally rely on interview material in an effort to “center the words and experiences of these experts and their knowledge of multispecies care and...politics” (p. 781). Doing this shifts knowledge-production authorization to the research participants rather than solely being presented by the researcher in an effort to centre expert knowledge which “advance[s] theoretical ideas about multispecies

impoverishments” (Gillespie & Lawson, 2017, p. 781).

In March 2016 I obtained the Certificate of Ethical Acceptability (#30007390) from Concordia University, which granted me permission to interview citizens of Montréal who were either primary or secondary guardians of pitbull-type dogs. Before each interview I provided interviewee’s a further description of the project, a brief overview of the interview and completed the consent to participate form. An overview of typical semi-structured interview questions is included in Appendix A. I conducted 30 interviews in the span of March 2016 to March 2017. However, because of the precarious nature of breed-specific legislation, 14 people wrote to me within the window of a month after the interview wishing to withdraw. I immediately deleted their audio files and assured them that there would be no mention of our conversation in my research.

A typical interview involved traveling to the interviewee’s neighbourhood, usually once they were done work for the day. I was keen on the idea of producing-knowledge and experiencing BSL together during the interview, so the majority of interviews were walking interviews, and for the most part, more specifically, dog walking interviews. Walking interviews are said to “generate richer data, because interviewees are prompted by meanings and connections to the surrounding environment” (Evans & Jones, 2011, p. 849). Using this method of interviewing was very productive as stories were further validated during the time we shared together, creating a cathartic experience for interviewees who reflected on the interview as an ‘empowering experience’. Not only were participants able to share past stories, but also together we were able to navigate a hostile public space.

The dogs themselves were also able to communicate to us during the interview about their level of comfort in public while wearing the muzzle, as well as more general behaviour that Lorimer, Hodgetts and Barua (2017) in their paper on animal atmospheres describe as “the affective intensities of a particular space that gives rise to events, actions, feelings, and emotions” (p. 2). Exploring nonhuman animal atmospheres’ is an effort to engage with “nonhuman difference, rather than a desire to extend a humanist analysis to animals” (Lorimer, Hodgetts and Barua, 2017, p. 3). This affords nonhuman animals the justice of making sense of their actions and behaviours because of “spatial connections, temporal trajectories and processes of intensification” (Lorimer, Hodgetts, and Barua, 2017, p. 8).

Taking this position in my research allows for capturing a lively ethnography during the interviews. This includes taking seriously the communication relayed from the dogs during the interview, from noting their mannerisms, to getting to know their individuality. A step further is noting their communication in transcribing the interview. For example, during an interview with Z, her dog Georgie was resting under the picnic bench when a small dog approached her unbeknownst to us. Georgie, becoming almost immediately nervous, barked loudly towards the approaching dog, sparking a conversation about how dogs should meet each other. This modest example of attempting to have dogs as participants in the interview process is a response to the fact that we often do not think of nonhuman animals as teachers or knowledge-producers, and that their “lessons are too often marginalized rather than centralized” (Corman & Vandrdocova, 2014, p. 140).

If we as researchers slow down, and release ourselves from expectations we can

become vulnerable to different practices that forge the possibility of non-verbal based research practices. Leslie Fawsett (2005) encourages us to “gain local intimate knowledge of another life” in order to slow down in time and space enough to register different subjectivities (p. 270). Although this made the interviews messier to transcribe, through noting their barks, and shuffles, and shakes, dogs were considered equal participants and given space to express their embodied presence. After transcribing the interviews I coded interviews manually, generating themes including: general dog details; registration process; street harassment; family and friends reactions; mental health/anxiety, and movement.

#### *Auto-ethnography and Intimate Feminist Geography*

The third methodology I used for primary research is auto-ethnography, defined as “a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts” (Spry, 2001, p. 710). Auto-ethnography further cemented intimacy as an overarching orientation to my research. This research has been emotionally charged from the outset. Rather than trying to disregard emotion from the research process, or “write [it] out” I have constructed my research practice around intimacy and emotion (Spry, 2001, p. 711).

As researchers we are told “emotions should have no place in [our] work because emotions simply contaminate the data and impede the objective process of acquiring valid information” (p.184), as Clinton Sanders states (1998). However, Sanders, drawing from his own experience as a multispecies ethnographer and reader of feminist scholarship, is critical of this positivist stance. He holds that “emotional experience is, in fact, central to doing ethnography” (Sanders, 1998, p. 185). Sander’s work offers

important insight into accounting for the place of auto-ethnography and intimacy in conducting research with nonhuman animals. Straightforwardly, he states that all too often “prior commitments held by researchers, who themselves tend to be animal people, may serve to amplify or otherwise draw out emotional aspects of being ‘in the field’” (Sanders, 1998, p. 86). In this project I admit to nurturing this positionality as it led me to productive and energized research habits.

*Writing Intimacy into Feminist Geography*, edited by Moss and Donovan (2017), was very instructive for my research practices. In the introduction chapter, editors Moss and Donovan (2017) state, “writing intimacy in geography means disclosing the everyday through thoughtful accounts of the lives of people, nonhuman beings and non-living things” (p. 17). To do this, intimacy and its complimentary state, vulnerability, have to be the cornerstones to research practices. An intimate research approach requires the researcher to “attend to sensations in the body, intensities of feeling, resonance between entities and connections among people, nonhuman beings and non-living things” (Moss and Donovan, 2017, p. 12). This methodological approach requires taking seriously how emotions have profound material and spatial implications. Moreover, writing intimacy into our research serves as a validating tool that “reflect[s] a particular sensibility of and approach to producing and circulating specific knowledge” (Moss and Donovan, 2017, p. 13).

Kathryn Gillespie contributed a chapter in *Writing Intimacy into Feminist Geography* titled “Intimacy, Animal Emotion and Empathy: Multispecies Intimacy as Slow Research Practice”. Without reservation, Gillespie, declares the emotional responses of grief and anger she experienced and bore witness to during her research at

an auction yard. Gillespie enters her research with empathy, seeking guidance in the words of Lori Gruen (2015), who writes, “we experience the world from a human perspective [but this] doesn’t mean that we can’t work to see things from the perspectives of nonhumans, and...empathy is a skill that helps us in doing this” (p. 4). Thus, by honing this ‘caring perception,’ Gillespie (2017) uses observation, witnessing, bodily encounters, and interviews with human caretakers, to gather knowledge about nonhuman lives (p. 163).

Gillespie’s research inspires my own. Writing about her rescued Beagle, Saoirse she states, “our shared life together has transformed the way she moves through and experiences the world around her. And it has transformed me, too” (Gillespie, 2017, p. 167). What is so powerful about this research is the willingness of the researcher to dissolve the distance that is often taken in conducting research. Studying nonhuman animals often comes with the charge of enacting anthropocentrism as said by other scholars in an effort to disempower the projects capacity to challenge human/animal binary and make people rethink how they live. Conducting multispecies research is met with the challenge of being considered legitimate, as we wade through spaces that render our research participants nonhuman animals non-sentient objects or property. However, scholars like Gruen and Gillespie brave the debate in order to account for nonhuman animals in politically engaged and meaningful ways.

Following in the footsteps of Sanders, Donovan and Moss, Gruen and Gillespie, I join in chorus with a lineage of feminist auto-ethnographic research – more specifically of the feminist-bitch lineage, where, as Haraway (2003) states, “dog writings [appear] to be a branch of feminist theory” (p. 3). This form of writing situates my experiences of

doing intimate research as apart of the story rather than just a storyteller. As Gillespie mentions, her transformative relationship with Saoirse granted her insights and deep moments of knowledge-making, which evolved over their time spent together. In the same way, I turn to my experiences with Eleanor and Clementine as we inhabit the world together.

I conducted auto-ethnography via journaling and embedding experiences of my own in this thesis. I believe that being a guardian to two pitbull-type dogs during my project granted me rapport with those I interviewed that may have not been as accessible if I had not been experiencing similar challenges. Moreover, I live the very experiences that my thesis outlines. Clementine and Eleanor are both my companion animals and are victims to breed-specific legislation. As Huff (2014) states in her article about canine memoirs, dog writing is an act of weaving dog and human tales alongside one another that serves to disrupt autobiography by bringing attention to the relations that make up individuals (p. 130). By inserting my experiences into my thesis I am too writing about Clementine and Eleanor's experiences, as we share stories by being in relation to one another.

### *Secondary Data*

In addition to all of the above primary research, my project relies on secondary data. Much of what culturally and legally defines pitbull-type dogs is not sourced from scientific data but rather perspectives that originate and circulate in popular culture. Therefore, secondary data weighs heavily in my analysis as it is significant in the cultural construct of the 'pitbull'. I have sorted this empirical material into four realms:

legislation; reports from animal welfare/rights and activists; online media archives, and visuals.

i) Legislation: A key component of my project is to analyze how pitbull-type dogs are made legible to the state, making them subject to regulation and control. I consult legislation –especially animal control by-laws and provincial animal welfare acts in three main jurisdictions: Montréal, Quebec and Ontario.

ii) Reports from animal welfare/rights and activists: There have been several major actors combatting BSL in Montréal. These groups include but are not limited to: the Society for the Protection of Animals Montréal (SPCA Montréal); Protection Pit Bull; Quebec Pit Bull; CRAC - Citoyens Responsables de leurs Animaux de Compagnie. These activist organizations have generated numerous documents pertaining to BSL in Montréal.

iii) Media Archive: Internet and Newspaper Sources:

The Internet promises insight when searching for media related to pitbull-type dogs. I shared my position as a graduate student with various anti BSL groups on Facebook and obtained page-monitors' permission to make use of the public-data. The main Facebook groups that I gathered data, quotes, stories and sentiments from are: Warriors United Against BSL; Protection Pit Bulls; PAC Pitbull Association of Chateauguay; MTL Pit Bull. Moreover, I consulted media from major newspapers in Montréal (such as Montréal Gazette, La Presse, Le Journal de Montréal and TVA Nouvelles).

iv) Visual Material:

I included a collection of photographs from my research that will aid in furthering

the stories told in my thesis. I make use of images that both visually show the techniques of control employed by BSL such as the muzzle, and simultaneously include visual images that re-story pitbull-type dogs as companion animals.

Including a few images of the dog participants in my project will introduce some of them while maintaining the anonymity of others.

### **Responsibilities**

Multispecies ethnography attempts to document an assemblage of bodies and things cohabitating a shared world. Yet, how do we meaningfully engage nonhuman animals in our research when they themselves cannot access our primary modes of communication? What responsibilities do we inherit and what do we owe nonhuman animals as research participants? Are nonhuman animal bodies represented as living beings or are we reproducing the encumbered ‘animals are good to think with’ complex attributed to the French anthropology Claude Lévi-Strauss in our research? Haraway (2003) addresses this position sharply, stating in the *Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, “dogs are not surrogates for theory; they are not just here to think with” and in fact, “they are here to live with” (p. 5). Agreeing with Haraway’s assertion, I now turn to a brief discussion of responsibilities to conclude with how I practiced this ethic in my thesis research.

Discussions of responsibilities and ethics factor in heavily when looking at multispecies ethnography. Amongst multispecies ethnographers many have the foundation of feminist care ethics traditions. Lori Gruen is a key theorist inspiring this work. Gruen’s (2015) work on entangled empathy beckons us to “radically rethink these

relationships if we wanted to improve everyone's wellbeing" (p. 2). Gruen's (2015)

foundational contribution is entangled empathy that she defines at length:

a type of caring perception focused on attending to another's experience of wellbeing. An experiential process involving a blend of emotion and cognition in which we recognize we are in relationships with others and are called upon to be responsive and responsible in these relationships by attending to another's needs, interests, desires, vulnerabilities, hopes, and sensitivities. (p. 3)

Subscribing to conducting multispecies ethnography that is closely aligned with Gruen, I look to activist-scholars who hold the value of entangled empathy and total liberation in their research projects.

Gillespie offers a key guide in her multispecies ethnographic study of Pacific North-western dairy producers. Entering her project with a broad interest in critically studying the dairy industry, it was only until after conversing with farmers that cows' emerged as co-participants in her study. Gillespie understood these stories of resistance told by the farmers as access points to cows' subjectivities that in turn engendered a politic of care. Gillespie (2016) understands this as the scholarly "responsibility to respond" to the uneven power between humans and animals which deeply permeated the process of her fieldwork (p. 127). Part of that responsibility is embarking on multispecies projects that open up spatial- and temporal- moments to witness varied responses from nonhuman animals and locate a framework to "resist with them, rather than form them" (Gillespie, 2016, p. 130). Gillespie approaches her research intentionally to bring individual cows' stories to the surface, as well as bring attention to their collective plight.

Pursuing this thought of what it means to do ethical research with nonhuman animals Collard identifies that there are currently no formal ethical guidelines or forms when conducting non-invasive research with nonhuman animals. Conducting research on

both non-human animals and humans at a rehabilitation sanctuary in Guatemala, Collard (2015) was confronted with the fact that in a university setting the only available ethics forms for nonhuman animals assumes an exploitive lab-work relationship with those animals (p. 159). Filling out ethics applications is a common process in the bureaucratic procedure of conducting research. Collard's observation showcases one of the first obstacles when doing research with nonhuman animals outside of the 'hard sciences'. It is the absence of any bureaucratic process that grants nonhuman animals access to the status of research participant and upholds an ethical standard for their participation. As of this current moment, any ethical standard for involving nonhuman animals in research is absent from the current animal ethics forms. Until a non-exploitive ethics form exists, scholars are given full-license to decide the nature of their relationship with nonhuman animals and what, if anything, nonhuman animals receive from participation.

In an effort to redress the lack of ethical responsibility I am expected to have to my nonhuman participants, an innovative passage by Sanders comes to mind. He discusses the dilemma of trying to avoid being a voyeur in research that often requires you to turn "pain into data" when doing research involving nonhuman animals (Sanders 1998, p. 187). He makes the point that in this kind of research there are ample opportunities to give back something of value, with the condition that it does not necessarily have to be "equally distributed among all actors in the research" (Sanders, 1998, p. 188). He continues, "should the ethnographer choose to intervene in situations that arise in the field, I maintain that these efforts are best focused on improving the lot of those with the least power" (Sanders, 1998, p. 188). Reading this passage of Sanders validates a relationship with one of my primary research participants Justin and his two

dogs Scottie and Meeshka, who not only contributed to this project, but also taught me many lessons during our shared time together. I close this chapter with their story.

My relationship with Justin, Scottie and Meeshka was by far the most intimate and entangled experience I had over the course of this project. I met them in the spring months of 2015 when all three were living on the streets, occasionally finding refuge in abandoned apartment buildings. When I heard about the implementation of BSL, having developed quite a special friendship with the three, I contacted Justin immediately and asked what I could do. Over the course of the next few months Justin focused on surviving on the streets while maintaining an as friendly as possible relationship with the police who were authorized by the city to enforce BSL. Knowing that he could not keep his dogs safe for long we began talking about an exit plan. He named Vancouver as his chosen destination for the reason that it has yet to be impacted by BSL and is a more moderate climate, suitable for those who live on the streets.

Our course of action was to get Scottie and Meeshka sterilized at a free clinic hosted by the Montréal SPCA along with creating a GoFundMe campaign for their travel expenses to the east coast.<sup>2</sup> The choice to have Scottie and Meeshka sterilized did not arise out of personal preference; it was a condition to be met by the legislation contributing to BSL laws now enforced by the city of Montréal. Although Justin was in disagreement with the mandated sterilization he allowed me to take both Scottie and Meeshka to their appointments. Scottie's surgery went well, however, Meeshka's surgery became a series of emergencies that may have cost her life.

On the day of Meeshka's surgery, I picked her up after she received the green light to leave. After walking a few blocks we successfully managed to hail down a taxi;

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<sup>2</sup> The link to the no longer active GoFundMe: <https://www.gofundme.com/fleeing-bsl-in-montreal>

this task alone is a difficult thing to do with a pitbull-type dog. Once in the back of the cab I inspected the area on her body where I expected to find her stitches. Much to my alarm, in place of the sutures I discovered a gaping hole. I calmly asked the driver to turn around and head back to the clinic.

Upon arrival to the clinic I immediately questioned a technician who told me little more than the fact they did not have any spare Elizabethan cones to put on her, therefore, post-surgery as she waited in the crate, she may have opened up the stitches. The technician claimed the clinic would not have time to look at Meeshka until the next morning, and I was given the option to leave her over night. Knowing that leaving Meeshka in her state would almost certainly result in a potentially life threatening infection, I immediately took her to the nearest emergency veterinary hospital, Hôpital Vétérinaire Pierrefonds Animal Hospital.

After recalling the multiple attempts by the SPCA to dissuade Justin from keeping his animals while homeless, the veterinarian and myself speculated that this uncompassionate response from the technician may have possibly been an echo of the effort to discourage Justin from reuniting with Meeshka. At the veterinary hospital Meeshka underwent her second surgery of the day and had to stay overnight.

That evening I found Justin in order to recount the catastrophes of the day, to explain to him why Meeshka was not with me. Devastated and terrified, he continued to ask me ‘is she dead? Is she really alive?’ I dutifully explained the entire situation to him and presented a spread of photos on my cellphone to corroborate the events of the day. Following Meeshka’s evening at the hospital, and after having already had two surgeries in the past few days which required anaesthetic, an incredibly dangerous thing for a dog

at any time during their life, we decided to keep her at Bark Avenue to ensure a sterile environment during the projected two weeks of her healing process (see Figure 1).

Despite the fact that things seemed to be going well for Meeshka after her first week at Bark Avenue, she developed a hernia under a suture, a life threatening medical emergency. As a result, Meeshka was once more admitted to the veterinary clinic in Pierrefond for her third, and fortunately, final surgery in less than two weeks. In the end, Meeshka regained her health, and was happily reunited with Justin and Scottie mid-June after spending a total of five weeks apart.



**Figure 1.1 Meeshka at Bark Avenue during her stay.**

Meeshka's surgeries were, however, not the end of Justin's plight in trying to deal with the restrictions of BSL as a person living on the streets. About two weeks before they left Montréal, Justin was fined twelve hundred dollars by the city for not possessing the special permits required for his pitbull-type dogs. Not only was Justin given an exorbitant fine, but an accompanying threat that Scottie and Meeshka could be

confiscated and, in the language of the by-law, destroyed. This presented Justin with an impossible situation. He was meant to acquire a permit that he was no longer able to obtain, as the deadline for the registration had long since passed. Regardless of having not met this deadline, he would have been simply not eligible in the first place to fulfill two of the major requirements in order to receive these special permits as a person without a permanent address or a clean criminal record. As a result, despite the fact that Montréal was the home where Justin and Meeshka and Scottie had lived united for years, by mid-July they gathered their belongings, and Freedom Drivers, an animal rescue transport organization, drove them to the Montréal–Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport where they boarded a flight to Vancouver.

Looking back on this experience and when reviewing my fieldnotes, I am given chills. Having developed such strong relationships with all three, I am grateful to have been in a position where I could use my social location to advocate for them in a way that allowed me to be an “allie[] rather than their saviour[]” (Corman & Vandrovcova, 2014, p. 137). This memory is one of many that I share with Justin Scottie and Meeshka. It also represents one of my greatest efforts to approach research participants with the intention that “we may be in relationship... for life” as this, continues to be a friendship I nurture, however, now long distance (Potts & Brown, 2015, p. 21).

### **Chapter Three: Historiography and Management of Pitbull-type Dogs**

*Since humans lack the knowledge of the real essence of things, our conceptions of species emerge out of a jumble of items like skin, hair, speech or other visible mutations. We select, define and name, but such terminological classifications are fictions...made by the mind and not by nature (Dayan, 2011, p. 118).*

In *The Law is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons* (2011) Dayan questions how legal discourse classifies life, producing different claims to society. Dayan (2011) picks up the subject of the pitbull-type dog in her research to question how “legalized violence against dogs” emerged as a possibility in North America (p. 227). She opines that humans conjure constructed conceptions of nonhuman animals to perform a desired function. She elaborates that dogs are entrapped in human dramas, serving as a vessel for human projections, and in the case of pitbull-type dogs, fears. In this chapter, like Dayan, I argue that the reputation of pitbull-type dogs as inherently dangerous creatures is one of factitious work. In doing so, I accede to Delises’s (2007) claim that “no breed of dog is inherently vicious, the creation of a vicious breed is in reality the creation of an image” (p. 80). Like Delise and Dayan, I ask: how did pitbull-type dogs accumulate the reputation of machinating violence against the multispecies communities they share and thus became subjects of legalized violence?

In this chapter I trace how the image of the pitbull-type dog was created, and reinforced in narratives specific to North America. This chapter has two main parts: the first traces the making of pitbull-type dogs, focused on England and North American, and the second explores the definition of pitbull-type dogs specifically in the context of Montréal. In the first part, I outline the historiography of pitbull-type dogs by looking at two historic phases. The two phases follow what Zinda (2014) has referred to as the

contradictory existence of pitbull-type dogs in North American imaginaries. Zinda conjures up the image of the mythological Cerberus figure, the three-headed dog, to visually depict society's relationship with pitbull-type dogs. She imagines these dogs as having three-heads: the warrior, the monster and the victim/angel (Zinda, 2014, p. 51). I argue that these three characteristics coincide with the two major historical phases of pitbull-type dogs that I highlight.

The first phase begins in Victorian England, locating the first known stories of pitbull-type dogs and their relationships to humans, notably working class coal miners. This phase spans the first decades of the colonization of North America, during which time pitbull-type dogs were cast as warriors. The second phase begins in the 1970s, when pitbull-type dogs accrued the indelible reputation of monster, soliciting rejection of care, compassion, and access to life. I briefly outline this phase until the mid-2000s when Michael Vick radically shook how pitbull-type dogs were imagined in North America. Next, I describe the contemporary political landscape for pitbull-type dogs that straddle the contradictory status of monster and victim.

After setting up the historiography of pitbull-type dogs in an effort to establish their contradictory places in North America I define what BSL is and what myths it reinforces about those dogs. I present the imagined pitbull-type dog that legislators are targeting to then challenge the key mechanism legislation uses to locate pitbull-type dogs: visual identification. Next, I turn to my research project to present a context-specific example of the monstrous narration of pitbull-type dogs. My entry point is the death of Vadnais in Montréal in June 2016 – an incident that set in motion much of the debate and

struggle with which I am concerned in this thesis.

