

Cats and cat people
The poetics and politics of animal-human relationship

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To explore crucial connections between humans and non-humans, I will take into account a specific figure, the cat lady, and the relationships established with the cats she takes care in some neighbourhoods in Palermo. A definition of this figure (a person feeding feral cats in some particular spaces of the city) involves several important features describing the social phenomenon: (i) a specific activity, (ii) a form of rearranged space, (iii) a categorization of the balance feral/tamed, (iv) and an actor network created by cat people taking turns in order to take care of the animals. Firstly, (i) the activity is characterized not only by the feeding in itself but also by a trajectory to follow to reach the different colonies of cats and by a programming of the day and the quantity/quality of food; from this point of view, the cat-feeding can be seen as a daily *narrative quest* to realize and renew in time. Secondly, besides the trajectory realized by the cat person, a second feature concerns (ii) the general reorganization of the urban spaces since sidewalks and street corners are covered with bowls and other instruments placed to change spaces into some kind of home for cats; this point is particular meaningful because cats are feral but the rearrangement of space by the cat people involves a new focus on the usual distinction private home/outside spaces. Thirdly, by feeding cats outside their homes, (iii) cat people also restructure the opposition between what is in principle considered as feral or tamed. Fourthly, in order to take care of cats, (iv) cat people have to contact each other periodically and also to meet people during the daily rounds establishing, therefore, a real and true actor-network. By emphasizing these features, I maintain that the phenomenon of cat people should be seen as a total social fact going beyond the usual definition of a single woman, in need of some love and having rare social interactions. Symmetrically, I argue for a definition of the animality including spatial, temporal and actorial forms of relationships. By focusing on this phenomenon, I intend to open up the opposition human/animal, usually taken as a main reference, to other semiotic categories and to the practices themselves involved in the process of 'taking care'. For comparative reasons, but also to displace my gaze, I will make some references to other animals and relationships in other regions of the world: monkeys (Cormier), birds (Feld), domestic animals (Haraway), insects (Raffles), dogs (Safonova and Sántha).

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