

## Tales of Cruelty and Belonging: In Search of an Ethic for Urban Human-Wildlife Relations

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***Abstract:** In the summer of 2011, a Toronto resident was charged with animal cruelty for beating a litter of ‘nuisance’ raccoons in his backyard with a shovel. The subsequent media furore, and the organisation of a local anti-raccoon rally, revealed deep tensions in narratives of urban belonging. This paper looks at how the rhetoric of animal cruelty is grounded in notions of civility that police the moral boundaries of the city. I discuss possibilities for an ethic to guide urban human-wildlife that can challenge the limiting framework of civility and move toward a deeper recognition of our non-human neighbours.*

***Keywords:** urban wildlife, raccoons, animal cruelty, animal geography, denizenship*

In the summer of 2011, Toronto resident Dong Nguyen's arrest over the alleged backyard beating of a litter of baby raccoons made headlines across Canada. The incident spawned at least sixty Canadian newspaper articles and provoked a spate of passionate op-ed pieces, both in the mainstream news sources and on blogs. Hundreds of readers hitched comments to online news reports. Raccoon conflicts became the issue of the hour on radio and TV shows during the weeks following the incident.

According to the majority of these sources, Nguyen was witnessed by a neighbour hitting several baby raccoons in his backyard with a shovel. The neighbour called the police. When the police arrived, an adult raccoon – the babies' mother – was still lingering nearby, attempting to move the babies out of the area. One injured baby was retrieved by the police. Nguyen was arrested and charged with cruelty to animals and possessing a dangerous weapon. He was photographed by reporters while the police led him, handcuffed, on the 'perp walk' (Preville 39) from the front door of his house to one of several patrol cars that had attended the call.

The coverage of Nguyen's case did not end with his arrest. Polarised public reaction to the incident triggered an 'anti-raccoon rally' where 'pro- and anti-raccoon protesters' gathered to stake out their ground (Chen and Vlachos). Raccoon advocates rallied for stricter cruelty laws that would penalise offenders like Nguyen. His sympathisers chastised the municipal government for their hands-off approach to urban wildlife management, which, they argued, made situations such as Nguyen's inevitable ('Man Organizing'). Several months later, a *Toronto Life* editorial, calling for lethal control of Toronto raccoons, suggested the city would do well to stop seeing itself as a 'wildlife preserve.' The author offered one qualification to his harsh prescription: if raccoons were to be killed, he said, they should be killed 'kindly' (Preville 39).

Media coverage reflected a public dialogue that ricocheted between topics of animal cruelty and human/animal rights of residence. The two topics, it was clear, were deeply entangled. But how do they relate? What kinds of behaviours – both human and raccoon – are socially acceptable in the city? This paper argues that human-wildlife interactions in the city are shaped by narratives of socio-spatial belonging. Using Nguyen's case as an illustration, I break this argument down into three interdependent claims. The first is that animal cruelty is part of a broader narrative of moral order that centres on civil behaviour. Since both humans and animals

can be stigmatised through this narrative, cruelty can manifest itself as a form of contested belonging. The second is that this narrative of civility is inseparable from its spatial logic. The moral order in cases such as that of Nguyen is a distinctly urban one. The third claim is that an ethic for human-wildlife relations must be sensitive to these socio-spatial dynamics. Drawing on Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka's application of citizenship theory to animal rights, I explore ways that a workable ethic might grow and develop out of a concept of shared urban space.

## Contextualising Cruelty

Animal cruelty laws have been widely criticised as ineffective tools for protecting animals. Most of the criticism centres on the highly interpretive nature of anti-cruelty laws, which typically prohibit only 'unnecessary' suffering. Because humans set the parameters, the notion of necessity is 'defined in a perfectly circular, self-serving manner' and so has no power to challenge whether a given use of animals is intrinsically exploitative (Bisgould 264). Animal rights scholars have commented on the futility of legal instruments that combine animal protection with culturally sanctioned animal abuse. The same laws that prevent cruelty also license 'animal exploitation for which there is some recognisable humane interest at stake, even the most trivial (such as testing cosmetics), or the most venal (such as saving a few pennies in factory farming)' (Donaldson and Kymlicka 4). How we interpret the necessity of animal suffering depends in part on what we consider the 'natural' state of an animal to be. In one particularly circular legal act, notes Siobhan O'Sullivan (37), the main section prohibits the permanent confinement of animals while a subsection of the act excludes from this prohibition animals that are *meant* to be confined (e.g., those bred for intensive agricultural production). Cruelty laws are highly context-specific; the law regards companion rabbits and rabbits bred for consumption differently. Animals are afforded different levels and types of protection based on 'where [the animal] resides and/or the purpose for which [he or she] is being maintained' (O'Sullivan 28).