### **The Making of a Dog**

In the following sections I ask how pitbull-type dogs become marked as dangerous, as devil dogs, frankenmaulers, un-dogs, sharks on paws, biological trash, dick on a string, killing machines, guns on leashes – all monikers for pitbull-type dogs (Zinda, 2014; Dayan, 2016; McCarthy, 2016). This investigation follows a similar quest to Haraway (2003) in her *Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, where she inquires into the stories told about breeds' histories and behaviours – an intellectual project as well as an ethical praxis, as “knowing and living with... dogs means inheriting all the conditions of their possibility” (p. 81). As Haraway wrote breed histories for Great Pyrenees, and Australian Shepherds, I try my hand at writing the history of the ‘pitbull-type dog’.

Turning to historical context is important as it puts a spotlight on the dynamism of bodies' positions in society and spaces of encounter. Ahmed advocates for a historicization of any object as it better helps us understand how bodies become oriented towards others, or how and why emotions accumulate towards others. It is these accumulative emotions (what Ahmed calls “affective values”) that have ontological power, creating imagined subjects (Ahmed, 2015, p. 11). For example, Ahmed (2015) explores emotions such as hate, fear and love as responsible for “sustain[ing] the object through its mode of attachment” (p. 49). Thus the hated or feared body (or object in her terminology) is made to seem as if it emerged on its own; that its hated properties are inherent to it; and that it is acceptable to fear and hate it. Ahmed insists that the hated and

feared body emerge out of racialized, and colonial histories imparting the importance of historical approaches to researching relationality. Ahmed's perspective is generative for my project as the stories I trace are relational; the stories are about the relationships between pitbull-type dog and humans. These relational stories emerge out of racialized, colonial and classed histories, like Ahmed's – but they are also bound up with anthropocentric domination. As I trace this historical context of pitbull-type dogs and humans, I remain alert to the various forms of abuse to which those dogs have been dealt. As I move from the historic to contemporary context, I argue that the injustice inflicted on pitbull-type dogs has only intensified through sanctioned violent management regimes that take shape in various forms such as BSL.

Unlike Haraway's pursuit of writing pure-breed dog histories, my task immediately becomes complicated by the fact that 'pitbull' or 'pitbull-type dog' is not a breed, but rather a convenient misnomer for many different breeds. As Weaver (2013) points out, "dogs labeled pit bulls experience breed as a formulation that lies in the eye of the beholder, a variation of 'I know it when I see it'" (p. 692). Pitbull-type dog is thus an umbrella category for dogs including: Staffordshire Bull Terriers; American Staffordshire Terriers; American Pit Bull Terriers; any dog mixed with these breeds; or any dog that presents visual characteristics of any of the above dogs. Sarah Goss (2015) expands the category of pitbull-type dogs to encompass dogs who cause harm to either human or nonhuman animals, stating "if it was a mutt before the bite, it is a pitbull now" (p. 46). Contending with this unstable and wide-reaching definition of what a pitbull-type dog is, I aim to piece together not a neatly presented breed story like Haraway, but a type of dog history belonging to dogs categorized as pitbull-type. To do this I will parse the historical

analysis into three sections that explore pitbull-type dogs in relation to colonialism, anti-blackness, speciesism, and saviour complexes in an effort to comprehend why pitbull-type dogs are rendered killable as seen in legalized expressions of violence such as BSL.

*The Warrior: The Coal Mine and Colonial Expansion*

To tell the history of pitbull-type dogs one must “go back to Victorian England,” as Heidi Nast (2014) contends. The makeshift history of pitbull-type dogs begins in Victorian England where terriers and bulldogs<sup>3</sup> were bred together by coal miners to create the ‘pitbull’. ‘Pitbull’ was the shorthand for the offspring of both terriers and bulldogs. The suffix ‘bull’ was short for bulldog, and the prefix ‘pit’ referred to the common place one would encounter a terrier: in the coal pit. Bringing terriers and bulldogs together was said to satisfy the desire for a more agile and muscular dog (Nast, 2014). Historically, it was coal miner workers who initially sought this type of dog for rat catching, guarding, and other boundary work around coal mines, and soon thereafter, the dogs became central to working class Victorian English men’s blood sport as fighting dogs.

In the early 1900s, shortly after the time when breeding dogs developed into a respectable pursuit in England, the Staffordshire Bull Terrier emerged as the first recognizable breed belonging to the pitbull-type dog family, attributed to the efforts of Joe Mallon, a chain maker, and owner of the Cradley Heath pub in Staffordshire, England (Nast, 2014; The Staffordshire Breed Heritage Center, n. d.). Mallon was a dogman who organized dog fighting below his pub in Staffordshire. Dog fighting was commonly

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<sup>3</sup> According to Harriet Ritvo the bulldog was associated with “lower orders,” and would debase any respectable person. Initially these dogs faced extinction and negative depictions such as “ugly, stupid, and brutal.” Then dog fanciers began breeding bulldogs. By 1885 bulldogs were described as “peaceable... intelligent, and even benign looking” becoming the second most common dog to enter breed shows, and be pets (Ritvo, 1987, p. 111).

hosted in pubs that were owned by coal mining management. Nast detects that this was strategically done to redirect miners' money back to their bosses. This is an important detail to note in tracing the historic role assigned to these dogs as a mediator of social and capital gain that was an appendage to the extension of industrial capitalism.

Nast argues that working class men's preference for pitbull-type dogs, and for the dog fighting that emerged in the 1800s, had to do with identity politics: the men saw themselves in both the material and symbolic qualities of the dogs and their fight. The coal pit and fighting pit were perceived to be one and the same. Being in the 'pit' represented a struggle between life and death as each day one's successful exit and return to home life was a "victory" (Nast, 2014).

But it did not take long for the bourgeoisie to appropriate dogfighting away from the coal pits, transforming them into elaborate fighting rings that "changed [their] use value into exchange value" (Nast, 2015, p. 127). Although "cruelty to animals was supposed to characterize the most dangerous members of society, not those whose responsible shoulders the social structure rested" (Ritvo, 1987, p. 156), dogfighting became the purview of elites in England. In contrast to the working class men who found self-representation in the pitbull-type dogs and their fights, the elite organized pitbull-type dog fighting primarily for capital gain earned from dogfighting (Nast, 2014). Even as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals extended its act in 1835 to ban animal sports, pitbull-type dogs continued to be exploited by the middle and upper classes.

As the first formal breed associated with pitbull-type dogs (Staffordshire Bull Terrier) was involved in dogfighting I want to pause and remind the reader that to agitate

those dogs enough to fight, dogmen had to create the conditions for those dogs to fight one another. In a recent article, Nast states that the pitbull-type dog was “ was partially responsible” for the human practices they were enrolled in because “[their] abilities to catch and kill animals that were deemed pests were seen as vastly superior to those of terriers, while [their] *natural propensity to fight was well known* [emphasis added]” (Nast, 2018, “The Pit as Worlded” para. 1). Reading this entry assumes a natural interest from pitbull-type dogs to fight one another, as if they themselves were doing what they wanted to do. In strong contrast, I argue that Nast fails to account for the rigorous training, conditioning, and cruelty pitbull-type dogs experienced by the hands of their human handlers – all to manufacture and elicit particular behaviours and skills. For example, dogs who showed deviance or violent tendencies towards humans were used as bait dogs<sup>4</sup> or culled by dogmen (Kim, 2015). Although Nast’s articles are essential reading for researching the history of pitbull-type dogs, I question her claim about pitbull-type dogs’ ‘natural propensity to fight’. This essentialist statement is disconcerting to read in the current politics and knowledge about the violence endured by those dogs.

Pitbull-type dogs and activities associated with them were exported to the colonies with British colonial expansion. In the early 1700s European settlers colonized what is presently known as Canada and the United States. Not only humans arrived as part of the settler colonial project, but also scores of nonhuman animals that the humans brought with them, such as dogs and cows. In a process referred to as ‘ecological imperialism’ (Crosby, 1986; Nibert, 2013), colonialism involved “taming” and

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<sup>4</sup> Bait dogs often will have their teeth removed and mouth taped or sewed together to prevent them from protecting themselves.

“improving” the land with what were thought to be superior domesticated nonhuman animals (Crosby, 1986). This transformation was essential to “secur[ing] a particular vision” of what a nation ought to be (Biermann, 2016, p. 211).

Equally important was to hold the nation-state as an entity to be “secured, purified, and strengthened in the face of threat” (Biermann, 2016, p. 211). Pitbull-type dogs were symbolically and materially enlisted in this security apparatus. During the 19<sup>th</sup>, and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century pitbull-types were positioned as tightly bound to the vision of North America through enrolment in patriotism. Well meaning literature, and popular media presented pitbull-type dogs as heroic figures in the construction of North America.

Pitbull-type dogs were actors in the colonization of North America in material ways too. The first historical tracings of pitbull-type dogs in North America were records of dog fighting in the coal mines of Pennsylvania and Ohio where Welsh miners settled (Nast, 2015, p. 128; 2014). From there, pitbull-type dogs were brought to factories, southern slave plantations, and gradually dispersed through the expanding frontier. In each place pitbull-type dogs were “called upon to attend to particular needs, and desires of white settler life” that included activities such as killing rats, and vermin, hunting boar, protecting homesteads, and functioning as catch dogs for enslaved people (Nast, 2015, p. 128). Unleashing this knowledge produces an unsettling narrative of pitbull-type dogs that challenges the assumption that pitbull-type dogs were uncontroversial until the 1970s.

As the above historiography makes clear, pitbull-type dogs and the history of dog fighting were created under the conditions of the white working class men of Victorian coal mines in England. Colonizers subsequently brought the dogs to North America for

use in the colonial project and slavery. The history is one of abuse, power, and domination. It is thus surprising that the bulk of contemporary literature on the history of pitbull-type dogs suggests that pitbull-type dogs have only recently become controversial. For example, Delise (2007) wonders how pitbull-type dogs have “been transformed from nationally celebrated hero’s to ‘*persona non grata*’ in hundreds of cities” (p. 1) in mere decades. Corroborating this sentiment Dickey (2016) remarks, “then in the 1970s, like a bright light snapping off, everything went terribly wrong” (p. 18). Delise and Dickey suggest that pitbull-type dogs become problematic in the 1970s, which erases the violent legacies of pitbull-type dogs during colonial expansion (for other examples of this erasure see Molloy, 2011; Harding, 2014).

Following Haraway’s prompt to become “curious” and radicalize my love for pitbull-type dogs in ways that “seek knowledge”, I have stumbled upon a disjunction in the literature that I think is important for making sense of the current social location of pitbull-type dogs, and how those who advocate for them chose to represent their history (Haraway, 2008, p. 107). The contradiction that stands out most pointedly (discussed in depth in the following chapter) is that pitbull-type dogs’ perceived inherent dangerousness is believed to be a product of their association with black men.

Yet as this section, and scholarship from Nast, and Boisseron demonstrate, it was not black man that made “the big dog look un-kind” (Boisseron, 2015, p. 17). Historically, pitbull-type dogs were used to tyrannize enslaved people and as we will see in the next section, are now relegated because of their association with blackness. As will be demonstrated, perceptions of pitbull-type dogs continue to be tethered to racist

representations and anti-blackness.

*The Monster: 1970s to the era of Michael Vick's "Victory Dogs"*

Pitbull-type dogs have had few friends between the 1970s, and what is commonly referred to in the rescue community as the post Michael Vick era (personal communication). Beginning in the mid 1970s pitbull-type dogs became a riveting, sensationalized figure in the media – so much that Wendy Bergen, an American journalist organized an illegal dog fight to document what she called real footage of illegal dog fighting in Denver Colorado for her four-part series called 'Blood Sport' in 1990. Bergen was not successful in making contact with the underground economy of dog fighting but was committed to her vision for the series, so she contacted a backyard breeder and paid him two hundred dollars to stage a fight that she included in her series as real, underground footage that she claimed arrived anonymously in her mailbox (Prendergast, 1991). Bergen's initiative made sense in the context of the media since the 1970s took an invested interest in circulating the dangerous dog myth. Delise (2007) argues this is apart of a longer trend in isolating a problem breed since the 20<sup>th</sup> century. First it was the German Shepard, then Doberman, followed by the Rottweiler, which was succeeded by the pitbull-type dog (Delise, 2007).

Scholarship has attempted to explain this creation of the 'dangerous dog,' and has traced the "falling" of pitbull-type dogs to their association with African Americans and the working class, particularly African American men in North America, and lower-income white men in the UK<sup>5</sup> (McCarthy, 2016; Harding, 2014). Claire Jean Kim (2015)

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<sup>5</sup> In my thesis I do not explore pitbull-type dogs in contemporary UK politics. However if interested, see *Unleashed: The Phenomena of Status Dogs and Weapon Dogs* (2014) by Simon Harding.

explores pitbull-type dogs in relation to anti-blackness in North America. Acerbically stating, “there is no race-free space,” (p. 276) Kim (2015) draws connections between the fear assigned to pitbull-type dogs and the racist sentiment that views blackness as a threat. She argues that dogfighting in North America has been cast as an African American activity. Thus the fear of those bodies is matched with institutionalized violence and policing.

Pitbull-type dogs are the most common dogs in North America to be forced to participate in dogfighting (Delise, 2007). Although dogfighting is illegal, there remains discrete acceptance, and lack of enforcement of the law depending on who is involved. Dayan (2016) ruminates “the meaning of cruelty [is] in the hands of the definers, and subject to variation according to geography, context, class, and historical period” (p. 293). Like Kim, Dayan (2015) argues it was the change of who fought dogs that constructed the pitbull-type dog in the 1970s. As pitbull-type dogs became associated with African American men in the context of anti-blackness, pitbull-type dogs’ once celebrated characteristics became demonized, worthy of concern, and consequently managed through BSL and elevated in the media.<sup>6</sup> Pitbull-type dog stereotypes of toughness, and involvement of dogfighting have ever since saturated the landscape of North America.

Boisseron identifies a similar suspicion in her research that corroborates Kim’s analysis. Boisseron suspects there is a fear from White Supremacist society in North America that these dogs will be used against them if in the ‘wrong hands’ – a fear

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<sup>6</sup> Kim (2015) argues BSL is a form of police power for pitbull-type dogs. The horrific practice of “shoot first and ask questions later” applied to African Americans in North America is expressed in relationships between police, and pitbull-type dogs (p. 190). In May 2017, police in Laval shot a pitbull-type dog during a traffic stop. The police defended their actions by saying the dog was charging for them, however, expert witnesses claimed the dog was peacefully sitting beside the owner, and shot (Feith, 2017)

stemming from how elites themselves used pitbull-type dogs historically as part of a program of anti-black violence, and oppression. Historically, rulers have feared that marginalized citizens will empower themselves through methods believed to belong only to the elite. An example of this racist view is exemplified in a statement made by George Washington, the first president of The United States, who said “it is not for any good purpose Negroes raise, or keep dogs, but to aid them in their night robberies” (as quoted in Dickey, 2016, p. 218). As was customary at the time, any enslaved person found with a dog would be reprimanded for perceived collusion. The enslaved individual would be whipped, and dog sentenced to death by lynching. In 1833 a detailed program for the ‘improvement’ of enslaved people on plantations claimed that enslaved people lacked the capacity to care for nonhuman animals, and could only relate to the weaponization of nonhuman animals (Dickey, 2016, p. 224). Boisseron (2015) remarks that the white fear of black revenge continues when she suggests that “Blacks do not own fierce dogs as retribution for slavery, but those who do own dogs are unconsciously perceived as revengeful due to the lingering fantasy of the Cujo<sup>7</sup> Effect” (p. 31).

In White Supremacist society, there remains a racial tension surrounding African Americans’ interest in what is relegated to be the natural world, including nonhuman animals. Carolyn Finney (2014) found that African Americans are rarely included in environmental research (p. 5), and are erased from cultural media and discourses of the environment. Finney’s (2014) research project challenges “perceptions that African Americans are not concerned with environmental issues”, suggesting that in fact they

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<sup>7</sup> Cujo is a cultural reference known for the rabid St. Bernard dog in Lewis Teague’s 1983 horror film who in a fit of rabies killed his owner, and all those around him. Boisseron (2015) suspects this namestake is derived from Cudjoe, a fierce Maroon leader who led the people of Jamaica against the British (pp. 21-2). Thus, the ‘Cujo Effect’ stands in as a amalgam for retaliation, and ferocious propensities in both the slave, and dog figure (see Boisseron 2015).

experience erasure (p. 9). The erasure Finney exposes in environmental literature is present also in literature on animal rights (see Harper, 2009). For example, Dr. Ronnie Elmore, the Dean of Admissions and Diversity at Kansas State University, wrote in an article about the racial diversity in his field of veterinary science that: “blacks generally tend to see animals as valuable only to the extent that they can be used or have a purpose, while European-Americans generally tend to see animals as objects of sentiment” (as quoted in Fiala, 2003). Racist generalizations like Elmore’s are emblematic of a broader social climate that constructs African American relationships to animals as those of utilitarianism and not of companionship. The association between pitbull-type dogs and African American men in cultural imaginaries assumes this relationship (and thus the definition of a pitbull-type dog) is rooted in utilitarianism, (ie. dog fighting, protection) and not that of companionship.<sup>8</sup>

It was in the 1970s that the imagine of pitbull-type dogs became fixed to African American men and the racist notion that their coming together was rooted in utilitarianism and not that of companionship. Animal rights organizations assumed to be friends to nonhuman animals fell prey to this construction of pitbull-type dogs, joining in the efforts to kill them. For example, People for Ethical Treatment for Animals (PETA), perhaps the most influential animal rights organization in the world, has taken a firm position on pitbull-type dogs supporting the efforts of BSL. PETA states this position is rooted in practicing care and a commitment to animals. But critics of this care suggest it is “sanctimonious compassion”, a form of care that heralds the extermination of

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<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that some marginalized individuals have found solidarity amongst marginalized nonhuman animals. Dickey (2016) remarks, “you can’t push an animal into the margins of society, and then blame those on the margins for identifying with [them] (p. 148). This sentiment was shared amongst my research participants.

nonhuman animals as witnessed in PETA's stance towards pitbull-type dogs (Dayan, 2016, p. 74).

Sanctimonious compassion is a generative framework when investigating how PETA has performed its own advocacy for pitbull-type dogs through the support of BSL. PETA has publically applauded and supported municipalities' enforcement of BSL, including Montréal (Cooper, 2016). Ingrid Newkirk (2005), the long standing President of PETA, wrote in an op-ed piece that pitbull-type dogs are designed as a "weapon...to fight other animals, and kill them". Newkirk (2005) believes that "those who argue against the euthanasia policy [BSL] for pit bull dogs are naïve" and "people who *genuinely care about dogs* won't be affected by a ban on pits [emphasis added]". Newkirk (2000) has also remarked that she herself is a victim of a pitbull-type dog attack, writing in an editorial in her local newspaper, "I have scars on my leg, and arm from my own encounter with a pit". Another spokesperson from PETA, Dan Shannon, demonstrates the close association between pitbull-type dogs and dog fighting in his lamentation that, "the cruelty [pitbulls have] suffered is such that they can't lead what anyone who loves dogs would consider a normal life" (as quoted in Gorant, 2008). By positioning themselves as caring guardians to pitbull-type dogs, PETA speaks (is the voice) for pitbull-type dogs as if the dogs themselves do not believe their own life is worth living (Winograd & Winograd, 2017, p. 20). This serves as a reminder that care can be contradictory in that it can both oppress, and do good.

The assumption that pitbull-type dogs could only be pursued for utilitarian reasons and not companionship were shaken in 2007. Michael Vick, an NFL quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons was charged for owning and operating Bad Newz Kennelz. Vick

maintained Bad Newz Kennelz for over six years, located in Surray Country, Virginia.<sup>9</sup> When police arrived to the property for an unrelated search on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007, they found more than fifty dogs, all displaying wounds and scars. Another twenty deceased dogs were found. The property in which these dogs were kept captive featured standard dog fighting paraphernalia that was used daily to inflict insufferable pain. There were kennels, a fighting pit, breed stands, treadmills, break sticks, and steroids (Kim, 2015, p. 253). Vick pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit dogfighting, and served twenty-three months of his original three-year Federal prison sentence (Kim, 2015, p. 246). Even after being released from prison, Vick maintained that what he did was awful, but he still held the belief that “it isn’t wrong for the dogs, [it] is what these dogs like to do. This is why they’re bred” (as quoted in Dickey, 2016, p. 248).

Vick was forced to financially support the rescue efforts for the dogs confiscated from Bad News Kennelz, paying almost \$1 million dollars for the care and rehabilitation of these dogs coordinated by the ASPCA (Dickey, 2016, p. 247). This provided a unique opportunity for humane workers to showcase the possibilities for these dogs’ lives outside of Bad Newz Kennelz and dog fighting generally (Dickey, 2016, p. 247). Of the dogs rescued: two were killed by the ASPCA, twenty-two were sent to Best Friends Animal Society, ten arrived at BAD RAP, fifteen were sent to shelters around the country, and several other dogs went to Animal Farm Foundation (Dickey, 2016, p. 247). In this sense, the court’s ruling challenged the precedent of killing dogs involved in dogfighting.

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<sup>9</sup> Vick was one of four men charged for association with dogfighting at Bad Newz Kennelz. It is interesting to note this as the three other men did not make it into mainstream media, presenting Vick as the sole organizer which further suggests mainstream media’s coverage was more invested in him than the reality of the issue.

Some animal welfare organizations condemned this. PETA issued a statement that the “dogs are ticking time bombs. Rehabilitating fighting dogs is not in the cards. It’s widely accepted that euthanasia is the most humane thing for them” (as quoted in Dickey, 2006, p. 284). Similarly, the President Chief Executive Officer of the Humane Society of the United States Wayne Pacelle said condemningly, “the[se] are some of the most aggressively trained pit bulls in the country. Hundreds of thousands of less-violent pit bulls, who are better candidates to be rehabilitated, are being put down” (Schmidt, 2007). Pacelle’s statement assumes that pitbull-type dogs are inherently violent, and even dogs that were never used in dog fighting are still in need of rehabilitation.

The statements by PETA and Wayne Pacelle are reminiscent of previous responses to pitbull-type dogs. However, according to Kim (2015), the commitment to Vicktory Dogs represented something more malignant. The attention this case received was not due to the fact that this was the biggest dog fighting ring investigation in the history of North America; rather, it was the person to whom those dogs were connected: Michael Vick. Weaver has proposed convincingly that what qualified this case was the possibility of bringing down a powerful African American man.<sup>10</sup> Weaver (2013) remarks that it was “whiteness to the rescue” (p. 697). The ‘Vicktory’ dogs in Weaver’s (2013) analysis become “hardworking canine citizens” (p. 697) that were removed from their partnership with “thugs”, or in Kim’s (2013) words, “finally free” (p. 271). Dogs once considered killable in previous dog fighting investigations became props in larger conversations about race and nonhuman animals.

Reminiscent of the Vicktory Dogs is Haraway’s analysis of Puerto Rican Sato

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<sup>10</sup> Melissa Harris-Perry believes the attention given to Michael Vick was less about the dogs, and more about a pernicious racism. During the Vick trial, media personalities ranged between disregarding the severity of dog fighting to call for the execution of Vick (Harris-Perry, 2010).

dogs. As the dogs travel from the streets into the homes of Americans, the very subjectivity of the dogs changes from killable street dogs to beings worthy of protection and domesticity. Haraway (2003) explains the transformation begins with an airplane that “is an instrument in a series of subject-transforming technologies,” (p. 93) just as Weaver (2013) argues that the guardian of a pitbull-type dog can transform them into “canine citizens” (p. 647). Weaver (2013) himself is a white trans man who rescued a pitbull-type dog. He has commented that when he walking his dog Hayley, she appears “less threatening,” and “less dangerous” by her association with his whiteness (p. 89). Weaver’s scholarship illustrates the importance of affect and identities dispersed in pitbull-type dog politics. From his own observations of being with Hayley, Weaver (2013) confronts notions of “what constitutes danger, and in which bodies it...localized” (p. 691). Interestingly enough, Weaver writes explicitly about the protection that comes with companionship to pitbull-type dogs. Weaver (2015) admits that during his transition, which he refers to as a time of “liminal embodiment”, he realized “people would not mess with [him] when she was there” (p. 349).

A further example that rubs against Weaver’s experience comes from Vicki Hearne (2002), and her relationship to Bandit, a pitbull-type once belonging to Mr. Redd, an elderly African American man. Bandit was seized, and ordered to be ‘destroyed’ after numerous incidents while living with Mr. Redd. Mr. Redd lamented that each time Bandit behaved badly, there was a reasonable cause behind his behaviour. Mr. Redd pursued a legal battle to keep Bandit alive. That is when Hearne, a respect animal behaviourist was called upon to testify on Bandit’s behaviour. The court ruled that either Hearne could adopt Bandit or Bandit would be killed; removing the possibility of Mr. Redd ever being

reunited with Bandit due to his “environment” (Hearne, 2002, p. 125). Hearne reflects in her memoir at the injustice of the case, and at larger corruption of animal rescue. Bandit was able to live because he was no longer a companion to an African American man in a ‘bad neighbourhood’.

These examples from Weaver and Hearne hone in on the question that I have tried to discern in this section: how are pitbull-type dogs constructed in a manner that permits their extermination in North America. Their work – and others (Nast, Kim, Dickey) – illustrates that the treatment of pitbull-type dogs is dependent on which humans they are associated with, and it is this association which determines the level of scrutiny and demonization of pitbull-type dogs in the contemporary context. In the next section, I shift from the historical analysis of pitbull-type dogs to contemporary pitbull-type dog politics in order to discern how these historical trends reverberate – and are resisted – today.

### **The Management of Pitbull-type Dogs**

*The worst cruelties belong to a politer world. You don't see the blood or hear the groans (Dayan, 2016, 107)*

The Vicktory dogs failed to unleash pitbull-type dogs entirely from the monster imagery; however their struggles became visible in mainstream animal rights media. As pitbull-type dogs were granted access to care (and access to life) post-Vick, the care came with an escalation of anxieties surrounding pitbull-type dogs and the question of their suitability for companionship. We see the tension surrounding the contested construction

of pitbull-type dogs contemporarily in debates about BSL. In this section I explain what BSL is and question the validity in the reliance on visual identification.

Since the 1970s, BSL has been the proposed governing solution to pitbull-type dogs worldwide. Although BSL is often taken as synonymous with pitbull-type dog bans, dogs of different breeds have also been subject to these regulations, such as Corgis in Italy (Hugabull, 2017). The first enactment of breed specific legislation was in 1929, banning imports of German Shepherd dogs into Australia. The law was not lifted until 1974 (Delise, 2007, p. 75). During this time the public failed to see any “redeeming qualities” of German Shepherds (Delise, 2007, p. 74), until redemptive television programs such as *Rin Tin Tin*, and *The Littlest Hobo* released German Shepherds from the determinant factors that instilled fear in the public, permitting them to be companion animals while maintaining their role in military, and police labour.<sup>11</sup>

Hunter and Brisbin characterize BSL as an example of panic policy making. Panic policy is defined as “the speedy creation of new laws, and regulations or new duties for governmental institutions in a situation of sudden and excessive fear and anger” (Hunter & Brisbin, 2016, p. 322). Panic policy follows a formula that begins with an injurious event, followed by a contagious fear to only be subdued by the implementation of policy that serves as a “symbolic gesture and promise that satisfies mass fears” (Hunter & Brisbin, 2016, pp. 322-5). Panic policy is meant to serve as quick justice to an incident, as is often the case with the implementation of BSL in response to canine-human conflict.

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<sup>11</sup> Similarly, during World War Two, Dobermans’ ability to be companion dogs was questioned. Utilized by Nazi Germany, Dobermans were believed to be biologically programmed to reach such a point of rage that their brains would explode in a frenzied attack (Delise, 2007, p. 81). Centering this historical knowledge of other breeds being entrenched in anthropocentric narratives of demonization demonstrates that the plight of the pitbull-type dog is not unique. However, after decades of persecution these dogs have yet to regain their status as acceptable companion animals, and continue to be most vigorously pursued by violence and legislation.

When a community experiences a pitbull-type dog related incident, the incident initiates dialogue about the implementation of legislation.

The standard definition of BSL is “a law that bans OR restricts certain types of dogs based on their appearance, usually because they are perceived as ‘dangerous’ breeds or types of dogs” (STOP BSL, 2017). The end goal of BSL is to achieve extirpation of pitbull-type dogs in a territory, either through a complete ban or restriction. The former means all targeted breeds or types of dogs are removed and killed, whereas the latter follows a ‘grandfather’ model. In the grandfather model, the dog’s guardian must follow regulations such as walking the dog on a short-leash, acquiring special licenses, and most often requiring the dog to wear a muzzle at all times outside her residence. With a restricted form of BSL it is legislated that only dogs legally owned by the time BSL is enforced are eligible for the grandfather clause. Although more common, restrictive BSL is still aimed at ‘letting die’: slowly phasing out a breed or type of dog through sterilization, and prohibiting the adoption or purchase of new dogs (see Chapter 5).

This kind of panic policy garners support from politicians and impressionable civilians, yet it is consistently rejected by professionals, including veterinarians, animal behaviourists, and dog trainers (Pare, 2016; Ledger et al., 2005). For example, the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association’s official position is that they “support dangerous dog legislation provided that it is not discriminatory of a specific breed” (CVMA, 2016). The CVMA and other animal professionals have concluded that pitbull-type dogs are not uniquely dangerous; however, in politicians’ eagerness to enforce BSL, they often wrongly communicate to average citizens that there *is* substantial evidence, and invoke various unfounded myths about pitbull-type dogs. They also rely on visual

identification of these dogs despite evidence that such identification is impossible. In the next section I question the legitimacy of accurately visually identifying pitbull-type dogs and challenge the myths upon which BSL is dependent.

### **Visual Identification of Pitbull-type Dogs**

Attributing dangerousness to a type or breed of dog according to shelters and legislators is reliant on the ability to visually identify those dogs. Visual identification became a normalized process in the 1990s with the introduction of BSL in Winnipeg, Canada. In 1990 politicians decided that high licensing fees and dangerous dog legislation would not achieve the eradication of pitbull-type dogs. Therefore, the only recourse was to prohibit the right for a citizen to be a guardian to pitbull-type dogs<sup>12</sup> (Hunter & Brisbin, 2016, p. 314). The by-law was based on the ability to visually identify a prohibited dog – that is, a dog that “has the appearance and physical characteristics predominately conforming” to American Pit Bull Terriers, Staffordshire Bull Terrier or American Staffordshire Terriers. By including any dog that resembled those listed breeds, the breadth of banned dogs was widened.

It is now common practice for shelter workers, veterinarians, or city officials to identify dog breeds by a visual assessment.<sup>13</sup> However, research has shown that visual identification is not an accurate judgement. Olson and colleagues found in their research that in general, one in three dogs lacking DNA for breeds lumped under the pitbull-type

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<sup>12</sup> The Manitoba “Responsible Pet Ownership Act” categorically puts pitbull-type dogs in the company of crocodiles as prohibited animals (Hunter & Brisbin, 2016, p. 314).

<sup>13</sup> For example, during the province of Ontario’s four day-consultation in 2004 Michael Bryant, the minister responsible for introducing the Dog Owners Liability Act (DOLA), was confronted with a photo spread of dogs, and was unable to differentiate a pitbull-type dog, yet promised Ontarians the legislation would free them of fear (Hunter & Brisban 2016, p. 330).

category were labeled as pitbull-type dogs. The researchers also found that one in five dogs genetically identified as having ancestry from the breeds associated with the pitbull-type category were not labeled as such (Olsen et al., 2015). Additional research similarly investigating the labeling of dogs in shelters found that 50% of dogs used in the study labeled as pitbull-type dogs lacked DNA breed signatures classified under pitbull-type dog<sup>14</sup> (Gunter, Barber, & Wynne, 2016, p. 2). Along with these inaccuracies the study also found that one-third of participants rated appearance as the most important factor in the adoption process. Knowing the inaccuracies which pervade the labeling of dogs as a pitbull-type, the study exposes that participants rated the same dogs that were first seen without a label of type as more attractive compared to when they were presented with the label of pitbull-type dog (Gunter, Barber, and, Wynne, 2016, p. 10). To avoid judging a dog by their type or label, the researchers concluded it was more pertinent to present potential adopters with a “fully validated behaviour assessment” than breed, as it is an actual means of communicating the behaviour, and personality of each individual dog (Gunter, Barber, and, Wynne, 2016, p. 15).

The labelling of a dog as a pitbull-type can cause a cascade of negative consequences to unfold. Pitbull-type dogs that enter shelters will be killed, sold to animal testing facilities, or for those few fortunate cases, transferred to a different location that does not enforce BSL. In North America it is estimated that only one in six hundred pitbull-type dogs secure a home. Moreover, it is estimated that 2,800 pitbull-type dogs are killed everyday (Saveabullmn, 2018). Those dogs are killed not for having done anything wrong but for looking a particular way. If a dog has a drop of phenotypic

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<sup>14</sup> Clementine was labeled as a Pit Bull in Ontario, yet having completed a DNA profile for her showed no ancestry with associated breeds. She is a Pitbull-type dog by appearance alone.

resemblance associated with pitbull-type dog breeds the dog is polluted. I raise this concern to flag the expansive violence and harm BSL brings that is not based on scientific merit, rather visual discrimination. Despite the concern from animal experts, and substantial evidence that there is no concise definition of pitbull-type, legislators still conform to a vague definition of what a pitbull-type dog is or ought to be.

### **The Making of Pitbull-type Dogs in Montréal**

In this section I turn to my research to examine how many politicians and members of the community in Montréal purchased into the narrative of pitbull-type dogs being conclusively dangerous dogs. I detail the death of Vadnais that served as the ‘injurious event’ that catalyzed the swift enforcement of BSL (Hunter & Brisbin, 2016).

On June 8<sup>th</sup> 2016, Vadnais was killed in her backyard in the Montréal neighbourhood of Pointe-aux-Trembles by her neighbour Franklin Junior Frontal’s dog Lucifer. Lucifer was found standing beside her mangled body, and was immediately shot by the police (Curtis, 2016).<sup>15</sup> Although Lucifer’s breed was not known, the attack was immediately declared a pitbull-type dog attack. The day of the incident the media reported that the police identified Lucifer as a pitbull-type dog, but this statement was subsequently retracted until the investigation proceeded. Later, the *International Humane Society of Canada*, under access to information laws, proved that the dog was registered as a boxer with two documented bite cases (Lagerquist, 2016). It was not until the coroner, Dr. Ethan Lichtblau, issued his report in October 2017 that Lucifer was confirmed as 87.5% American Staffordshire Terrier, according to a DNA test (Lichtblau,

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<sup>15</sup> Some news stories additionally claimed that Lucifer ‘[attacked] one of the officers’ but that is unsubstantiated (Curtis, 2016).

2017). Yet, Lichtblau was hesitant to call Lucifer a pitbull-type dog because he felt that DNA analysis was not a perfect science; the cheek swab sample and a photo of Lucifer were simply too unreliable to “formally identify [him] as a pitbull” (Lichtblau, 2017). Moreover, Lichtblau wanted to direct the conversation to a more important and informative aspect of the case: that Lucifer had two reported bite histories.

Lichtblau gained access to the police report from June 8<sup>th</sup> 2016, and provided key insights into Lucifer’s life under the guardianship of Frontal. Frontal testified to owning Lucifer for seven years, and recounted that dogs had attacked Lucifer on three different occasions in the first year of his life, resulting in mistrust towards both people and other animals. Frontal claimed that he took good care of Lucifer, and walked him regularly. However, the investigation of Frontal’s dwelling suggested otherwise. Neighbours admitted that they had never seen him walking his dog. Moreover, there was a broken crate in the backyard in which Frontal admitted to having constrained Lucifer for long periods of time. Frontal also claimed to have muzzled Lucifer when he was away from the home as a precaution. Lichtblau’s report included that the home was scattered with garbage, seemingly caused by a dog, and that the ground in the bedroom was chewed through, and that there was a long-standing gaping hole in the fence connecting to Vadnais’ backyard that was haphazardly covered by a metal sheet. Lichtblau (2017) concluded that Lucifer was “maltreated”. He stated, “it is likely that this dog has been poorly socialized for a long time, left alone frequently for prolonged periods, under-stimulated, lacking canine companions and lack of exercise” (Lichtblau, 2017).

Lichtblau also factored into his analysis that Lucifer had two separate biting records reported to the city. In 2014, Lucifer attacked a man while he was unsupervised

tied outside of a *dépanneur*. The second reported incident included two friends of Frontal that entered his home while he was away, both sustaining significant wounds to the foreman, (including a possible fracture on one person) and thigh, necessitating immediate medical attention. Both incidents were filed with the police, and Frontal was told that the municipalities involved would contact him in order to follow up on the incidents.

Although there was a protocol in place at the time, Frontal was never contacted by the authorities. Lichtblau (2017) remarks on the city's failure, saying, "it is questionable whether this attack could have been avoided if, by 2015, the municipality involved had carried out the required follow-up and taken appropriate measures" ..

After reviewing supporting literature concerning BSL, Lichtblau pointedly stated that an attack is not the fault of a breed, but the conditions to which the dog was subject. But, as stated, the media was less interested in those details and more on if Lucifer was a pitbull-type dog. This is consistent the media's treatment of canine-human conflict more generally. Delise (2007) traces dog attacks reported in the media from 1900s until the late 1990s and finds that over time, attack reports dropped essential details such as temperament and environment in which the dog lived, and instead relied on breed as evidence. Lichtblau fell out of step with the wider pattern of attack reporting when writing his conclusion was not the soundbite *pitbull-type dog* but instead *neglect* and *previous bite history*. His conclusion, although shared by many professionals in regards to pitbull-type dogs, has been disregarded in political conversations that attribute human-canine conflict to a single breed/type of dog.

Instead, what mattered most in this case was that Lucifer was suspect to be a pitbull-type dog who acted on his own accord. Vадnais' family to this day contends that

what happened was the fault of the breed, regardless of the conditions in which Lucifer lived. The Vadnais family stated they were incredibly disappointed by the coroner's report as it denounced BSL as a solution. Lisa Vadnais, Christiane's sister, stated she was "shocked at times" reading the report, as she firmly believed it was a pitbull problem, and not primarily a neglectful guardianship issue (CBC, 2017). This narrative was upheld in the court case, as Frontal was not held responsible for the death of Vadnais or neglectful guardianship of Lucifer (Lagerquiest, 2016). Thus, it is as if Lucifer acted on his own, validating the dangerous pitbull-type dog myth (Lagerquiest, 2016).

At this point, the City of Montréal turned to BSL as a form of justice in response to Vadnais' death. Although Lichtblau was reluctant to qualify Lucifer as a pitbull-type dog, Denis Coderre, the mayor of Montréal at the time, did not hesitate. In an act of panic policy making, between mid-June and October 2016 Denis Coderre and his political party designed and implemented BSL in the city of Montréal as a solution to and confirmation of the fears that circulated after the incident. After months of legal appeals, it only took a few months for Coderre to secure BSL in the city of Montréal, which was put into effect October 3<sup>rd</sup> 2016. This was arguably an easier approach than to address the real issue of why human-canine conflict emerges. What is lost from much of the media that followed this case was that Lucifer was a dog failed by both the administration meant to intervene for the benefit of his welfare, and Frontal who failed him as a guardian. Blaming a breed/type of dog is easier and more sensational than confronting the state of relationships we have with dogs, an inquest that would ask much more from us as a society.

## **The Legal Definitions of Pitbull-type Dogs in Montréal**

For my research, I subscribe to the definition written in Montréal's *By-law Concerning Animal Control* (16-060) which included: Staffordshire bull terrier, American Staffordshire terrier; American pit bull terrier, a cross breed, or any dog that has morphological similarities such as short-hair, a blocky head, or a wide jowl. According to the fact-sheet developed by the City of Montréal, a pitbull-type dog is classified as having two thirds of the following traits: (1) muscular, short haired, powerful (2) between 10-35 kg (3) short and smooth hair (4) round frontal face (5) head 2/3 of shoulders (6) distance between back of skull to eyes is equivalent to eyes to tip of muzzle (7) well-defined stop (8) muzzle straight and square (9) lips are tight, dental occlusion (10) small, triangular eyes (11) ears high set and small<sup>16</sup> (12) muscular neck (13) shoulders wider than rib cage at 8<sup>th</sup> rib (14) elbows not prominent and legs parallel (15) front legs solid looking (16) front is massive (17) back slopes (18) hips are broad for firmly attached muscles and hind legs muscular (19) hocks are low and hind legs slim under knees (20) tail is medium and kept down (Ville De Montréal, 2017). It is important to note that DNA-analysis was rejected by the City of Montréal, which instead again prioritised the visual identification method (personal communication).

## **BSL in Montréal**

On September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016 the City of Montréal voted in favour 37:23 for the introduction of the by-law 16-060 entitled *By-law Concerning Animal Control* (CBC, 2016a). This by-law was ushered in to provide a solution to the perceived threat of pitbull-type dogs in

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<sup>16</sup> The description used for pitbull-type dog-ears is interesting as it is a human alteration to a dog. Pitbull-type dogs exploited in dog fighting have their ears cropped as it is considered too easy of an infliction from the other dog.

Montréal after the death of Vadnais. The greatest contradiction of BSL is that pitbull-type dogs do not represent the bulk of dog bites or fatal attacks in the context of Montréal or otherwise. In recent conversations regarding the implementation of Bill-128,<sup>17</sup> Ewa Demianowicz, a campaign manager with the Humane Society International Canada, presented research that states that in the past 30 years out of the eight fatal dog attacks in the province of Quebec, seven were attributed to feral dogs belonging to the husky family.

Regardless of the data on human-canine conflict, the city voted in favour of BSL, prompting a tenacious legal battle between the city and animal advocates (LaFramboise, 2016; Smith, 2016). The SPCA appealed<sup>18</sup> the by-law successfully winning a temporary suspension of the by-law until December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 (Pall, 2016). During this appeal the SPCA argued that the by-law was too vague in its definition of what a pitbull-type dog was. During the appeal, René Cadieux, the lawyer representing the City of Montréal defended the vagueness of the by-law arguing that although it is difficult to identify the exact characteristics of the breed it is much, “like pornography. You know it when you see it” (Bernstien, 2016). This statement satisfied the judge, who overturned the suspension. The city agreed to then organize breed identification clinics to address the concerns of the SPCA and citizens who did not know if they owned a pitbull-type dog according to the law. Maurice Bernard,<sup>19</sup> an animal trainer, was contracted to host the breed identification clinics.

The clinics were organized between December 2016 and March 1<sup>st</sup> 2017.

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<sup>17</sup> Bill 128 “The Act of Promote the Protection of Persons by Establishing a Framework with Regard to Dogs” was introduced by Mr. Martin Coiteux, the Minister of Public Security in 2017. It essentially would extend and apply Montreal’s bylaw targeting pitbull-type dogs provincially.

<sup>18</sup> An overview of the appeals challenges can be found: <https://www.spca.com/?p=13494&lang=en>

<sup>19</sup> Maurice Bernard protection trains German Shepard dogs (personal communication).

However, the city failed to advertise the clinics until the final two weeks before the deadline (March 31<sup>st</sup> 2017) for applicants to file for the special permit to own a pitbull-type dog (Foster, 2017). During a recent panel discussion regarding Bill-128, councillor Sterling Downy shared the information that Bernard was contracted to work 1000 hours; however, he did not complete his contract in full due to a request by the city. Bernard only saw 500 dogs, 12 of which he identified as a pitbull-type during that time (Breakfast Television Montréal 2018). Downy's statement suggests that the city actively made it difficult for individuals to attend breed identification clinics through poor advertisement and discontinuing the clinics before Bernard's contract was fulfilled.

Bernard began addressing the issue on his own, traveling to people's homes for one-hundred-and-fifty-dollars after being contacted by citizens who were unable to attend the clinics or found out too late. I contacted Bernard and he traveled to my home to do the assessment that would have been done for free, at the clinic. During the visit he took several photographs of Clementine's body, focusing on her stance, chest, and facial features. After reviewing the city's guidelines he wrote a certification stating that Clementine was not in fact a pitbull-type dog according to the city's standards. See Figure 3.1 for an example of the officialised paperwork that deemed a dog not a pitbull-type dog.