We can already see how there might be conceptual problems with applying cruelty protections of this sort to urban raccoons, whose 'natural' state – the place where they belong – is contested. In the Nguyen case, a debate about cruelty was transformed into a contentious

dispute over spatial legitimacy. Some participants in the ensuing discussion expressed disbelief at the humanitarian attention directed at an animal that represented nothing but a nuisance to city dwellers (Leung). Those on the other side of the fence felt, in contrast, that the story was newsworthy. They responded to the vulnerability of the baby raccoons and the anguish of a panicked mother. More than this, though, they were motivated by the fact that the cruelty had taken place in a *visible* space, not behind the doors of a laboratory or a slaughterhouse.

O’Sullivan claims, in fact, that the issue of visibility is the main source of the inconsistencies we typically find in cruelty laws. Economic interests certainly play a part, but their effect has typically been overstated by animal ethics scholars (O’Sullivan 4). Drawing on historical and contemporary evidence, she demonstrates a strong correlation between how visible an animal’s suffering is and how much legal protection the animal receives. Highly visible acts of cruelty are quick to attract the attention of the public and policy-makers; those that happen out of sight are comparatively under-regulated.

Visible cruelty is socially distasteful, to be sure. But we need to go beyond the correlation of visibility with cruelty to examine how cruelty functions as a social technology. Animal protection laws do not simply *document* the distress of witnessing cruelty, but rather are part of a larger public rhetoric that aims to *expel* from the city those acts and agents that do not fit within the urban moral order. This becomes apparent when we see how the rhetoric of cruelty nestles within a wider discourse about civility and urban spaces.

## Civility and Morality

The rhetoric of animal cruelty has long been a tool for shaping the boundaries of belonging. Harriet Ritvo’s compelling history of the relational framing of animal practices and class conflict in Victorian England suggests that animal cruelty, since its conception as a social problem, has been as much about defining its perpetrators as protecting its victims. Cruelty laws and penalties, for example, disproportionately targeted the working class (Ritvo 133; Kean 154). Early animal advocates in the mid-nineteenth century were often aristocrats who criticised the activities of the lower class, such as bull-baiting (Turner 26) and horse-flogging (Ritvo 138).

They tended to turn a blind eye to fox hunting and other questionable animal practices that were associated with the upper classes (Ritvo 134).

The Victorian condemnation of animal cruelty became, like many other reform movements of the age, a ‘rhetoric of moral distinction’ that separated the civil classes from the supposed savages (Ritvo 135). The bestial working class offenders were thought to be cruel to animals because they were *like* animals – ‘Humaneness’ (= humanness) emerged as a defining value of the middle class. Because humane attitudes separated the middle class from the lower class and bound them to the upper one, it remained central to the mission of societal improvement during the second half of the nineteenth century (Kean 61). Civility began to emerge as a form of social power that was vital in maintaining the moral order.

An emphasis on cruelty-as-incivility remains a prominent theme in modern animal advocacy. Today the classist framing begun in the Victorian era is more often employed to denigrate racialised or ethnic groups, to show their otherness by framing certain of their cultural animal practices as backwards or cruel<sup>1</sup> (Elder, Wolch and Emel 185). The power of the incivility frame is evidenced by the stickiness of the label. Humane society workers who market cruelty cases to the public tend to avoid graphic images because they fear ‘charges of incivility,’ despite their benevolent intent (Arluke 184). Even conducting academic research on cruelty, Arnold Arluke observes, is enough to mark one as a cruelty sympathist, tainted by association (12).

What is at stake in these battles over civility and savagery, and compassion and cruelty, is not so much our treatment of animals as our own humanity, expressed through the notion of a moral ordering. Media coverage of contemporary ‘ugly’ or egregious cases of animal cruelty, Arluke observes, reflect polarised public reactions. Two dominant and competing ideas stand out: one, that acts of animal cruelty threaten the moral order by perverting human civility, and two, that too much concern about the welfare of animals undermines human superiority. The first idea, that cruelty is a threat to moral order, can be seen in media rhetoric about the pathology of individuals who are charged with committing animal cruelty: suffering animals are aligned with defenceless humans and their attackers are compared to ‘psychos’ and ‘serial killers’ who commit violent acts against people (Arluke 192). This kind of rhetoric emerged in the polemical media coverage of the Nguyen case. Certain reports characterised the scene as a

tragic family drama: the mother raccoon was desperately trying to protect her babies who were letting out ‘piercing screams’ and making noises ‘like a young child’ as they were being attacked (Haniff and Hauch). The mother raccoon was reportedly seen carrying away two dead kits after Nguyen had ‘bashed’ their heads (Lamberti).

The second idea, the notion that too much public concern about animal cruelty threatens the status of humans, was also reflected in the Nguyen media coverage. Some used human comparisons to remark on the absurdity of Nguyen’s treatment by police. As one neighbour remarked, ‘the way this gentleman was treated – the handcuffs – it was like he killed a child’ (Hume, ‘Anti-raccoon’). Raccoons were pictured as dangerous urban pests, unworthy of human protection. Under a stock photo of an open-mouthed raccoon<sup>2</sup> captioned ‘Ready to Rumble,’ *Toronto Star* columnist Heather Mallick sympathised with Nguyen’s act of garden-defence, asserting that the ‘culture of mercy has gone on too long,’ and that the city should not be protecting the rights of ‘shifty little creatures’ who ‘come out of the birth canal sacking and looting.’ It was not bad human behaviour at issue, they argued, but bad animal behaviour. However bad behaviour was defined, it was clear that it was not welcome in city space – detractors claimed that urban raccoons had become a ‘menace to public health and private property’ (Preville 40). Raccoon advocates posted flyers around the neighbourhood labelling Nguyen as a ‘disgusting animal torturer’ and calling for him to move out (‘Animal Activists’; Preville 39). ‘I was shocked and appalled,’ said one neighbour, ‘I’m an animal lover, but even if I wasn’t this is barbaric cruelty, which has no place in our society or in this neighbourhood’ (Hume, ‘Man Arrested’).