# CERTIFICAT D'IDENTIFICATION



Prénom et nom du propriétaire : Stephanie Marie Rose Eccles

Nom de l'animal : Clementine

Identification de l'animal

Numéro de permis 2017 : 2417-000006  
PV17-000590

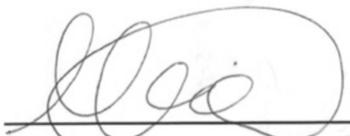
Numéro de micropuce : 982 000 406 159 336

Nous confirmons par la présente que le chien décrit ci-dessus, selon nos évaluations visuelles et en vertu de la définition de chien de type pitbull inscrite au Règlement sur le contrôle des animaux de la ville de Montréal,

Est de type Pit bull

N'est pas de type pit bull

Date de l'évaluation : 6 juin 2017

  
Maurice Bernard, Expert canin

**Figure 3.1 A copy of the official document from Maurice Bernard certifying Clementine was not a pitbull-type dog according to the city's standards.**

The breed identification clinics were set up to determine if citizens had a pitbull-type dog or not, but their poor execution left many people unsure if they had a pitbull-type according to city standards. During an interview a participant reflected that deciding to register her dog came down to the fact that she had “cropped ears” (T and Gia, interview). T said she did not know Gia’s parents, or where she came from. Having worked with pitbull-type dogs for over fifteen years, T felt unable to make that decision for Gia. However, since a defining characteristic of a pitbull-type dog in the by-law is ‘(11) ears high set and small,’ T decided to register Gia as a pitbull-type dog out of concern that if she did not, she could be confiscated. From my personal experience, Eleanor was adopted May 10<sup>th</sup> 2017, several months after pitbull-type dog registration

closed. I made the decision that she was “pass-a-bull” as another breed, Dogo Argentino, which was not included in the by-law (Goss, 2015, p. 16). However, as by-law officers were trained and responsible for enforcing the by-law, the self-labeling of one’s dog could be overturned at any moment in place of their visual assessment.

If individuals did decide to apply for the pitbull-type dog special permit the following documentation and procedures were needed: proof of residence; a police report demonstrating a clean criminal record (cost \$60-\$150); proof of vaccination against rabies; sterilization; micro-chipping, and a fee of \$150 (a contrast to the \$25 for non-pitbull-type dog registration fee that required no supporting documents).<sup>20</sup> These documents were uploaded into a database maintained by the city. This special permit was to be applied for annually without the guarantee that you would obtain the license. The city maintained that keeping your dog would be easy if you could meet and follow the protocols, but as I will elaborate below, the registration process itself was messy and for some not an option. During my interviews, participants spoke in anguish over their experience of applying for a special permit. In this section I will raise two themes that emerged during my interviews when discussing the registration process: knowing if your dog is qualified as a pitbull-type dog or not, and the bureaucratic process of applying for a special permit.

As I have detailed in this chapter, visual identification of a breed or type of dog is an inaccurate assessment of a dog. A, a participant in my research, experienced this exact problem when trying to find out if Kyto qualified as a pitbull-type dog. She had conflicting documents from her veterinarian and Bernard: her veterinarian identified Kyto

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<sup>20</sup> There were 2,000 applicants, and only 1,400 individuals completed the file to obtain the special permit (Bruemmer, 2017).

as a Cane Corso; yet after 45 minutes at a breed identification clinic Bernard said to A, “we are really sorry we are trying not to identify dogs as pit bulls but...” (A and Kyto, interview). Contacting the city with this conflicting evidence, she was told that both documents were valid. In the end, A felt that registering Kyto as a pitbull-type dog would keep her safer than registering her as a Cane Corso in case a day came where a by-law officer questioned the validity of her breed.

Another participant, J, experienced a wildly different interaction in relation to her dog’s breed/type. J adopted Mally from her veterinarian’s clinic. On the day of her adoption Mally was identified as a Boxer-mix, although the initial paperwork listed her as a pitbull-type dog. Having owned a Staffordshire terrier before, J wanted to navigate the by-law as legitimately as possible so she scheduled an appointment at the breed identification clinic with Bernard. During the appointment, Bernard identified Mally as a Boxer/Mastiff/Lab-mix. Relieved that she had obtained proof that Mally was not recognized as a pitbull-type dog, she contacted her veterinarian office to obtain the rest of Mally’s documentation (rabies vaccination, proof of sterilization) to complete the normal dog registration. After being on hold for several minutes with her clinic, she was confronted by a receptionist on the phone who insisted that Mally was a pitbull-type dog, and “that to call her anything else was unethical,” accusing her of trying to avoid the special permit fee (J and Mally, interview). J asked the technician if they did any sort of assessment of Mally when she was there and was told no, the size of Mally’s head said it all.

Unlike A and J’s experience, another participant struggled with deciding if she should register her dog or not. Her dog was a Bull Terrier, not a breed included in the

Montréal by-law but closely associated with pitbull-type dogs, so she felt compelled to complete a DNA test. The results revealed Chuck was a Bull terrier – Staffordshire terrier mix. M was confused with what to do with this information, but chose to ignore it for the time being to protect Chuck from the by-law.

These three examples illuminate the first and foremost challenge of knowing if one's dog was considered a pitbull-type dog in the context of Montréal's BSL. Sorting through all of the messiness attached to this process one fact remains true: that by-law officers were authorized to visually assess a dog's breed/type; therefore, regardless of what proof you had, it could be called into question. These challenges also extend into the registration process itself, as exemplified by the experiences my participants had during the registration process that I turn to below.

T began the registration process in September 2016 after hesitantly deciding to register Gia because of her cropped ears. Yet, T did not receive the orange tag which marks the completion of the special permit process until May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017. The first time she went to the Accès Montréal office the staff informed her that the department was not capable of filing for the pitbull-type dog special permit. Angry, T opened the office's webpage that stated the office was indeed the *only* department that handled animal registration. She handed over all of her paperwork, made the payment, and left without a tag but was assured she would receive it in the mail within a week. After a month passed, T called the office to check on her application. She was told that her file was incomplete, and Gia needed to be sterilized (which she was). It took her several more attempts before the city staff correctly filed her application and distributed her orange tag.

One of the most frustrating experiences of the registration process was the carelessness on part by the city to train their staff in the new bureaucratic process that was time sensitive. In the next story, I learned from personal experience that not only was the staff not trained, but also the law itself was set-up to deny marginalized individuals, such as someone without permanent residence, the right to register a nonhuman animal.

I accompanied Justin (introduced in Chapter 2) to the *Accès Montréal* office on two separate occasions. Justin was willing to apply for the special permits for Scottie, and Meeshka. But he was prohibited from applying because he did not have a clean criminal record as was required to be a legal guardian to pitbull-type dogs. So instead, Justin applied for the ‘normal’ dog license for Scottie and Meeshka, as he felt there would be some level of protection afforded to them with the regular tag compared to not having a city tag at all. The first time we went to the office Justin was turned away because he did not have a permanent address. As he tried to explain his situation, the staff directed him to resources in the city with which he was already familiar. Leaving and feeling defeated, Justin and I called various organizations in the city to see if they would provide Justin a temporary residential address. However, we learned that only individuals who accessed their services for a minimum of three months would be allowed. Returning to the *Accès Montréal* office, and presenting our case to the manager she told us Justin was unable to register his dogs, and would have to get rid of them to avoid fines. Justin was presented with two options: either he surrenders Scottie and Meeshka to a shelter or amasses fines that would eventually climax into having his dogs confiscated. The city was unwilling to accommodate his position and let him walk away that day with no reasonable options for navigating the new city animal registration process.

The extensive documentation and registration process prompted one of my participants to actively not register their dog. Toggling between registering or not came with risk either way. Pitbull-type dogs without a legally recognized guardian would be killed, transported out of province or sold to a research facility.<sup>21</sup> Registering one's dog thus felt like a way to keep them safe; to not register one's dog could subject them to confiscation if an authority deemed the dog a pitbull-type dog. However, registering one's dog as a pitbull-type dog felt more violent at times; it felt as if one was giving the city unwarranted access to one's life. And the challenges beleaguering pitbull-human companionship in Montréal did not disappear once a permit was obtained. The special license, designated by an orange tag, mandated the following requirements for the dog(s):

- Be muzzled at all times outside the registered residence (no backyard exceptions)
- Be walked on a 1.26 metre length leash
- Be supervised by an individual 18+
- To wear and keep visible the ID orange tags issued by the city at all times
- To be sterilized, micro-chipped and vaccinated

The following two chapters explore the experience and consequences of living under BSL with these restrictions and requirements.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I set out to understand the historical and cultural imagination and political apparatus surrounding pitbull-type dogs that subjects these dogs to intensive legal, and

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<sup>21</sup> The SPCA of Montréal considered those fates for pitbull-type dogs, prompting the organization to expand their protocol for “temporary placement” a practice having been only used for nonhuman animals classified as exotic or farmed (CBC, 2016b). Aware of its own shortcomings with identifying breed or type of dogs, the SPCA Montréal transferred (and at times adopted/fostered) all dogs weighing more than 10 kilograms out of province to Vermont, Alberta, and Nova Scotia (CBC 2016b).

extra-legal violence. As I presented in the historiography, pitbull-type dogs were esteemed as warriors during the Victorian era and then brought to North America during the first phases of colonization and directly enlisted in both colonial transformations of the landscape and the enforcement of the slave system. After decades of normative human-canine relationships with pitbull-type dogs, it was in the 1970s that society's perception of those dogs dramatically shifted. Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century there is a documented rise of dangerous dog myths. It was in the 1970s that pitbull-type dogs became stigmatized as dangerous in mass media and popular culture. Coincident with this stigmatization is the racialization of the pitbull-type dog – its associated with African American men. Surveying the historic relationships between humans and pitbull-type dogs reveals conflict, contingent on what purposes humans saw fit for those dogs.

As I confronted the literature that traces pitbull-type dogs' demonization in the 1970s an uncomfortable observation emerges, one which Dayan (2016) picks up too. Whether it is forced participation in dogfighting rings, the sanctimonious compassion of shelters that prefer to kill pitbull-type dogs rather than rehome them, or BSL, pitbull-type dogs have been victims of human violence and conjecture since their inception. In contemporary politics, to identify a dog as pitbull-type, "becomes equivalent to proof" of danger (Dayan, 2011, p. 248). Yet, as I demonstrated, visually identifying a dog is an inaccurate assessment tool. Following the overview of BSL I turned to my case study situated in Montréal. Montréal introduced BSL as a form of panic policy in response to the death of Vадnais in 2016. I proceeded to outline the details of BSL in Montréal, and commented on the registration process. Participants highlighted two problems related to the registration process: knowing if you had a pitbull-type dog and the difficulty of

obtaining the special permit. In the next chapter, this knowledge becomes essential as I further investigate how BSL functioned, specifically in relation to how it was spatialized through performance of the law in daily encounters.

## **Chapter 4: The Spatialization of Fear: Everyday Effects of Caring for the Wrong Dog**

*Fear works to align bodily and social space: it works to enable some bodies to inhabit and move in public space through restricting the mobility of other bodies to spaces that are enclosed or contained (Ahmed, 2015, p. 70).*

In this chapter I investigate what we can learn when we follow the mobility and effects of the law through social spaces. Through a close reading of legal geography, my main argument is that BSL is a form of spatial injustice. Before I present the definition of spatial injustice, it is important to note the difference between space and place. Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) argued that both terms “require each other for definition” (p. 6). Tuan (1977) considers “if we think of space as that which allows movement, the place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place” (p. 6). Thus, space is in Massey’s (2005) words, “always becoming, always open to the future,” (p. 10) whereas place is “securit[ized] defined by spatial laws and practices (Yuan, 1977, p. 3). Geographers maintain that place is space filled with meaning in a process of place-making. As a space can be appropriated simultaneously by individuals and collectively there can exist either overlap or deviation in place-making efforts.

Place-making – or fixing space – is often monopolized by those in power. This is exhibited in the concept of spatial injustice. Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2014) defines spatial injustice as the denial of certain bodies’ access to what is considered shared space. This denial of access often stems from perceptions of danger and consequent moves to securitize space. Ahmed speaks to this spatialization of fear in this chapter’s opening quote, where she emphasizes the spatiality of fear, how fear shapes what bodies can move through space, and how. Like Ahmed’s feared figures, such as queers or racialized

bodies, pitbull-type dogs and their guardians too are subject to context specific restrictions to shared space (see Chapter 3 for an exploration of pitbull-type dogs position in society). Ahmed (2015) writes, “Fear involves shrinking the body; *it restricts the body’s mobility precisely insofar as it seems to prepare the body for flight*” (p. 69). As civil society promises to eliminate fear through security measures, some groups marked feared are restricted from forming attachment to space, subsequently rendering them outside of the realm of place-makers. This is precisely a condition of spatial injustice that Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos suggests in his work, and that I turn to in order to elaborate on the spatialization of BSL.

In this chapter I suggest that BSL is a form of spatial injustice for both pitbull-type dogs and their human guardians. BSL is one strand of the myriad discourses surrounding the ‘dangerousness’ of pitbull-type dogs. I do not mean to impress readers with the idea that the spatial injustice I trace here is solely a by-product of specific legislation, as that would erase how law works with other sites of discursive production – i.e. the media – to engender the demonization of pitbull-type dogs. In this chapter I focus on BSL, however, as it is my focus for the thesis as a whole.

To forge my argument that BSL is a form of spatial injustice, I turn to legal geography, which I review in the following section. This literature helps me unpack how spatial injustice is produced through technical processes outlined in Montréal’s animal management by-law. Empirically, to make this argument I depend on my interviews and auto-ethnographical data that imparted me the knowledge that BSL is more than just what is written on paper. The interviews undertaken with guardians of pitbull-type dogs in Montréal suggest that BSL is a form of power that extends beyond the immediate

intended impacts of the by-law and seeps into people's sense of themselves, their relationships to others, and then how they navigate space. Making this claim is an attempt to study law through an exploration of its effects: or "how [laws] work, rather than what they are" (Valverde, 2003, p. 11). For example, integral to the work done by the law is a consideration of how everyday people on the street enact the by-law – in this case, people telling others who they think are with pitbull-type dogs to follow the law.

In this chapter I first provide an overview of how law becomes spatialized, before reviewing how BSL policy transformed Montréal into a hostile space for those with pitbull-type dogs. Next, based on my interviews and personal reflection, I investigate the multiple ways the use of public space for pitbull-type dog guardians changed under BSL in Montréal. I consider four main effects of BSL for how pitbull-type dogs and their guardians experience space in the city: changed walking patterns, the emergence of / increased street harassment, decline in community membership, and the most extreme effect: leaving the city. I draw these thematic categories together to buttress the argument that BSL functions as spatial injustice that moves beyond the written law into an orienting or aligning project that methodically controls pitbull-type dogs and their guardians.

### **The Spatialization of Law**

In this chapter I rely heavily on research from Nicholas Blomley, a legal geographer, and Irus Braverman, a multidisciplinary scholar invested in researching between the lines of law, geography, and ethnography. Both Braverman and Blomley alongside colleagues David Delaney, and Alexandre Kedar demonstrate the ubiquity of law's place-making

ability. Collectively they state, “law is always ‘worlded’ in some ways...social spaces, lived places, and landscapes are inscribed with legal significance...legal forms of meaning are projected onto every segment of the physical world” (Braverman et al., 2014, p. 1). Likewise, Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2014) speaks to the world-making properties of the law which are to “measure, distance, to tell the bodies moving around where to step and when to do so, to keep out, while showing the way in [for some]” (p. 14). He presses further when he states that the law is “no longer considered only the written law of constitutions and conventions, or the judge made law...but much more, more deeper and yet much more invisible” (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2014, p. 14). The invisibility Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos gestures at is what critical legal scholars attempt to emphasize by animating law, in terms of how it shapes spaces, movement, and sense of belonging – directly challenging common impressions of law as dry or lackluster written text.

As part of this attempt to visibilize law and see how it operates in everyday life, Braverman and colleagues argue for bolder understandings of law in geography. A first step in conducting legal geography is to observe how law “constitutes territory, polices its borders, and frames its identity” (Ojamalmmi & Blomley, 2015, p. 59). Law then proves itself to be productive, as it defines the qualities of the territory it governs. So when “law changes, so does territory,” including the classification of life, management and acceptance of particular relationships (Ojamalmmi & Blomley, 2015, p. 52).

The addition of a multispecies legal geography lens overcomes the anthropocentricity of law. Braverman herself has been integral to forming this body of scholarship at the intersection of multispecies and legal geographies. In particular,

Braverman argues we must shift how we think about animal law. She argues, “the modern project of policing animals in the city does not target animals directly”; rather, regulation targets the relationship between humans and nonhuman animals, or the concept of guardianship (Braverman, 2013a, p. 107). This is a crucial insight for not only this chapter but also this thesis as a whole – where, as I suggest, BSL is an attempt to manage and shape how people relate to pitbull-type dogs.

In my project I investigate urban animal regulation, specifically the case of pitbull-type dogs. I am particularly interested in the act of being proscribed from law – I am interested in those subjects who, as Dayan (2011) says, are in a “negative relation to the law” (p. xvii), subjected to legal disciplinary forces rather than protective elements. Dayan (2011) herself incorporates pitbull-type dogs into her analysis, alongside other marginalized beings, in an effort to understand how the law creates subjectivities that are “subordinated and expelled from society” (p. xi). For this chapter then, I will focus on these subordinated, disciplined subjects and relations, to illustrate the contours of BSL’s spatial injustice. To do this I first I provide foundational knowledge to understand how Montréal as a territory was spatially redefined by the by-law, followed by a discussion of how BSL impacted how individuals moved through space.

### **The Spatialization of BSL**

*“That’s when we realized, like, oh, we can’t even drive through the province [Ontario] with our dog, like this is crazy” (A and Kyto, interview).*

This section directly pulls from the Montréal by-law to outline the space-making ordinances of the by-law. I draw on three sections from By-Law 16-060 to depict what Montréal looked like, temporally and spatially, under BSL. The by-law has three

important space-making features, in particular: I investigate the bordering of the city of Montréal, providing access to residence without a warrant, and limiting what spaces are accessible to pitbull-type dogs *sans* muzzle. To understand those essential spatial characteristics of Montréal during the enforcement of BSL I will break each point down to provide essential background information to consider the other effects detailed in this chapter.

The first space-making detail that is discernable from the by-law is the amendment of who can legally occupy the territory. Montréal maintains an open border to permitted nonhuman animals. In section II of the by-law it is written that a dog (non pitbull-type) or cat registered to a different territory may be brought into the city limits for a maximum of 30 days before requiring registration (16-060: 8(1)). However, a dog belonging to a prohibited category was not permitted to enter the city under any circumstance, not even for a short visit, participation in a dog show or to drive through Montréal to reach a different destination (16-060: 8(3)). To enforce this border, BSL generated a registry of pitbull-type dogs through the initial registration process, a legal manoeuvre to both categorize and numerate how many of those dogs existed on the territory of Montréal.

Reducing dogs to abstractions through category and quota created the perceived ability to manage those dogs (Ojamalmi & Blomley, 2015, p. 52). James Scott (1988) writes that efforts, such as the creation of last names, or in this case licencing numbers, function as “spatial ordering” (p. 2) for the state. Efforts of spatial ordering often do not “successfully represent the actual activity of the society they depicted, nor were they intended to” (Scott, 1988, p. 2); rather, such efforts create and instil the *idea* of a perfect

ordering. It is assumed by policy makers that solutions like removal or assigning permits and licenses will eventually cause the problem to “disappear” (Blomley, 2011, p. 11) or be “tightly controlled” (Braverman, 2013a, p. 125). By making pitbull-type dogs distinguishable from other dogs, and amassing a database of their personal lives, it *appears* that BSL is successful in its mandate to control and monitor those dogs by tracking their death while also being able to identify those who do not belong and enforce the protocols in place.<sup>22</sup>

Both Ontario and Montréal were uncompromising with their border as they banned the movement of pitbull-type dogs registered to different municipalities from traveling through the territory, although Ontario made an exception for pitbull-type dogs participating in a registered dog show or fly ball tournament (DOLA). A case that exemplifies experiencing the border made the news in 2016 when a family escaping the Fort McMurray fire in British Columbia attempted to drive to Prince Edward Island with their pitbull-type dog Lucy. Making their travel itinerary they discovered they could not drive through Ontario because of DOLA (and could not re-route through the United States because they did not have passports) (Purdy, 2016). If they had decided to do so, Lucy—just driving through the province—would be in danger of being confiscated under the DOLA act. One of my research participants (quoted in the opening of this section) similarly expressed frustration about never being able to enter Ontario with her dog to visit family. Both of these stories demonstrate the creation of a border that restricts or prohibits pitbull-type dogs and their guardians’ movement.<sup>23</sup> Thus BSL requires the

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<sup>22</sup> Ontario has enforced BSL since 2005 and is an example of the failure of achieving extirpation as these dogs are still found in the province today (DOLA; Winter, 2016).

<sup>23</sup> This aspect of BSL had led to several petitions online to boycott Montreal as a tourist location (Shingler, 2016)

building of borders and registration lists to propagate the belief that a territory can be a gated space from non-legal pitbull-type dogs; and thus free from human-canine conflict.

The next aspect I want to draw out zooms in on domestic space. In section 2(1) of the by-law it states an authority<sup>24</sup> can “visit and inspect any occupancy unit for the purposes of this by-law” without warrant 2(1). This is further detailed in section 2(5) that states, “any owner, tenant, or occupant of an occupancy unit, must, upon presentation of a piece of identification by the authority having jurisdiction, give access to the occupancy unit” (16-060). Moreover, it is “an offence under this by-law to inconvenience, to insult, to prohibit or impede in any manner the access” to a residence, or to “deny or neglect to comply with a request that is made under this by-law” (16-060 2(5)). BSL, in sum, provided authorities access to one’s home without requirement of a warrant, cause or accompaniment of the occupant. This aspect of the by-law illustrates that there was no place that was not subject to surveillance by the authorities regarding pitbull-type dogs.

The third space-making feature of BSL I raise pertains to the embodiment of space by the dogs themselves. As the law outlined the only space a pitbull-type dog could be liberated from wearing a muzzle was the registered residential address, which was available to disturbances from the authorities. In any other space a pitbull-type dog was required to wear the muzzle at all times, including areas such as public dog exercise areas, friend’s homes, cars, animal kennels such as Bark Avenue, and veterinarian clinics. This aspect of the law is in contrast to what animal experts believe is the safe amount of time a dog should wear a muzzle: less than a twenty minute period (personal

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<sup>24</sup> An authority according to the by-law (16060-1): officer or employee responsible for the application of this by-law, a peace officer as well as any representative of a business whose services are retained by the city for the enforcement of this by-law.

communication with professional veterinarian). As will be elucidated in the forthcoming sections, the muzzle requirement had a significant effect on dogs' embodiment of space.

To reiterate, the three space-making features of the law included: amending the border to control the movement of pitbull-type dogs, permitting state actors to enter a private domesticity without a cause, and limiting the safe, comfortable movement of pitbull-type dogs. I now turn to the four effects of the spatialization of BSL by examining the lived experiences of my participants and myself.

### **Four Effects of the Spatialization of BSL**

As outlined in Chapter 2, I conducted both multispecies ethnography and auto-ethnography, keeping a field book of my own experiences and interviewing participants and their dogs. In reviewing my data, I observed four effects of BSL that speak to the spatial injustice of this law: changed walking patterns, increased street harassment, decline in community membership, and departure from the city.

#### *Changes to Walking Patterns*

*“I am conflicted between hiding and being defiant to be outside”* (M and Chuck, interview).

To paraphrase the quote that opened this chapter, some bodies move through space more easily while others movement become more restricted (Ahmed, 2015). This is a product of bodies' relationship to power, position in society, and to the law. In this section I give shape to Ahmed's observation by examining walking with a pitbull-type dog. First, though, it is important to set the stakes, to convey the significance of dog walking. Walking with one's dog daily is an important interaction between humans and their

companion animals, as well as a basic welfare principle (Horowitz, 2009). Veterinary experts suggest that dogs should be taken for walks daily, ranging between 30-60 minutes to maintain both positive physical and mental health. Horowitz suggests that the 30-60 minutes dedicated to walking with one's dog should be attuned to a dog's understanding of a walk. She suspects that the "walk your dog wants" looks like a poorly choreographed exercise led by her nose: a smell-walk (Horowitz, 2009, p. 284). Moreover, going for a walk is also a daily ritual of stepping away from one's controlled environment (the home) into a chaotic public realm full of new and familiar earthy encounters.

Leaving the confines of one's home opens up the possibility of familiar or new encounters with humans, nonhuman animals and smellscapes (Porteous, 1985). Porteous contributed the concept of smellscapes to the discipline of geography to factor in how the landscape carries with it a set of smells. While smellscapes matter to most humans<sup>25</sup>, they are ranked the most important 'scape' for dogs. Research has found that humans typically have six million sensory receptor sites in the nasal cavity, compared to dogs, who have an average of two to three hundred million sensory sites. Thus, "dogs have more genes committed to coding olfactory cells, more cells, and more kinds of cells, able to detect more kinds of smells" (Horowitz, 2016, p. 71). Smell-walks thus matter greatly to dogs' embodiment of the world.

As for a dog's relationship with their guardian, walking together is an act of world building. Geographers Fletcher and Platt (2016), curious about how walking is negotiated between dogs and humans, state that in the current repertoire of knowledge we "know very little about how walking and the spaces in which we walk feature in our

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<sup>25</sup> Important to note are the exception of people who experience anosmia (loss of partial or full smell) experience smellscapes differently.

relationships” (p. 211). Contemplating their research question, it is here that I turn to participants and my own personal experiences with walking pitbull-type dogs in the city of Montréal under BSL. Analyzing my interview data three major sub-themes emerged regarding how walking with a pitbull-type dog changed under BSL: change of routine, walking with a muzzle, and finally extra-precautions taken when walking.

#### a) Routine: When, Where, and How

Perhaps one of the most notable effects of BSL was how, when and where one accessed public space during walking activities. In this section I explore adjustments made to participants’ walking routines. Important to note is that when BSL was enforced, anyone with a pitbull-type dog or a dog that might pass as a pitbull-type had to carry around all of their supporting documentation for their dog, including vaccinations, proof of sterilization, and status of the type/breed of their dog. The documentation was required to be carried whenever in public with one’s dog, in order to produce proof of your dog’s legitimacy, in addition to the specialized city tags the dogs were meant to be wearing. This additional responsibility of having paperwork on one’s person at all times burdened any walk with a reminder that not having these documents could result in a hefty fine, or having one’s dog taken away. Due to these conditions participants and members of communities that I interacted with online confirmed that adjustments had to be made to their walking routines.

Participants noted they would walk more at night time to avoid heavy traffic on the sidewalk and in parks, and to avoid authorities, even when complying with the requirements listed in the by-law. Their reasons for this included feeling at risk,

vulnerable, and undesired. A participant described their change of routine in the following remark:

I just kind of avoid walking in the park...I try to avoid high-risk areas. I walk down the street to get to a quieter sidewalk. I don't go into the park, then you are really asking for trouble. (K & Phoenix, interview).

Moreover, K continued to state that she no longer took the front path to her home, and instead used the garage entrance to avoid any possible confrontation (K & Phoenix, interview). In my own experience, I felt this aspect of BSL the strongest. Having experienced many negative encounters in the Plateau-Mile End neighbourhood of Montréal, I noticed myself walking, and playing with my dogs in the early mornings and late in the evenings. What once was an enjoyable experience for participants, our dogs, and myself, became an “anxiety fest” as described by another participant (M and Chuck, interview). This contrasts greatly from what has been described in the literature on human and dog companionship models.

To counter this trend, boroughs in Montréal organized solidarity dog walks such as the ‘Verdun Pitbull Support Group’. The intention behind those groups was to provide networks for individuals in their respective neighbourhoods to organize walks with either pitbull-type dogs or dogs of varying breeds and types. This was an example of a community forging together to overcome the overwhelming sense of rejection and anxiety that came with walking a pitbull-type dog under BSL.

As alluded to in solidarity walks, walking with a pitbull-type dog in general felt like a political act. As Blomley writes, walking in public space is more than getting from point A to B. Walking is understood as an activity of encounters that are not merely “collisions” with other beings, but “dense with social significance and meaning” (Blomley, 2011, p. 27). Embedded in this cultural meaning is the requirement for

individuals to navigate their shared space with “an array of tacit and informal codes and norms” (Blomley, 2011, p. 27). As both this section and the following demonstrate, BSL spawned new normative interactions that were thick with social disapproval of caring for a pitbull-type dog.

#### b) Walking with a Muzzle: A Dog’s Perspective

The muzzle is defined in the Montréal by-law as a “device surrounding the nose and jaw of the animal with enough strength to prevent the animal from biting” (16-060, p. 1). The muzzle was to be on the dog at all times, supervised or unsupervised, with the only exception being when the dog was in their residential unit (excluding any outdoor area attached to or surrounding the residential unit). The length of time a dog was meant to be wearing a muzzle is, as stated earlier, in direct opposition to the professional advice that a dog should not wear a muzzle for more than twenty-minutes at a time. In this section I will argue that muzzles represent the perception of safety, had significant impact on individual dogs’ experiences of public space, and accentuated people’s fears of pitbull-type dogs.

Participants suggested that wearing a muzzle made them more visible in public spaces. The muzzle would make “people afraid, as it is essentially putting a sign on you being like look I have a dangerous dog and that is when people would cross the street” (A and Kyto, interview). Moreover, there was effort from people to tell people with pitbull-type dogs that they ought to muzzle their dog. As J mentioned in her interview, people would remind her everyday that Mally had to have a muzzle on. This even happened after Mally was deemed not a pitbull-type dog by the city clinic.

A memorable experience jotted in my field journal took place in September 2017. An individual who cycled past Eleanor and I in the borough of Outremont proceeded to turn around, jumped off his bicycle to tell us that she was illegal and had to wear a muzzle. His tone was very severe, as if we had harmed him. Examples of this were corroborated in my interviews as random people on the street regularly reminded anyone with a dog that looked like a pitbull-type dog to follow the law. Even with certification of one's dog to be not pitbull-type status by the commissioner Maurice Bernard participants and myself still experienced exaggerated harassment on the street regarding muzzling our dogs. It seemed that people purchased into the belief that if a pitbull-type dog (judged according to the person) remained muzzled risk would be managed, and so they took on personal responsibility to enforce this aspect of the by-law.

As caregivers to pitbull-type dogs were harassed regarding whether or not their dog wore a muzzle, it is important to consider the impact muzzling had on the dogs themselves. Turning to the dog's response to being muzzled while walking it was conclusive in my interviews that dog's wellbeing was reduced while muzzled. I offer these observations in spite of the lack of research dedicated to the impacts of wearing a muzzle for dogs. One study in particular argues that dogs do not experience stress while wearing a muzzle according to an analysis of the cortisol released in muzzle wearing dog's saliva (Cronin et al., 2003). The same study acknowledges behavioural changes such as reduced barking and submissive stances but does not consider that indicative of uncomfotability. Such a perspective takes a reductionist approach to dogs and fails to consider the complexity of dog's embodiment.

I argue that muzzling dogs has a significant impact on how they access and embody space. Participants shared stories of their dogs struggling to exercise, experienced amplification of nervous behaviours, being less capable of socializing with other dogs, and other changes to their normal behaviour. In her interview A described how Kyto would have normally ran for 20 consecutive minutes. However, when wearing a muzzle and especially in the heat, their normal routine would tire her out in five minutes. She speculated it was a “psychological thing” for Kyto who, in spite of being properly trained to wear a muzzle, was noticeably uncomfortable with it. By taking away from Kyto’s ability to comfortable exercise, the muzzle interrupted a vital quality of her being able to live a full and healthy existence.

Not only were regular exercise routines more difficult, many dogs exhibited an amplification of nervous behaviour. A, describing her dogs Raja and Midas, prefaced their story with mention of how both dogs were rescues. As a result of their previous experiences, they both exhibited nervous behaviour in public, including fears of certain objects like hoses. The addition of the muzzle made both Raja and Midas experience a greater sense of nervous behaviour, furthering distressing A who, of course, did not want to see her dogs like this. In addition to an increased nervousness in her dogs, A also described a time when Raja had tried to give someone a kiss with the muzzle, and unintentionally harmed that person with the impact of the hard and thick plastic encasing her snout and her jaw (A and Raja and Midas, interview). A’s example further evidences the disruption of dog’s normative behaviour, even that of being able to express the intimacy of showing affection with a kiss.

My interview with T and P describes how muzzling their dog Riesling detracted for her from being able to socialize normally. This was due to the fact that she had to wear the muzzle in daycare, an important place in her social world. Her personality was challenged by the muzzle, a disruption to her senses and ability to communicate with other dogs as she had done before. Not only was this isolating for Riesling, and a probable deterrent to A to bring Riesling into environments where she is at a clear disadvantage, but most importantly, it highlights a barrier to social time with her own species. Broadly, this draws attention to how BSL can in fact create the conditions for canine conflict to emerge by erecting barriers preventing dogs from properly socializing with humans and other nonhuman animals (as will be discussed further in the subsection access to animal services).

Building upon Riesling's experience of being restricted in socialization, other participants corroborated that having to wear a muzzle was paired with a change in behaviour. Depending on the muzzle worn, whether an occlusion muzzle (soft fabric, cone-like and the most restricted), or a basket muzzle (plastic or leather material with ability to drink and eat), each dog experienced individual changes in behaviour (see Figure 4.1 and 4.2 for examples). Most participants reported the frustration displayed by their dogs, as they were unable to sniff people or other dogs properly, and showed visible signs of discomfort. I noticed changes in Clementine's behaviour when the muzzle was worn. She refused to urinate or defecate outside, and would often spend the entire walk pulling at the muzzle to the extent that she would open up her own skin.

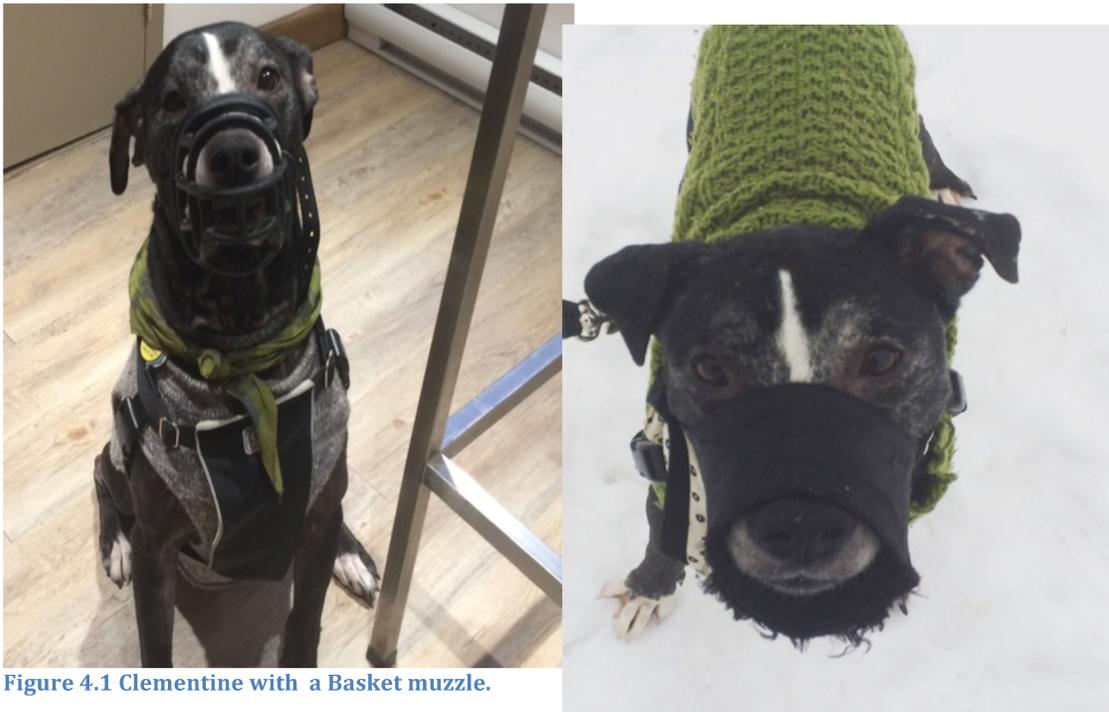


Figure 4.1 Clementine with a Basket muzzle.

Another participant, Justin thread together that the perception of safety and negative experience for his dogs' to the muzzle resulted in the accentuation of people's of pitbull-type dogs. Justin lamented that he feared muzzling his dogs while panhandling because it both discouraged people from approaching him as they did before, and increased Meeshka's anxiety. Meeshka, already being reactive towards other dogs, became "ten times worse" when wearing the muzzle, or could enter the 'red zone', as he described (J, Scottie, and Meeshka, interview). Meeshka's typical response was to bark at a dog, and then redirect her attention with a correction from Justin. However, with the muzzle Meeshka could not communicate as easily as before. Justin believed her new behaviour was the result of having to wear a muzzle for the majority of each day, and having no internal residence living on the streets, meant that Meeshka (and Scottie) were almost always wearing the muzzle (see Figure 4.3). Moreover, people were less likely to

approach him because the muzzle acted as a deterrent as it symbolized a warning of a dangerous dog.



**Figure 4. 3 Meeshka wearing blinders to ease the anxiety she had when muzzled. Scottie is resting beside her.**

As the above stories demonstrate, the muzzle played a large part in how individuals responded to pitbull-type dogs when walking, and the direct negative impacts on individual dog’s behaviour that significantly depleted their primary sense capacities and ability to move through space.

### c) Additional Safety

Several participants expressed another important adjustment made to walks with their dogs: they took greater safety precautions. K, when walking Phoenix, began wearing a GoPro camera on her jeans after experiencing numerous negative experiences within the proximity of her home. K cited the GoPro served as “proof” or “documentation” if people “wanted to make false accusations” (K and Phoenix, interview). This precautionary step

was a direct response to an encounter they had walking in the park, where one day a man stopped near them to do push-ups in the snow. K, knowing Phoenix can be nervous around strangers, walked in the other direction, only to be confronted by the man who threatened to call the police if he saw them again (K and Phoenix, interview). K described this situation as completely random and ridiculous, yet she felt the need to keep the GoPro camera with them during walks.

Amassing documentation felt like smartest thing to do; however, as expressed in interviews, what could you really do with it? During her interview, A recounted experiencing re-active dogs, or in the word choice of the by-law aggressive dogs, but felt that being a pitbull-type dog guardian, she could not call authorities to make a complaint. She states, “I don’t even feel comfortable calling animal control because I have a pit bull, and there is this second breath of, well, what happens if they investigate, will they euthanize that dog or my dog?” (A and Kyto, interview). Several of my participants and myself similarly refrained from reporting incidences as we did not want additional visibility from the authorities on our companions, or to contribute to the media’s database on pitbull-type dog stories.

Without being able to access recourse, BSL left none of us with a feeling of safety; instead, we had a fear of being arrested, of being prevented from seeking resolution before a conflict even arose. It was these sad and unwanted anxieties that one had to take for a walk alongside their beloved family members under BSL. Regardless of how responsible of a dog guardian one is, our dogs were marked as ‘killable’ in the name of public safety. Amassing documentation when walking a pitbull-type dog was perhaps

the only proof one would have if authorities were to intervene, even though that too felt negligible.

Walking with a dog is generally a positive experience for both dog and guardian. As Fletcher and Platt (2018) argue, walking space is a rich “cultural space for making sense of human-animal relations” (p. 214). But, as this section showcases, daily walks with a pitbull-type dog deviates from this, and is rather an activity beset by anxiety and fear. In the following section I elaborate on the escalation in street harassment experienced while in public space with pitbull-type dogs.

### *Street Harassment*

*“I’m not going to bring people cup cakes and whatever because like, if you want to talk about it let’s talk about it, but don’t harass me on the street” (A and Kyto, interview).*

In this section I elaborate on what was expressed during my interviews as the most concentrated experience of BSL in the city of Montréal – that of street harassment. Street harassment, a common occurrence outlived in public space is characterized by unwanted attention expressed by physical or verbal assault. Street harassment constituted the bulk of encounters in public space between people and pitbull-type dog guardians, as reported by my participants. In this section I will share participants stories and insights on what accessing public space meant with a pitbull-type dog.

A participant described her experience with Maya, a pitbull-type dog she had before BSL. J, remembering her time with Maya stated:

I experience[ed] so much negativity from people in the streets. Not everybody, like fifty percent of people would be like ‘what a beautiful dog’ they want to take pictures with her, pet her,.... But there were occasions where some lady threw herself up against the wall, like, ‘no no no!’, and Maya wasn’t even looking at her, and I was like, ‘what’s wrong?’ I didn’t

know she was referring to us...and that was one of my first of regular situations, where people were like, 'get that dog away from me! And I would ask "why?" to hear the response that those dogs are killers... (J and Mally, interview).

Before BSL, J had previous knowledge of what type of harassment one could experience with a pitbull-type dog, and after Maya passed away she wanted to rescue another because they were so often "negatively perceived" (J and Mally, interview). She recounted a more recent experience during BSL that when walking in a grassy area with Mally as another couple who were walking two small dogs approached. One of the couple told the other that a "a dog [was] coming" prompting her to perform sidewalk traffic etiquette of getting into single-file, but "when she saw Mally, she picked up her dog and ran in the opposite direction into the field, she vanished...screaming 'oh my god'" (J and Mally, interview).

All participants shared similar stories to that of J and Mally's, indicating street harassment was a common feature to walking. A participant, speaking directly on the subject of their ongoing harassment on the street, captured the frustration of having to always 'be the bigger person'. T lamented:

I felt that I was at a breaking point, and that is one of the really difficult things about BSL, because it puts such a spot light on you, it also doesn't allow you to have feelings about things because you have to always be the bigger person, like I always have to be the one that is smiling, and if people are like treating me like garbage I have to be like well, I can't get mad at them because then they are going to go home and say 'all those dogs are like this (T and Gia, interview).

In this remark, T alludes to what is perhaps the most disempowering feature of living under BSL. My research has shown that individuals did not feel like they could pursue avenues to report harassment, or any threat by other civilians, as it would draw further attention to their dogs that could result in the confiscation of their beloved companions.

Public space is a key area to enact citizenship and morals. As witnessed in my research, this enactment of morals by everyday people in public space became central to the enforcement of BSL. Martina Löw (2008) writes that the social agents *reproduce* space, as it is space that is *produced* through social structures and systems, such as law. In this way, street harassment conducted by everyday people (social agents) furthered the mandate of BSL as it transformed the landscape into an inhabitable space for pitbull-type dogs. As a result, guardians of pitbull-type dogs reported experienced a decline in community membership.

#### *Decline in Community Membership*

*“You are undesirable because you have this kind of dog, you are not someone we want. You are presumed to be a liability, a threat, a criminal, a problem”* (M and Chuck, interview).

The opening quote by M captures the core of what an individual feels when being guardian to a pitbull-type dog, with or without BSL enforced. Whether or not one felt a sense of belonging to a community, June 2016 both severed and at times built new communities. In this section I detail three areas of community involvement that participants referred to during interviews: access to services, fear of encountering a by-law officer, and use of personal or public outdoor facilities. All of these examples created a sense of feeling apart of a broader community, suggesting that pitbull-type dogs and their guardians were excluded from accepted community membership and lost access to public space.

#### a) Access to Animal Services

Several interactions I had at Bark Avenue indicated that other animal facilities' willingness to work with pitbull-type dogs further declined once BSL entered municipal politics. After June 2016, Bark Avenue received at least daily one phone call from someone seeking services for training, boarding, or socialization after being turned down multiple times by other dog facilities in the city and directed to us. A typical phone conversation with a guardian would begin with a shaky voice stating that their dog is a large mutt, mix or boxer. We quickly caught on to what was being expressed in those types of phone calls, and immediately shared our commitment to pitbull-type dogs, often resulting in the owner sharing their dog's true breed/ type. At Bark Avenue we frequently have clients request we pull pitbull-type dogs out of the daycare when their dog is socializing. But if dog facilities refuse to board, socialize or train pitbull-type dogs, there is a risk that this will create conditions for canine conflict. Our policy is to socialize any and all dogs that pass our evaluation (see Figure 4.5).



Figure 4. 5 Eleanor, Tanner, Phoenix, and Max (all rescues) in daycare at Bark Avenue.

## b) Encountering a By-Law Officer



**Figure 4.6 Dino and Dante being approached by two by-law officers in July 28, 2017.**

*One afternoon I was walking through Jean-Mance park and I witnessed an animal by-law vehicle swiftly pull up behind a man and his dog sitting in the grass. The man had headphones in his ears, and his dog directly in front of him basking in the sunshine. He did not hear or see them approaching. As the two by-law officers stepped out of their vehicle dressed in a bulletproof vest, I watched in anticipation. One of the officers approached the dog, removing their collar before even saying one word to the man. It was as if he was hoping the dog would respond to his aggressive introduction. I know that neither of my girls would respond so politely to unfriendly hands. This prompted the man to remove his headphones and engage with the two by-law officers who demanded documentation. Thankfully, the man was prepared for what was expected of his owning of a pitbull-type dog. The by-law officers made copies of his paperwork. Ten stiff minutes passed as I watched from a nearby tree, bearing witness to the entire incident. Luckily the by-law officers finally left and I approached the scene. I learned that the dog's name was Dino, a dog that was not designated a pitbull-type dog during the breed identification clinics. The man told me he was being fined for not having a harness on his dog, and was grateful for Dino's calm disposition during that interaction that could have gone so differently (Fieldnotes, July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017).*

After BSL, the first hiring cycle of the new animal by-law officers targeted Police Technology students in the original job post, listing the responsibilities of the job which included: catching dogs, cats and other animals using nets, hypodermic rifles, etc., and immobilizing subjects, if necessary, with tranquilizers (Foster, 2017). Not only were by-

law officers equipped with Tasers, tranquilizers, and other tools of enforcement, additionally they wore bulletproof vests (as can be seen in Figure 4.6). My research participants questioned the severity of the need for by-law officers to wear vests, and viewed it as a direct response to who is perceived to be a guardian to a pitbull-type dog.

Of the participants approached by a by-law officer, all mentioned the initial exchange began with equivocal question if they had “ a pitbull-type dog,” a question that was supposed to be the responsibility of the officer to answer (T, P and Reisling, interview). Things often went downhill from here. J shared her with me her experience with the authorities. As she was walking Mally in the Plateau borough in what was one of the worst snowfalls of the year, J was cut off by the animal control van. J remembers that, “I couldn’t walk, and there was a big snow bank behind us that we had literally walked in to get home, so [Mally] was completely covered in snow” (J and Mally, interview). The by-law officer, remaining in the warmth of his vehicle, demanded paperwork, which she dutifully presented as she carried it around at all times. In spite of having the necessary documents, she was interrogated for 15 minutes, standing outside in what was one of the worst blizzards of the season. Despite having presented paperwork certified by the city that Mally was deemed not a pitbull-type dog, the by-law officer insisted on continuing to ask “what breed” her dog was (J and Mally, interview). Regardless of J producing the official paperwork regarding Mally’s standing the by-law officer parted with a threat that the city would contact her to make sure her dog was indeed not a pitbull-type dog. In addition to the unnecessary length of time the officer took to conduct his interrogation, the officer’s claim that the city would follow up proved to be untrue leading J to suspect it was the by-law officer exercising his power.

Participants in my research project thus shared a sense of anxiety that was directly related to meeting authorities on the street. To leave one's home with one's pitbull-type dog was to accept the omnipresent threat of encountering a by-law officer who could randomly identify and subsequently order the killing of your dog. This is a clear example of spatial injustice, or the foreclosure of one's ability to move freely, safely, and confidently in public spaces. A community effort emerged in response, to put together a map or schedule of where the eight to twelve by-law officers were stationed. Organizers learned that officers' schedule was random, so individuals issued social media posts whenever and wherever they saw a by-law officer. For example, the Twitter account @PitPatrolAlert was created for individuals to tweet animal patrol alerts that generated information about the activity of the by-law officers (PitPatrolAlert, 2016). These efforts were a creative and concerted attempt to reduce any possible encounters with by-law officers.

### c) Use of Personal Outdoor Facilities

*Since June we added another task to our morning routine at Bark Avenue. Before letting a dog out, we dutifully scan the yard for anything that may have been thrown over the fence during the night. We do this because we have a reputation in the community and media to love pitbull-type dogs, and with this we fear that our facility could be targeted with a meatball riddled with rat poison, razor blades or other noxious substances (Fieldnotes).*

The above entry from my fieldnotes was a response to the threat of pitbull-type dogs being targeted after the death of Vadrnais. On June 25 2016, two pitbull-type dogs, Anna and Trixie, consumed meatballs laced with a black grain substance that were deposited onto the balcony. Trixie who was only six-months old did not survive the incident

(Voldstad, 2016). In an interview, J, concerned about something similar happening to Mally, introduced herself to her new neighbours to clarify that Mally was a mastiff, a breed unrelated to the ban. J felt clarifying Mally's breed pre-emptively before someone asked provided protection against her worst nightmare. She explained, "my main nightmare that I've had since moving in here has been somebody throwing something poisonous over my fence. That is my main thing, so I'm like, we can't get in on negative terms with any of neighbours" (J and Mally, interview). Taking extra precaution she still "regularly swept the yard" (J and Mally, interview).

It was not only private property that could be compromised by poisonous food but people also feared their dogs could be subjected to poisoning when out in public spaces. A Facebook post that circulated in the summer of 2016 confirmed this. The below is a shared post from Facebook:

Montréal dog owners beware: I was just informed that a Caucasian man in his 50's is circulating with dog treats that are laced with poison, aimed to kill. He was last seen at the Laurier dog park, yesterday (April 23rd). He had a "four day" beard, was wearing a baseball cap and a grey coat and was behaving "peculiarly". He arrived on a bike, entered the dog park and attempted to give a dog a treat but was stopped by someone before he could. One reported killing so far at another park. Be attentive out there! If anyone has other info, please share (personal communication, August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016).

This was an additional stress placed on guardians of pitbull-type dogs in the city of Montréal. Not only were people scared of encountering a by-law officer who could randomly confiscate one's dog, people were additionally alert to random people offering their dogs treats in what would otherwise be considered a gesture of kindness. Both at home and in public spaces, pitbull-type dogs were at risk of death. This is a threat unique to guardians of pitbull-type dogs, buttressing the argument that living under BSL was to experience compromised access to space, a further iteration of spatial injustice.

### *The Question of Leaving*

*“I was freaking out all summer, we just kept thinking are we gonna move or are we gonna stay, where are we gonna move?” (A & Kyto, interview 2017).*

*“We are not going to be Quebec’s problem anymore; worry about the other pit bulls, not mine” (Justin, and Scottie and Meeshka, interview).*

The last effect I will present in my argument that BSL is a form of spatial injustice is the most extreme effect: being forced to leave, the culmination of the “elimination of fear” (Ahmed, 2015, p. 71). Many families I interviewed questioned whether they could manage to stay despite BSL, or if the wisest decision would be to leave the territory of Montréal. Those questions were asked in the context of the possibility of the province of Quebec passing their own province-wide BSL, Bill-128. All the participants in my interviews raised this concern. Three participants discussed previous interest in purchasing property in Montréal, but once BSL was enacted, the sense of being rejected by one’s community prompted them to continue living with the flexibility of renting. All participants remained in Montréal with the exception of one, as those individuals invested hope in BSL being overturned during the municipal elections. The exception of my research participants was Justin, and his two dogs Scottie and Meeshka, to whom I will now turn.

Justin and his two dogs Scottie, and Meeshka were homeless on the streets of Montréal. As described in Chapter 2, Justin was not able to obtain the special permits for Scottie and Meeshka due to having a criminal record and lacking a residential address. During the interview he revealed to me that it was not his first time being forced to move because of BSL. In the early 2000s Justin rescued two pitbull-type dogs, Rocco and

Molar, while living in Toronto, Ontario. He was content with his living situation for the most part, but was forced to make a decision in 2005 when the province of Ontario passed DOLA. Although Rocco and Molar would have been grandfathered in the province of Ontario, Justin, aware of his precarious living situations, felt he could not guarantee their safety, and so this was the reason “[they] left” (Justin, and Scottie and Meeshka, interview). Justin’s family, being hyper-visible to authorities, experienced a double effect of fear. Not only did he have to fear his dogs being confiscated for being homeless, under BSL he additionally feared for the safety of Rocco and Molar because of their appearance (Irvine, 2013, p. 157).

Between 2005 and 2017 Justin lived in Montréal. In those years Justin remained living in precarious situations yet showed compassion towards dogs. In the interview he shared stories of rescuing Rocco and Molar in Toronto, and once he arrived in Montréal, he rescued four other pitbull-type dogs. Naya was abandoned near a dumpster; Meeshka required a new home as her owner was arrested, Scotty was found tied to a fence in a park, and Eleanor was abandoned in an apartment. Justin admitted to having a love for pitbull-type dogs, that “if a pit bull [needed his] help, [he would] be there to help” (Justin, Scotty and Meeshka, interview). Justin’s relationship to pitbull-type dogs was bound to how he identified and the relationships that he wanted to cultivate even when those relationships complicated his already precarious living situation.

As those relationships were again threatened, Justin asked for my support to help him raise enough funds to fly himself, Scottie and Meeshka to Vancouver, BC. We created a GoFundMe campaign, and were successful in raising enough money for his ticket, and other miscellaneous expenses. Justin had an outstanding agreement with

another animal organization *Freedom Drivers* that graciously covered the costs of the dog crates and dog flight tickets for Scottie and Meeshka. Fortunately, all three safely evacuated Montréal in July 2017.

Justin, Scotty and Meeshka's story reveals the extreme measures that individuals will take to protect their canine families. All of my participants including myself were able to navigate BSL and maintain a level of safety for our dogs, but as Justin's story reveals, not all could be so privileged. During my research process I met people who decided to move their dogs to a friend or families home in an area that was not governed by BSL; to my dismay I also heard stories of individuals initiating the killing of their own dogs from either internalized fear of their dog and or fear of what future their dog had (Fieldnotes).

In sum, this section illuminates the far-reaching effects of the spatialization of BSL. As Ahmed (2015) states, "fear works to contain some bodies such that they take up less space" (p. 69) in an act of "shrinkage" (p. 69). It is in this fourth effect of no longer being able to claim space that illustrates the most pronounced form of "shrinkage", of spatial injustice. Justin, Meeshka, and Scottie share through their story the severity of BSL: if they stayed in Montréal, their relationship would be illegal and in effect, Scottie and Meeshka would be killed. If they departed, they could stay together and live. So they left.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I rely heavily on participants stories and experiences as a commitment to their intersubjectivities and experiential knowledge of navigating BSL. I buttressed those stories with my own, as this project is both a multispecies and auto-ethnographical

pursuit. In this chapter I embedded those stories in legal geographies to demonstrate the spatialization of the legislation. I explored how the territory of Montréal was shaped by the legislation, and then traced four spatial effects of the legislation for pitbull-type dogs and their guardians: changed walking patterns, increased street harassment, decline in community membership and leaving the city. In this chapter I put into sharp relief the ways in which each effect radically transformed both pitbull-type dogs and if applicable their guardians' claims to the territory of Montréal. The effects ranged from being able to safely walk outside, the ability to smell the environment, be put up for adoption or to securely inhabit one's home without eviction.

As pitbull-type dogs' bodies were read as fearsome and dangerous the laws' impact reached beyond the legal jargon and into public hands and spaces. The observations raised in the context of Montréal can be extrapolated into broader conversations about what BSL does, as it moves beyond just how the law is written. Moreover, I argue it was not only the governing authorities' enforcement of the law that circulated the effects explored. It was just as much as the everyday person on the street as witnessed in the episodes of street harassment, the distribution of poisoned food, or other communications. Everyday citizens voluntarily enforced the legislation altering usership and access to space.

In the following chapter I continue to address the effects of BSL, to further emphasize the underlying work done by the legislation. I move from considering BSL's spatial work and effects to considering how BSL is a process of *desired* extinction.

## Chapter 5: *Desired* Extinction and Contested Companionship

“*Going extinct is not equivalent to disappearing; it involves a range of processes that produce, transform, and deform a diverse group of subjects*” (Mitchell 2016, p. 24).

In this chapter my aim is to approach extinction studies from a perspective that investigates, in Thom van Dooren’s (2014) words, the less spectacular “unravelling of life” (p. 7) by emphasizing the processes in place that let – or make – death happen. Specifically, I develop an account of BSL as a project of *desired* extinction, where subjects rendered “unloved” or disposable – here, pitbull type dogs – are actively targeted for death through extermination campaigns (Mitchell, 2016, p. 25; Rose, 2011; Heise, 2016). Employing the critical perspective on extinction imparted by scholars like van Dooren, Rose, Heise, and Mitchell I am able to bring in to focus the goal of BSL – to make pitbull-type dogs extinct – and to unravel the mechanisms by which this is pursued.

This chapter picks up on the previous chapter where I outlined the ways that BSL, in concert with cultural constructs of pitbull-type dogs, significantly alters and diminishes spaces of cohabitation. I continue on this trajectory by focusing on BSL as a governance regime aimed at the extinction of pitbull-type dogs and their relations with humans. As Mitchell’s (2016) opening quote refers to, extinction is not merely about disappearance, but also the ways the subjects enrolled in the process are transformed. Thinking expansively about extinction illuminates that life is more than biological, as the immediate loss of physical life is not the only death experienced. As Rose (2011) considers, other forms of death include foreclosing the possibility of reproducing future generations (kin), and the prohibition of certain relationships with others (p. 98).

Factoring in how lives and relations are unmade in death processes reveals how death unfolds as it deprives individuals the lives and relations they would have lived otherwise.

Understanding extinction in this manner, I argue that BSL pursues extinction through three death modes: the legislated death (physical); the prohibition of future generations (sterilization); and death of the relationship between pitbull-type dogs and humans (death of a relationship). Speaking to the latter death mode, I offer the concept of contested companionship (building from Radin's concept of contested commodities) to describe the relationship between humans and pitbull-type dogs as one that is subject to intensive regulation, management and eventual elimination: another form of death, which denies pitbull-type dogs access to the status of companion animal. As pitbull-type dogs are rendered killable, similar fates are endured with respect to their relationships to human companions. All three-death modes concertededly work towards the extermination of pitbull-type dogs to result in their localized extinction in the context of Montréal.

### **Challenging Extinction Stories**

In this section I offer a brief explanation of extinction as commonly understood, and then unpack the concept further with nuance, building from the insights of scholars who are challenging what extinction is. The two challenges I raise are: first, that extinction is not a singular event; and second, that extinction studies has tended to exclude unloved animals. I conclude this section by discussing the politics surrounding nonhuman animal death in relation to whose life is grieved and whose is not. I raise this conversation to situate pitbull-type dogs in similar stories of *desired* extinction. This framework will allow me to tell the “extinction story” of pitbull-type dogs, a story that provides a

narrative-based engagement exploring what extinction means in the particular case study, why it matters, and to whom (Rose, van Dooren, & Chrulew, 2017, p. 3).

Extinction is considered the crisis of our time. To be classified as a subject of extinction, a species or group of organisms must have only a small group of living reproductive members. Currently, we are living in the midst of the sixth extinction that, unlike previous episodes, is fundamentally driven by humans (Rose, van Dooren, & Chrulew, 2017, p. 1).<sup>26</sup>

Key terms in extinction studies include biodiversity, species, and conservation. Mitchell argues that those three concepts dominate the scientific and public discourses of extinction. Biodiversity and species are positioned as the key sites under threat in extinction (conventionally framed as the moment when the last species representative dies). The loss of biodiversity and the extinction of species is typically perceived as a problem because they are framed as essential to “ensure human survival and economic development” (Mitchell 2016, p. 26). Mitchell (2016) points out that capitalism plays a major role, and conservation is presented as the “only possible mode of response” (p. 25). As a result, discourses rooted in human utility of the nonhuman animal frame extinction “in terms of the loss, accumulation, production and extraction of value from ‘natural’ capital” (Mitchell, 2016, p. 27). Species who are subject to extinction stories thus carry a capital incentive to be gained through conservation efforts.

Scholars in extinction studies are pushing against the above conventional framing of extinction. Van Dooren (2014) expands traditional extinction narratives by proclaiming, “that there is no single ‘extinction’ phenomenon. Rather in each case there

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<sup>26</sup> I want to note that not all humans drive extinction, and those who do drive extinction do not all do so with the same force.

is a distinct “unraveling of ways of life”, a distinctive loss and set of changes and challenges that require situated and case-specific attention (van Dooren, 2014, p. 7). Approaching extinction studies as van Dooren does brings recognition that extinction is not a straightforward or singular event, but a complicated assemblage of events involving many participants, and actions across space and time. Van Dooren’s approach is especially provocative in that it directs attention to the many steps that come before the last individual of a species dies. Another strength to this approach is individual beings’ lives are considered and valued beyond their species category; they are rather seen as valued members in broader sets of relations.

Deborah Bird Rose is another key thinker in challenging extinction studies. She is interested in how we are implicated in the lives and deaths of others, particularly in contexts where we “bear the burden of witness” in the premature death of others (Rose, 2013, p. 4). She calls this living in the death zone, defined as “the place where the living and the dying encounter each other in the presence of that which cannot be averted. Death is imminent but has not yet arrived” (Rose, 2013, p. 4). Like van Dooren, Rose dwells on the lead-up to extinction. She also purposefully considers the life prospects of pest and dangerous animals in the accounts of extinction she pursues. In her book *Wild Dog Dreaming: Love and Extinction* (2011), Rose examines dingo extermination campaigns in Australia, where dingoes are considered pests to Euro-Australians but companion animals to Australian Aborigines groups. Violently erected into the landscape, the bodies of dingoes are strung by Euro-Australians “on the fence wire” in a display of the ongoing success of the eradication campaigns (Rose 2011, p. 63). However, this sight brings a sense of loss, and sadness to those who see them as members of their community (Rose,

2011, p. 65). Rose writes, “when an animal is declared a pest [or feared], death becomes [their] destiny. Suddenly, whatever [they] do is wrong in the eyes of those who are determined to get rid of [them]. And suddenly, where they are, is where [they] must not be” (2013, p. 15). Animals condemned to those fluid categories – out of place, behaving wrongly – are violently killed through powerful policy and management practices to secure a world without them. Rose attempts to recuperate those animals as also subject to extinction, a move I repeat here.

Considering this, I raise the second challenge in extinction studies: that some nonhuman animals are subjects of *desired* extinction, typically through extermination campaigns. To exterminate a nonhuman animal is to withdraw the “sentimental eye” that is reserved for other animals (Holm, 2012, p. 77). Extermination, according to Myers (2003), is “the removal of every potentially reproducing individual of a species from an area that will not be reinvaded” (p. 533). To secure this, future resources including funding, designated authorities, and surveillance strategies are ushered in to oversee the swift removal of any threatening individual (Myers, 2003, p. 533). In the context of my project all three resources were put into full effect to monitor pitbull-type dogs that legally remained and to evict those who were not.

Nonhuman animals subjected to *desired* extinction through extermination projects include rats in Alberta, Emerald Ash Borer beetles in Montréal, Kangaroos in Australia and so many more nonhuman animals who are rendered unlovable. Intensive management projects are created to dispossess the species from claims to space, formatting their death as necessary to align with the ideologies of those who belong. Code names for nonhuman animals subjected to extermination include pest, terrorist, and

invasive alien species: words to denote their direct threats to the safety, enjoyment and or economic gain of humans (Sinclair & Pringle, 2017). Once these animals are marked as a problem, extinction – via extermination – is the conventional solution.

Responding to this differential valuation, Mitchell (2016) calls for an attunement “to the beings and processes excluded” from mainstream conversations of extinction in an effort to foster “ethical debates about what goes extinct and what should be protected” (p. 33). These animals whose extinction is pursued are not typically conceived of as subjects of extinction, nor are their deaths mourned. As Van Dooren (2014) asserts, nonhuman animals deemed pests are “unremarked on and even noticed” in stories of loss (p. 7). Yet to experience extinction is an option available to every species and or group of being as we are mutually connected by our vulnerability to death. However, extinction stories are marked with differing affective values. Stories about extinction “rely on the politically mobilizing power of mourning” that is differently attributed to species allowing for some species “disappearance” a cause of rejoice, as “certain species...lack the cultural standing that might make them tragic or elegiac figures” (Heise, 2016, p. 35). As Heise elaborates, it is the differential value we place on nonhuman animal’s life that either calls their death into attention or not. Why then are some subjects of extinction represented as a loss whereas subjects of *desired* extinction, typically through extermination campaigns, are celebrated in their death?

Billy-Ray Belcourt (2015) argues colonialism is responsible for this disjoint between nonhuman animals. He states nonhuman animals exist in “violent colonial geographies” that subject their bodies to intensive surveillance, ontological violence, and death in an effort of protecting or producing colonial interests (p. 5). Belcourt further

presses that we cannot address animal oppression or liberation without tracing the connections between nonhuman animal subjectivities on stolen land and settler colonialism. Nonhuman animals on stolen land exist according to their use to colonial projects. Thus, extermination campaigns and their subjects speak to ongoing efforts that profit a system of supremacist logic. It is the supremacist logic that continues to place different values on bodies which determines their claim to life.

The stakes are high when it comes to broader discourses and conditions that establish some life as worth maintaining and preserving; some life as worth killing directly – or, as said by Haraway (2008), making “killable” (p. 8); or some life worth removing care from in an act of ‘letting die’. Pest animals or invasive species stories shed light on the management systems that are in place in North America which create the conditions for nonhuman animal life to be killed with sanction, deaths made to be “socially acceptable” (Atchison, Gibbs & Taylor, 2016, p. 2) or even celebratory. Rose (2003) enunciates this in her analysis of flying foxes in Australia that are targeted for eradication. She notes that their extinction does not matter, as flying foxes have “tumbled into the abyss of...unwanted” (p. 16). Rose (2011) raises an important point in her analysis, which is that it does not matter what you have done, but it matters “who you are” (p. 27).

I turn to unloved figures such as pest animals because pitbull-type dogs similarly occupy the status of nuisance animals. Thinking alongside van Dooren, Rose and Heise a radically different perspective of BSL emerges. I argue that what happens under BSL is that pitbull-type dogs are relegated to the violent regimes of management and eradication of which pest nonhuman animals are also victim, in an effort to bring about their *desired*

extinction. Care, attention and mourning are absent from stories of those marginalized nonhuman animals as they remain outside of what is considered life worth sustaining, nourishing and framing as lost life. Informed by these ideas, in what follows I take up an example of a extermination campaign as witnessed in Montréal's BSL and put it into context with broader conversations of extinction. Conflicts such as BSL "make clear that in practice, cultural factors play a crucial role in shaping decisions about the life and death of other species: ideas about what belongs and what does not belong in the city, what is desirable and what is undesirable in one's neighbourhood, what forms of multispecies cohabitation are acceptable and which ones are not" (Heise, 2016, p. 140). I hope bringing BSL into conversation with such a culturally loaded word as extinction will open space to critically ask necessary questions that will lead to an ethical call to disrupt the senseless killing.

### **Pitbull-type Dogs' Extinction Stories: Three Modes of Killing**

In this section, I explore the material and semiotic disintegration of pitbull-type dogs by tracking three modes of killing generated from BSL: physical death (right to kill); death of future generations (sterilization); and the death of human-pitbull-type dog relations, or in my words, contested companionship. It is those processes that work towards the end goal of BSL: a *desired* extinction of pitbull-type dogs from the territory of Montréal.

#### *Physical Death: The Right to Kill*

In this section I use the example of Ontario's dangerous dog law DOLA as a launching pad to understand the right to kill exhibited in Montréal's BSL policy. Ontario is the

largest territory governed by BSL in Canada. Like other jurisdictions, DOLA relies on the assumption that the removal, killing, and eventual death of grandfathered pitbull-type dogs will eliminate human-canine conflict. After implementing the legislation in 2005 the logic maintained is that by 2020 the province will, under the law, have no legal pitbull-type dogs; in other words the *desired* “local extinction” will be reached (Cain, 2016). Similar assumptions were built into the Montréal by-law. As March 31<sup>st</sup> 2017, was the final date to initiate the application to obtain the special permit, subscribing to Ontario’s estimation of the life span of fifteen-year-age for pitbull-type dogs, Montréal would be pitbull-type dog free by 2033.

The initial reading of the legislation afforded the city of Montréal an unrestricted right to kill pitbull-type dogs by declaring them illegal. If pitbull-type dogs were found in shelters, or found illegally with a person, the city could order their immediate death. It was during the first appeal led by the Montréal SPCA in September 2016 that the by-law was amended to redress the ease of distributing death. The amendments to restrain the right to kill were the following: a) that no order for euthanasia may be issued...without a statement by the competent authority to the effect that the dog is dangerous, at risk, stray, dying, gravely injured or highly contagious; b) the guardian of a...pit bull-type dog, may retrieve [them] from a shelter unless the shelter has disposed of [them]; c) a pit bull-type dog may be put up for adoption to be kept outside Montréal’s city limits or taken to a shelter outside Montréal’s city limits (16-060). Those three amendments were to redress, or at least create protocols for the issuing of death.

The Montréal SPCA was contracted by the majority of boroughs in the city to manage animal control. Once BSL went into effect the Montréal SPCA was faced with

the legal obligation to respect and uphold the law, including the responsibility to carry out the expensive burden of transporting pitbull-type dogs out of province or to kill healthy dogs. Strongly disagreeing with the law, the Montréal SPCA decided to not renew their service contract with the city of Montréal. At this time the only other organization that had the capacity and willingness to provide similar animal management services to that of the Montréal SPCA was the for-profit municipal pound Berger Blanc. Since the early 2010s in Montréal, Berger Blanc has built a negative reputation for being unusually cruel and quick to kill (Solyom, 2016). During my research project I met an individual who had rescued twelve pitbull-type dogs ordered to be killed at Berger Blanc. The individual then facilitated the adoption of those dogs (personal communication). Although the SPCA made the initial threat to withdraw from servicing the city, Berger Blanc demonstrated that they were an organization ready to fulfill the need of senseless killing in the name of addressing human-canine conflict in an effort of securing public safety.

As the amendments were to restrict the ability for the city to kill pitbull-type dogs, the amended language performed what Wadiwel (2015) refers to as a discourse of “peace-ability”, an act that furthers legalized violence and expansive regulatory power through masking the underlining domination (p. 106). Even with the three amended points, death was still imminent. For example, a statement from an authority would be easy to issue for the death of the pitbull-type dog; shelters reserve the right to kill the pitbull-type dog if the dog is not claimed within the first two days of holding; and the resources to transport a pitbull-type dog out of province is an incredible financial cost to the shelter that is already resource-stressed. Thus, while the amendments were to redress

excessive killing it is disputable if the amendments provided pitbull-type dogs with actual recourse.

The legislation made it illegal for pitbull-type dogs to become legal companion animals after March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017, while simultaneously policing the pitbull-type dogs that were allowed on the territory. For those dogs without a legal guardian three options remained: either be killed in a shelter, be adopted out of province, or sold to a research facility. In the next section I will hone in on one aspect of the by-law that did not directly kill, but rather enacted a ‘slow death’ (Berlant, 2011).

*The Death of Future Generations: Sterilization as a more “Humane” Way of Killing*

The second death-mode I want to explore is the mandatory sterilization of pitbull-type dogs. As stated in the Montréal by-law, guardians of pitbull-type dogs must provide “proof that the dog has been sterilized or [obtain] a written opinion from a veterinary surgeon establishing that the animal cannot be sterilized” (16-060 16(3)). In contrast, non-pitbull-type dogs did not have mandatory requirements regarding their reproductive status.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, it is not plausible to make the typical argument that the revised animal by-law was invested in reducing the overpopulation of dogs in general (Palmer, Corr, and Sandoe, 2012). Rather, it was invested in foreclosing the opportunity for pitbull-type dogs to reproduce, or in Rose’s (2011) words, to deprive them of “future generations” (p. 106).

One of the key ways to both disturb and manage populations is to intercept their reproductive capacities. Therefore, I argue that pitbull-type dogs under BSL in Montréal

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<sup>27</sup> Although the registration fee for a normal dog tag is reduced by five dollars if sterilized.

were subject to reproductive injustice, as mandatory sterilization operates as a ‘humane’, or slower-er way to kill them. As the by-law was concerned, the 600 pitbull-type dogs registered for the special permit would be the last dogs of this kind to exist. Before I unpack how sterilization functioned as a key strategy in denying future generations of those dogs in an effort of making them extinct, I provide a brief summary of dog sterilization, how sterilization is understood in critical animal literature and beyond, and what it meant to coercively sterilize pitbull-type dogs in Montréal.

The sterilization of bitches involves the removal of ovaries (ovariectomy) or the additional removal of the uterus (ovariohysterectomy). For male dogs castration by surgical removal of the testicles is performed. Currently, the three listed surgeries are the only options to sterilize dogs. Research shows that the benefits of sterilization are weighed more for humans than the nonhuman animals themselves. For example, sterilized dogs are less likely to exhibit undesired behaviour such as spraying or humping and do not contribute to overpopulation (Wayne, 2017). In fact research has shown that sterilizing males significantly reduces their overall well being by making them more vulnerable to prostate cancer and shockingly increases the likelihood of bladder and bone cancer by fourfold (Palmer, Corr, and Sandoe, 2012). As for bitches, health risks are negligible but due to the invasive nature of the procedure complications and harm is possible (see for example Meeshka’s sterilization in Chapter 2). Therefore, in the West as we continue to advocate for the sterilization of dogs we must admit that it is not a “selfless” act because the justifications are solely for the benefit of humans (Armbruster, 2010, p. 766).

Discussions surrounding nonhuman animals and reproduction are contentious. While sterilizing companion animals is considered the responsible thing to do in North America, within animal rights literature scholars question the acceptability of sterilizing nonhuman animals without the ability to obtain consent (Palmer, Corr, and Sandoe, 2012). Marya Torrez (2014) raises the point that “the state and corporations intervene in the pregnancies and manipulate the reproductive capacities of humans and nonhumans for the *purported benefit of society* [emphasis added]” (p. 284). Torrez (2014) contextualizes this conversation in the history of state sterilization programs against human populations that were “undeserving” and not desired to produce (p. 283).

Krithika Srinivasan explores themes of sterilization, euthanasia and breeding for street dogs or unwanted dogs, such as pitbull-type dogs, in the UK. Srinivasan offers a comparison between India and the UK, a country that positions itself as a “world leader in animal welfare”, to reveal how themes of euthanasia, sterilization and breeding challenge the high welfare standards that are said to exist in UK but be lagging in India. Her research illuminates how within the UK animal welfare movement, truth discourses which characterize ownerless dogs or unwanted dogs as “better off dead” remain unchallenged (Srinivasan, 2013, p. 106). If animal control authorities decide to let the dog live they remain subject to what she calls the “ontological choreography of breeding” that allows only certain dogs to procreate (Srinivasan, 2013, p. 115). Moreover, she argues that controlling sterilization, euthanasia and breeding are “exercises of sovereign power” contingent on human world making projects (Srinivasan, 2013, p. 101). The intention behind the control of reproduction is to “prevent unwanted individuals from being born” (Srinivasan, 2013, p. 116). Srinivasan’s research demonstrates that in India,

unlike the UK, dogs are not subjected to the same rigorous oppressive logic regarding their reproduction. Comparative studies such as Srinivasan's prompt us to question the Western animal welfare model, and ask: are there practices that are more aligned with nonhuman animal's interests?

To prevent unwanted individuals from reproducing means that there is an inverse category: there are also individuals wanted for reproduction. In her article that investigates human control of canine sexuality and reproduction, Armbruster presents the view of a veterinarian named Myrna Milani (2003) who believes "fewer dogs with the temperaments to become 'nice family pets' can be found in shelters, necessitating shelters to transfer more acceptable dogs to the shelter or encourage families to purchase dogs rather than rescue" (p. 762). Milani (2003) believes that responsible pet owners are doing a disservice by sterilizing their pets, removing them from the breeding pool and replacing their potential progeny with "more aggressive" less adoptable dogs (p. 762). Milani makes use of loaded language in the animal rescue community that sticks aggression and un-adoptability onto pitbull-type dogs, further exacerbating the issues faced by those dogs that make up the bulk of North American shelters. Milani wrongly assumes that genetics dictate behaviour, resulting in her belief that there must be an ideal 'nice family pet'. She concludes that we should breed specific dogs for the role of companion animal. Armbruster (2010) understands this as evidence that "reproduction of purebreds is controlled to satisfy human preferences and desires, while the widespread [sterilization] of mutts is practiced for their own good" (p. 58).

Thinking expansively with the insights of Torrez, Srinivasan, and Armbruster, I argue that nonhuman animals experience reproductive injustice when humans bring about

their sterilization. In relation to my project, I argue additionally that pitbull-type dogs' undesirability is the main reason we mandate their sterilization. Forced sterilization under BSL is an act of foreclosing future life of pitbull-type dogs rooted in sentiments as expressed on this blog post: "by sterilizing existing pit bulls, down the road our society will be a safer place, without having to instil some sort of genocide" (Christian, 2013).

Again, sterilization is presented as a humane measure to protect pitbull-type dogs from potential future violence such as mass human led massacres of those dogs: we sterilize in the name of care. Such sterilization brings about what can be thought of as what Lauren Berlant (2011) refers to as a form of "slow death", a death that arrives from "wearing out a population" or the regularization of life (p. 95). I am here suggesting that such "slow deaths" also comprise extinction. In the case of BSL, considering sterilization of pitbull-type dogs as a slow death that forecloses future generations reveals the intention is to bring about *desired* extinction. In the next section I investigate the third and final death mode: contested companionship.

#### *Death of a Relationship: Contested Companionship*

Vexing questions abound concerning what species are suitable companion animals, and thus what relationships are acceptable with nonhuman animals. In North America, dogs and cats have been conclusively acceptable recipients of the categorization of companion animal. Marked as companion animal, those nonhuman animals are not consumed, cohabit our homes, are recipients of basic care, and are sometimes considered kin (Fudge, 2008). This relationship is often romanticized, glossing over the neglect, abuse, and death common to companion animal keeping (Wadiwel, 2015). Exploring the breath

of injustice in companion animal keeping in Canada is beyond the scope of my thesis; instead, my research is focused on asking the question: are pitbull-type dogs considered companion animals?

To approach this question, I offer contested companionship as a concept to account for the stigmatized relationships experienced on the margins of normative companionship models (such as regulated relationships). As my master's thesis research has demonstrated, human and pitbull-type dog's relationships are considerably more complicated than other human-dog relationships. Considering the ambivalence towards pitbull-type dogs and consulting literature, I am led to argue that the third extinction process at play in BSL is the re-characterization of pitbull-type dogs as not suitable companion animals, which disavows them from a dog's role in North America.

Contested companionship is a repurposing of Margaret Jane Radin's theorization of contested commodities.<sup>28</sup> Radin distinguishes uncontested and contested commodities. Uncontested commodities are defined as goods and services with value status that remain in good standing "with the belief in commensurability that attaching a value onto something will still allow for non-monetary values on things such as relationships"(1996, p. 1). Yet, there are goods and services that through processes of law and culture become inalienable to the market. Categorized as such, goods and services become prohibited because of the *social disapproval* of accessing them. Once considered inalienable to the market, the good or service in question further is made non-transferable in order to denounce or *eradicate* its existence through material-semiotic practices. Contested

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<sup>28</sup> I admit that I could use Radin's concept as is, as nonhuman animals are commodities or property under current states of capitalism and law, but I chose to reject that status of nonhuman animals and frame it in more kin-like terms.

commodities are thus commodities that are subject to moral or political debate and are made available through carefully regulated circumstances (Radin, 1996).

Radin draws attention to how moral debate can render a commodity contested, and how its contestation has implications for whether it continues to circulate as a commodity at all. Inspired by Radin, I extend her thinking to relate to relationships, dog companionship in particular. The division between Radin's purpose and my own is that in general commodities are not worth fighting for in the social justice sense, whereas companionship is. Yet Radin's work provides a helpful framework for me to think through how BSL frames companionship to pitbull-type dogs. I will demonstrate how pitbull-type dogs are made into contested companion animals through two debates that: contest their status as dogs, and contest their capacity to be companion animals. Following this, I will present a case for the relationship between human guardians and pitbull-type dogs as a form of contested companionship.

#### a) Are Pitbull-Type Dogs Actually Dogs?

*"I have come to believe that the modern pit bull should not be thought of as a dog at all. A dog is man's best friend, but this is an animal that will kill the man, his wife, his children, his parents and the guests in his home. Clearly this is not man's best friend; clearly it is not a "dog" in the sense that we think of a dog". (Philips, 2013)*

Radin identifies the first step in the act of contesting is to call the commodity, or in my case relationship, into cultural and political debates. I argue BSL and the dangerous dog narrative first calls into question if pitbull-type dogs are like other dogs. This is demonstrated by evacuating pitbull-type dogs from other/normal dog categories by creating either dangerous dog by-laws (in addition to other/normal dog laws) or even often relegating them to animal management protocols designed for exotic animals

(Hunter & Brisban, 2016). Hallsworth (2011) reflects that “once constructed as vermin the pit bull was effectively positioned as an outsider, in effect matter out of place whose killing appeared justified just as it is in the case of other animals constructed as vermin” (p. 394). Writing about the British Dangerous Dog Act, Hallsworth quotes a politician at length: “This dog it has been claimed, is essentially *different* [emphasis added] from other respectable members of the canine family. It is unstable and more violent and as such poses a real threat to anyone and everyone around it. The public are victims and it is in the name of public protection that the seizure and killing of these dogs is justified” (Hallsworth, 2011, p. 395). Underpinning such claims are assumptions about pitbull-type dogs’ anatomic abnormalities unlike other dogs, such as having locking jaws, and a bite capacity that surpasses an adult shark (Nopitbullbans, 2007). I have read that the ‘locking jaw’ of a pitbull-type dog possesses the ability to inflict an astounding 1800psi (pounds per square inch), a statistic contrasted to sharks whose jaws have on average 600psi. A study that interrogated this belief found that pitbull-type dog jaws like other average medium sized dogs have a general capacity of 320psi (Delise, 2007, p.108).

A pet, or companion animal, is said be tamed or “de-animalized” through relationships of human dependency (Fudge, 2008, p. 8). In a way, domestic companion animals “are expected to not really be like animals at all” (Bisgould, 2011, p. 127). Aph Ko and Syl Ko (2017) pointedly remark that the “colonial tool of animality affects animals,” meaning animals did not inform our notion of ‘animality’, rather animality informed our notions of animals (p. 124). Ko and Ko (2017) suggest animality is a racist, colonial and speciesist tool that applies the concept of animal/animalization to a “vast social body” to render them destroyable and controllable (p. 124). They close this thought

with the assertion that to have one's animality called upon is to be conceived of as killable. Such animality is at work when we see the invention of the pitbull-type dog as a malignant figure exceeding acceptable forms of animality, rendering them unsuitable or impossible companion animals. It is thus the myth of pitbull-type dogs as *not domesticated* canines that leads to remarks of banishing pitbull-type dogs to a zoo, an acceptable enclosure for their lives according to BSL proponents (Elisa-Jordana, 2016). A primary mechanism of contested companionship is thus to distance pitbull-type dogs from the general category of 'dog', not seeing them as de-animalized pets, but rather re-animalized wild (pest) animals.

As just explained, in the media and law pitbull-type dogs are often positioned as not quite a dog or wild animal, greatly shaping what people believe them to be. Take the passage in *Little Darling's Pinups for Pitbulls: A Celebration of America's Most Lovable Dogs*, for exemplar of pitbull-type dogs existing in a liminal space. Referencing an experience while running a booth at an event, the Franklin writes (2014):

One elderly woman walked past our booth at a tattoo convention and read that we [were] advocating for these companion animals on one of our banners. She stopped in her tracks, looked up at me and asked, "Pit bulls can be companion animals? I thought they were only used for fighting". (p. 11)

This passage stayed with me during my research process, and will always remain with me as a guardian to pitbull-type dogs. During my interviews, such sentiments about pitbull-type dogs as re-animalized or not domesticated surfaced often. Participants said that people have said to them "I did not know pitbull's could be pets" (Fieldnotes). J, said a woman once walked up to her and said that "[Mally] belonged in a zoo" and asked, "why would you adopt that kind of dog, why didn't you get a beagle or something else... such a dangerous decision", clearly demonstrating the social disapproval of their relationships

(J and Mally, interview). What it also demonstrates, however, is the questioning of pitbull-type dogs capacity to be in a domestic unit, as demonstrated in J's experience of being told Mally belonged in a zoo, and not a domestic unit.

From my research I observe that sentiment as being a leading instigator in banning pitbull-type dogs. Questioning the commensurability of pitbull-type dogs to normal dogs is a defining feature underlying BSL debates. To question their capacity to be companion animals opens up space for untruths to be inserted and circulated (see Figure 5.1). The image was shared through a personal communication of a homework sheet a participants child was asked to complete in class. The chart is set up to compare the friendly/pet Saint Bernard to the not friendly/not a good pet pitbull-type dog.

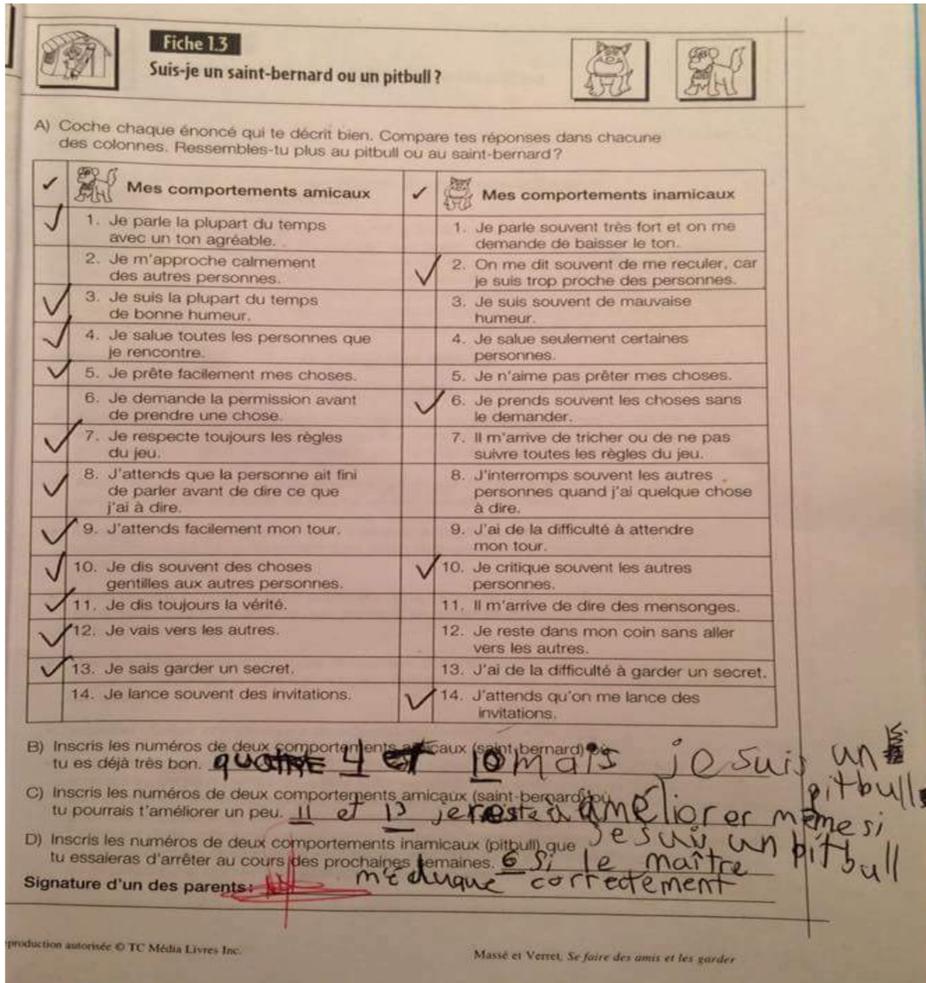


Figure 5.1 Photo of a Montréal grade school child's assignment in 2017 comparing friendly Saint Bernard characteristics to that of unfriendly pitbull-type dog characteristics. Source: Personal Communication.

So what exactly is a good companion animal? And what does BSL do to pitbull-type dogs? In their article, Schuppli and Fraser offer a systematic analysis to evaluate the suitability of nonhuman animals as companion animals in the context of North America. What matters most is the companionship shared between the nonhuman animal and the human guardian (Schuppli and Fraser, 2000, p. 363). Companionship, which Kendra Coulter (2015) has defined as animal's contemporary work, is "the emotional and care work animals do in families providing joy, comfort, and compassion [which is]

immeasurable...because [it] is ubiquitous, some people may take it for granted” (p. 64). Equally important is to consider particular animals’ physical and behavioural abilities to cohabit in a domestic space.

Schuppli and Fraser also offer a framework to assess the suitability of nonhuman animals to be companion animals; of the five categories they suggest I focus on two. Category B accounts for “species that require significant commitment of time and/or resources in order that their use be positive for the animal and the owner” (Schuppli and Fraser, 2000, p. 366). In this category domestic dogs and cats are considered. In contrast, category E stands for “Species that are unsuitable as companion animals because of undue harm or risk of harm to one or more of: the animal, the owner, the community, or the environment” (Schuppli and Fraser, 2000, p. 366). Category E consists of species such as venomous snakes, exotic birds and primates. Each category has a suggested regulation regime such as implementing bans, prohibition of animals’ movement or licensing.

Applying this framework to the Montréal by-law and BSL and in broader discourses of pitbull-type dogs, it becomes obvious that those dogs have been evacuated from the category of suitable companion animal. In a short period of time pitbull-type dogs went from being considered a Category B to Category E. This fall has had great consequences; as previously explored, a dog’s life in North America is valid only through ownership, resulting in an ending to any possible future for every type of this dog. It also is testament to how violent human relationships are with nonhuman animals, even the ones we cherish above all others like dogs and cats.

## b) Contested Companionship

As pitbull-type dogs are legally excavated from the category of dog, and become unsuitable companion animals, how can the relationship shared between humans and pitbull-type dogs be described? In this section I put into sharp relief what contested companionship is by examining instances of community members, friends and family, and even scholars of animal studies calling into question the relationships between pitbull-type dogs and humans.

Twining, Arluke and Patronek (2000) study this reframing of pitbull-type dog companionship in the UK. They conclude that “there was a sense among ...owners of an unofficial canon of appropriate family dogs, such as spaniels or retrievers, among others” (p. 8). Strikingly, when participants adopted pitbull-type dogs it was as if they were transgressing a “tradition” of pet keeping (Twining, Arluke, and Patronek, 2000, p. 8). During my research, participants spoke of reservations expressed by friends before or after the legal re-categorization of pitbull-type dogs as dangerous. For example, A’s mother was concerned for the well being of A when Kyto was adopted (A and Kyto, interview). Similarly, when A was discussing the potential adoption of Midas with a friend, she remembers showing her friend two photos of dogs, one Midas (pitbull-type dog) and the other not a pitbull-type dog. Her friend pointed towards the other dog who was more ‘suitable’ if A wanted to have children one day (A, Midas and Raja, interview). Both of those comments are indicative of general fear surrounding pitbull-type dogs as both Kyto and Raja were adopted during a time when BSL was not governing Montréal.

Another participant shared an experience she had with her mother during the first months of BSL. Both T and her sibling have pitbull-type dogs that are well known and loved by T's mother. One day in conversation she alluded to the anxiety she felt towards her daughter's decision to have pitbull-type dogs. During the first months of BSL in Montréal she would regularly call T sharing stories she read about pitbull-type dogs being inherently dangerous, succumbing to the narratives of the media even though they contrasted her direct experience with her daughter's dogs, and the knowledge they shared with her as anti-BSL advocates (T and Gia, interview). Like the UK research referenced, participants experienced similar denunciations by family, friends and other acquaintances about their chosen dog relationship.

It is not only the rejected possibility of shared love between humans and pitbull-type dogs, but also the stigmatization of pitbull-type dog-human relationships, where it is assumed that the human is committing a grave act of violence by keeping what is perceived as an inherently 'risky' animal. In a chapter called "The Ethics of Animal Training" in a recent pet studies reader, Tony Milligan (2017) writes about animals as part of the family and states: "In the case of certain kinds of dogs, Staffordshire Bull Terriers being an obvious example... [they are] the stuff tragedies are made of. Owners can, and in some cases do, lose sight of the reality of who and what they share their homes with, that is, creatures who remain *inserted* [emphasis added] into a human-dominated environment" (p. 20). Milligan's statement embodies the binary of uncontested and contested companion dogs. His statement assumes pitbull-type dogs are unlike any other dogs; he questions their presence as an insertion, a contrast to how domesticity is automatically granted to other dog breeds/types, where the risk remains

dormant but possible. He gestures to risk as defining one's relationship to pitbull-type dogs.

Recasting pitbull-type dogs as “un-dogs”, as contested companions, has significant impact on their claims to life. In North America the proper place for a dog is in the domestic unit. Therefore, a dog's chance of life is through a relationship with humans, the very definition of their role requires first and foremost a guardian. Without a guardian or relationship to a human being, a dog then has no claim at life. As Martine (2017) writes, “to terminate their relationships with the [pitbull-type dog]” is to terminate the dog's life (p. 294). As pitbull-type dogs remain fixed in narratives of either being inherently dangerous or only found in dog fighting scenarios and never in homes, the possibility of their status as a companion dog remains wholly contested. Because their lives are so dependent on this companionship, the contestation and death of this companionship is one of the mechanisms that propels pitbull-type dogs towards extinction under BSL.

### **Conclusion: Living in a Time of *Desired* Extinction**

In 2017, Martin Coiteux<sup>29</sup>, the Minister of Public Safety, stated, “I like dogs but people need to realize that we need to protect citizens. I encourage all *dangerous dog owners to consider another breed for your next dog* [emphasis added]” (CTV News Montréal, 2017). As I have demonstrated in this chapter, to prohibit a relationship between a dog and human in North America is to cut off access to life for that dog. When I first read

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<sup>29</sup> Coiteux was responsible for introducing Bill-128, the Quebec-wide BSL law. Remarkably, after hosting a 3-day commission consulting experts and organizations on the risks of pitbull-type dogs, he stated “there is no scientific consensus that the idea of going so far as to designate a ban on a specific race (of dogs) is applicable” and redacted the breed specific ordinance in his law (Authier 2018).

Coiteux's comment I was immediately drawn to think of BSL as a form of extinction – or as I have come to understand it, a form of *desired* extinction.

In this chapter by thinking alongside van Dooren, Rose, Mitchell, and Heise I claim that pitbull-type dogs have a particular extinction story, one that I have attempted to tell. I highlight three ways pitbull-type dogs are dealt death, or denied life: by legislated death (euthanization), by slow death (sterilization) and by death of relationship (the contestation of pitbull-type dog companionship, or the removal of pitbull-type dogs from the category of companion animal). The first two modes of death-dealing capture the physical violence to which those dogs are subject. The third mode is a death of relation, as described in the concept of contested companionship that de-domesticates pitbull-type dogs to re-animalize them into being unsuitable companion dogs. Cumulatively, these three modes of death result in the extinguishment of pitbull-type dogs' lives, and the *desired* extinction of those dogs in a governed territory. By categorizing BSL as a form of *desired* extinction, I contribute to the effort of scholars, and members of communities who are challenging the arbitrary human decisions of what life counts as worth living, and what life counts.

## Chapter 6: Concluding Remarks and Reflection

*Galunker was hated by all of mankind, and it bothered him greatly. I'll bet that you'd mind. Because nobody likes to be hated, I deem, no matter how hateful they happen to seem. You'd want to be cherished if you were a worm or a spider or lizard or rodent or germ. You'd hate to be hated if you were a snake, who snuck through the forest and lurked in the lake. (It's hardly your fault if you sneak and you lurk, if sneaking and lurking are just how you work.) You'd resent this if you were a freak or a frog, and Galunker was none of these things. Just a dog. No, Galunker was not even hateful at all. He bolted and bounced; he did not even crawl. (And crawling is not such a rotten thing too if crawling is what you were brought up to do.) But unloved he was, and he always had been; for Galunker, though never his fault, looked real mean. His name was tattooed on the back of his ear, which helped him look fierce (didn't help him to hear). It was never his fault that the people he met, upon meeting Galunker, became so upset, that they flinched or they frowned or they screamed or they screamed; he was not even slightly the way that he seemed (Cooper, 2017, pp. 5-8).*

The above passage is from a children's storybook called *Galunker* (2017), a tale about a pitbull-type dog's encounter with a dogcatcher who intercepts his journey searching for a home. This opening passage speaks the essence of this master's thesis. A pitbull-type dog is 'just a dog', and a worm is just a worm. However, living in a world of human domination and speciesism, animals like pitbull-type dogs become so much more than 'just dogs'. Social constructions and discourses transform an animal like a pitbull-type dog into a figure of fear. Assigning fear to their bodies impacts how others move around, perceive, and value them. This fear is embodied in gestures ranging from people crossing the street to the disapproving conversations that take place when alerting friends and family of the recent adoption of a pitbull-type dog. In my thesis I set out to understand the reason for such conflict, but to my dismay intellectualizing hate is a much bigger project than I can take on.

Instead, I shifted my thinking to unpack what happens when fear concretizes in law. BSL is a law that either bans or restricts a breed or type of dog, often pitbull-type

dogs in a territory. Montréal, Quebec, my current home, became my field site for research after the death of Vadnais by a rumoured pitbull-type dog in June 2016. Admittedly, this project has been deeply emotionally taxing as both living and working with the subjects of my study while researching BSL. To take on the fear of having my family taken away, the possibility of my workplace raided, to have these fears frozen quietly in my chest while reading through literature discussing dog fighting, all while confronting the constant onslaught of similar legislation elsewhere, has left me hopeless.

It seems every day another negative story surfaces regarding pitbull-type dogs. The New York Guggenheim exhibition in September 2017 was the show “Dogs that cannot Touch Each Other” by the artists Sun Yuan and Peng Yu who recorded pitbull-type dogs leashed, on treadmills and facing one another. Taken from the artist abstract, they claim the exhibit “fundamentally changed the rules of pit bull fighting. The result was a contest of the spirit, unlike the vicious physical dogfights in the *past*. By invalidating the assault, the confrontation and animal instincts of the pitbull terriers in an art gallery setting, the artists *allowed us to look beyond the cruel reality of pit bull fighting, and revealed an existing potential for violence and confrontation* [emphasis added]” (Yuan & Yu, 2003).

Yuan and Yu defended their use of American Staffordshire Terriers because they felt that breed of dog was pugnacious, a word that denotes qualities of willingness and eagerness to fight. Yuan and Yu asserted that what they did was not animal cruelty, but a display of the true nature of pitbull-type dogs (Yuan & Yu, 2003). However, what is absent from their defense is the conditions they created as human beings, to enliven the reactive (read aggressive) behaviour in the dogs. All too often with dog reactivity the

conditions in which it is fostered are forgotten, and instead simpler stories emerge that attribute the behaviour to the innate qualities of the animal. Hope for a shift in perception appears vacant when consulting the media for stories of pitbull-type dogs who are constantly made to accept the blame or wrongdoings of any dog who behaves outside of the confines of what is deemed acceptable by humanity.

In this thesis I fundamentally challenge the construction of pitbull-type dogs as inherently violent or confrontational. I examine the ongoing deployment of this construction, as well as its affects and effects for the lives of pitbull-type dogs and their guardians. I hope to contribute to the efforts that challenge the treatment and legislation of pitbull-type dogs as “collective members of a generic breed” rather than as individuals (Hogue 2015, p. 38). In what follows I summarize my key findings and conclusions and highlight future directions for research that my project sparks. I then briefly discuss the limitations of this research project, and reflect on the current state of BSL in Montréal.

### **Thesis Summary**

In Chapter One I introduce the structure of my thesis by providing a chapter outline and theoretical backbone that frames my thesis. First, I introduce Ahmed’s pivotal work investigating the concept of fear in relation to the spatialization of bodies. Second, I introduce critical animal geography, which, like Ahmed, focuses on how and why bodies move through space as they do. Unlike Ahmed, critical animal geography considers nonhuman animals as implicated in political and spatialization projects. I expose three central tenets of critical animal geography that I have weaved throughout my project: the

position that animals are political subjects, the argument that space of encounter matters, and the commitment to sharing space.

I maintain that pitbull-type dogs are “subjects of, and subject to, political practices” such as the cultures surrounding companionship, alternative economies such as dog fighting, and legislation regimes such as BSL (Hobson, 2007, p.151). Moreover, their subjectivities are contingent to space and place. In Chapters 4 and 5 I highlight the significance of spatialization and encounter. For example, my research showed that walking with a pitbull-type dog attracted negative attention such as street harassment, and a sense of exclusion. Considering how both the material and discursive landscapes are dictated by human ideology, the third tenant of critical animal geography offers an ethic to strive for: shared space. At the heart of my project is a commitment to advocate for a shift towards pitbull-type dogs that re-stories them as lovable and companionable, rather than disposable and dangerous.

Chapter 2 consults literature regarding multispecies ethnography and intimate feminist geographies that foreground “grief and danger as political dimensions in...research” (Gillespie, 2017, p.160). As I state in my positionality statement, this project matters greatly to my community and my own family as I am both a caregiver and guardian to pitbull-type dogs. Reviewing this chapter, my greatest limitation emerges as the ethical implication of including nonhuman animals as research participants in a meaningful way. I admit that researchers like myself remain limited by our own capacity to properly translate nonhuman animals’ communication. However, research practices are slowly reforming practices to attune to different modes of communication. In Catherine McKinnon’s (2004) words, “Who asked the animals? ...do animals dissent from human

hegemony? I think they often do. They vote with their feet by running away. They bite back, scream in pain, withhold affection, approach warily, fly and swim away” (p. 270). In this thesis I have sought to foreground such non-verbal expressions of dissent, discomfort, or joy, among my pitbull-type dog participants. I presented the dogs I interviewed as individual, embodied beings living under BSL. By orientating methodological practices to concepts of care, as Donovan states, we can meaningfully “listen[] to other life-forms regardless of how alien they may seem to us” (Donovan, 2006, p. 315).

In Chapter 3 I present a limited historiography of pitbull-type dogs and review the management practices that have governed them since the 1970s. Nast, a leading scholar and geographer, traces the history of pitbull-type dogs. Their history begins in Victorian England where coal miners bred dogs to be companion animals in the coal mines, including fighting them against one-another in an act of replicating self-representation of the miners. Pitbull-type dogs were eventually exported alongside British colonial expansion to North America serving similar roles in the coal mines and other exploitative working class geographies. Those dogs also were employed in unimaginable cruelties of anti-blackness to control and terrorize enslaved people. The second phase mentioned spans the 1970s until the mid-2000s when Michael Vick’s Bad Newz Kennelz caught the attention of the animal rescue community.

In the latter section of this chapter I introduce BSL as a form of panic policy that manages pitbull-type dogs through various mechanisms of control such as grandfather policies, muzzling, ban, and restrictions. A major problem I identify with BSL is the reliance on visual identification, which has been proven to be an ineffective evaluator.

The assumption is that a ban or restriction on a certain type of dog will eliminate human-canine conflict. Montréal pursued this panic policy and its ideologies in 2016 after the death of Vadnais by Lucifer, a dog that at that time was severely neglected by his guardians. As discussed in this chapter, making pitbull-type dogs accountable to all human-canine conflict that exists overlooks the real reasons for such instances to occur. In sum, I argue BSL is a discriminatory policy against pitbull-type dogs and if applicable, their guardians.

In Chapter 4 I present my research that investigates how space is navigated and embodied once BSL is in effect. Reviewing my interview transcripts it became evident that the fear that sticks to pitbull-type dogs manifests legally as spatial injustice. Spatial injustice, as defined in this chapter, is the denial of certain bodies' access to space, through social and political tools such as laws. To understand the specifics of spatial injustice in this case, in this chapter I ask: what work does law do? By thinking expansively with Ahmed, and legal geographers such as Braverman and Blomley, I present four effects that thematically emerged during my research. The four effects include: change to walking patterns, increased street harassment, decline of community membership and the extreme effect of leaving. As I demonstrate in this chapter, approaching law through an investigation of its effects shows how law works and its effects, rather than just what its content is (Valverde, 2003).

In Chapter 5 I speculate what is intended as the final goal of BSL. I argue that the overarching function of BSL is to facilitate death through three modes: death of the dog (physical); death of future generations (sterilization); and death of relationship (contested companionship). I host this conversation in the context of extinction literature where I

engage with scholars who advocate for greater attention to extinction processes and the beings that are rendered unlovable, undesirable and ungrievable. As I have thread throughout this thesis, pitbull-type dogs are unfairly distinguished from other dogs, sometimes even being referred to as ‘un dogs’, and are in many cases cast out of the category of ‘companion animal’ – a casting out whose consequence is ultimately death. All three modes thus work collaboratively towards the death and eradication of pitbull-type dogs, the true ulterior motivation of BSL that is never explicitly stated in its legislation. Explicating the overarching goal of BSL demonstrates that pitbull-type dogs governed by the law are subjected to *desired* extinction.

### **Future Directions**

Mulling over my thesis as a whole two potential projects emerge for future research, stemming from gaps I found or from the need for primary research. The first is in relation to Chapter 2’s discussion of methodology. I find it particularly important that scholars of critical animal geography further work to develop methodologies that draw nonhuman animals into research practices as participants. I agree with Corman’s (2017) suggestion that a promising path to do this is through engaging in ethology. An example of this kind of research is the eagerly awaited forthcoming book by Gillespie titled *The Cow with the Ear Tag #1389* (Chicago Press) that is sure to further multispecies ethnography methodologies.

Another project I see as important is a critical empirical investigation into the current trend of pitbull-type dogs becoming the new police dog. Police canine units the United States of America are increasingly recruiting pitbull-type dogs, especially those

found in shelters, Many advocates, including the influential organization Animal Farm Foundation, support the recruitment, considering it a positive step in canine equality. I would argue the opposite. Considering the historiography presented in Chapter 2, I think a project that looks at the history of using pitbull-type dogs to terrorize and police racialized bodies in relation to contemporarily incorporating pitbull-type dogs into the police efforts would be mutually fascinating and imperative to resisting particular constructions of pitbull-type dogs. Personally, I advocate for and hope to see future research that calls for unchaining pitbull-type dogs from being implicated again in a system that predominantly terrorizes racialized humans (see Wall, 2016 for a discussion on police dogs and racialized terror). Moreover, it is important to ask ourselves if this is a good relation between humans and canines, as well if the life of a police dog is a life we want pitbull-type, or dogs of any breed or type, to live?

### **Limitations of Research**

During my research process I exclusively interviewed individuals who were guardians to pitbull-type dogs and the dogs themselves. Despite several attempts, I never interviewed the owners of Bark Avenue Montréal. This was due in part to the fact that the time we spent together consistently overlapped with the work I did at their business, or due to their time commitments or parenting duties, which inevitably prevented us to take advantage of any hour we planned to talk. I highlight this as a limitation as I believe their perspective would have allowed me to explore some details in my project with increased nuance. Their lives as business owners and experienced pitbull-type dog

guardian/advocates for over decades would have concretized and strengthened the overall depth and impact of my research.

Another limitation of my research was the language barrier I experienced as an Anglophone researcher in the predominantly French-speaking province of Quebec. Many of the political exchanges that took place over the course of BSL in Montréal were in French, making them generally less accessible, or if translated, subject to inaccuracies.

### **Final Remarks**

*“There is a lot that we may never know about the motivation and behaviour of nonhuman organisms, but we can imagine that they, like us, want to live” (Tsing, 2015, p. 172).*

The primary discourse circulating around pitbull-type dogs says more about the human ability to craft narratives and feared subjectivities than about the dogs themselves.

Acknowledging that requires us to slow down, open our hearts, and pay attention to the hierarchies of power at play through the careful examination of processes, such as BSL, that precede and ultimately shape our perceptions. Like the fictional Galunker who is just a *dog*, so too are the many dogs who I interviewed, Clementine and Eleanor who are my kin, and the many pitbull-type dogs living in the city of Montréal and beyond. Yet, the introduction of severe legislation like BSL only further perpetuates the narratives of dangerousness that as I argued re-animalizes and de-domesticates pitbull-type dogs. How do we deflate this image of pitbull-type dogs? And challenge the fear that affectively makes every movement made with a pitbull-type dog coloured by hostility.

I am fortunate that I am able to tell story of hope with pitbull-type dogs as during my research project BSL was repealed due to a change of government on December 20<sup>th</sup>,

2017. Yet, the stigmatization of pitbull-type dogs compounded with the year of BSL remains intact. From my own experiences since that date, much of what I report in this thesis continues and speaks to a broader stigma encircling companionship to pitbull-type dogs. I depart my research knowing this will be a project for life: pitbull-type dogs, like all nonhuman animals, will continue to be victim to human control, domination and discourses that treat their lives flippantly, if acknowledging them at all. Living with a pitbull-type dog means Googling the next place you plan to move to see if they have legislation in place, and if so, if it is possible to “pass-a-bull” one’s pitbull-type dog or not (Goss, 2015, p. 37).

Reflecting on my masters’ project I am very grateful and appreciative for what this project allowed me to do as a researcher with the goals of committing to social justice and taking an active role in that change. I was able to listen, corroborate and validate my participant’s experiences, I was able to organize with a resilient group of people who eventually overturned BSL in Montreal in December 2017 after making the animal by-law a primary debate issue in the municipal election. Over the past two years I have had the pleasure to meet – through text or in the velveteen skin – hundreds of pitbull-type dogs who exude brilliance, love, resilience, forgiveness and a will. It is this that I turn to for hope. Reflecting on all those dogs I met, cared for, and dwelled with, alongside their human companions, I am moved by the unexhausted wilfulness. Like my participant Justin, who moved to Vancouver and has since shared with me the joys Scottie and Meeshka experience when swimming in the ocean. In a world where BSL can uproot families over night my project has demonstrated the resilience amongst those

impacted. The commitment to stay together in spite of having ones relationship contested in hostile geographies is what I hoped to have captured in this research project.

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**Appendix A: A typical list of questions asked during an interview.**

1. Tell me about “dog(s) name” biography. How did “dog(s) name” come into your life? Had you been spent time with pitbull-type dogs before? Did you know about BSL going into the guardianship?
2. Did any of your friends, family or acquaintances in life have reservations?
3. Before June 2016 did you experience any harassment on the street or in other public and private spaces against how your dog looked?
4. What about in immediate aftermath of June 2016 in those same spaces? Did you have to make adjustments to daily routines such as walking?
5. Did you register your dog under the special permit? If no, explain why. If yes, walk me through the process from your contact with the Access Point of Montréal up until you successfully received the orange tag in the mail?
6. Did you contact Maurice Bernard, the City’s contracted breed clinic ID specialist?
7. What other contact did you have with the city ie. 311?
8. Have you encountered or seen a by-law officer or vehicle in your neighbourhood?
9. If someone approached you and said “I did not know these dogs could be pets,” how would you respond?
10. Do you have any final questions for me, or further experiences you would like to share?