## Shaping the Urban Moral Order

Social and spatial belonging, as these examples show, are tightly entwined. The voices of both Nguyen’s allies and his critics reveal a moral order in which civility polices the borders of the city. Residents in rural areas surrounding Toronto characterised the public reaction to Nguyen’s case as a characteristically urban one, calling the situation ‘utter nonsense’ and suggesting the litigious fuss over Nguyen’s act of property protection could happen ‘only in Toronto’

(Woodcock). ‘Country people know how to handle varmints’ one columnist declared, ‘Blam! But in the city, varmints are known as “wildlife” and must be protected at all costs’ (Wente).

This narrative of urban civility is intimately attached to the history of animal cruelty legislation in the West, which has been less a story about ending violence toward animals as it has been about making it disappear from urban spaces. Spurred by the ubiquitous presence of animal cruelty in the streets of downtown London in the early nineteenth century, moral reformists underlined this role for civility when they complained about the morally degrading effects animal cruelty had on those who committed the acts and those who were forced to watch (Kean 58). Certain mid-nineteenth century cruelty laws were explicitly designed to thwart such degradation by restricting the visibility of suffering – one bill, for example, aimed to protect children from witnessing animal slaughter, and advocated for the destruction of strays, whose emaciated conditions were upsetting to onlookers (Burt 37).

The Smithfield Cattle Market, located in the centre of London until the mid-nineteenth century, is an important example of how notions of civility operate as a form of border-control. Men drove cattle through town to the market, prodding and beating them. Animals at the market were slaughtered in full view of passers-by. Public dialogue on the Market was coloured by concerns about the moral impacts of ‘beasts’ in the center of London (Philo 669). Some contended that the spectacle of violence encouraged gin houses and other establishments of debauchery to flourish in the area. The city started to emerge as a ‘refined’ space that needed to be protected (Philo 670; 674). Some protesters even asserted the cruelty was caused by the Market’s confinement to a small city space, implying that moving the Market was not just an out-of-sight, out-of-mind tactic but a means by which animal welfare could be improved (Philo 670). The link between animal visibility and welfare remains central to contemporary animal advocacy; O’Sullivan’s survey of animal activists’ communication strategies showed that exposing suffering that has been moved out of public view is central to their approach (O’Sullivan 45).

Civility, we see, is a principle that has the power to actively expel those who challenge the socio-spatial boundaries of the moral order. The city, conceptually separated from the wild through this same rhetoric of civility, becomes a physical and metaphorical space for well-behaved people. This logic has not only affected humans; over the last twenty years, scholars in

cultural geography have begun to pay more attention to the ways that urban animals are connected to the spaces they inhabit (Emel, Wilbert and Wolch 409), and how particular animals fall onto the ‘continuum between inclusion and exclusion’ (Philo 667). Animals become ‘matter out of place’ when they transgress the ‘socio-spatial order which is created and policed around them by human beings’ (Philo 656). As the public debate around Nguyen’s case highlights, wild animals in the city have become victims of a conceptual problem encapsulated by the oxymoronic term *urban wildlife*.

## Renegade Raccoons

In the Toronto raccoon case, advocates for the raccoons wanted Nguyen exiled for his bad behaviour. Nguyen’s supporters wanted the raccoons banished for theirs. Humanness, as Judith Butler reminds us, is not a category but a value, a ‘shifting prerogative’ of who is worthy of moral consideration (76). Paradoxically, some humans may not be afforded much of this value, and some animals may be assigned a lot. Value is assigned, in part, based on how well a body seems to belong in its designated space.

But what happens when a body doesn't fit anywhere? One of the central problems with traditional animal rights theory, Donaldson and Kymlicka argue, is that it is based on a mythical dichotomy between free, independent wild animals and helplessly dependent domestics (67). These two categories, they note, are flawed in a number of ways, not the least of which is that they completely ignore the many animals who don't fit in either group – what they call liminal species – but still share city space with humans. The raccoons in Nguyen’s yard exemplify this liminal category. Their in-between status is reflected in media representations of human-raccoon interactions. Newspaper editorials reflect a fierce ambivalence about raccoons, frequently characterising them as savage and sweet, interesting and wretched, often in the space of a single sentence. They become ‘adorable urban vermin’ (Luther 29). Wild animals in the city, says Jennifer Wolch, tend to be assimilated to the categories of pest and pet. Pests ‘are implicitly granted agency in affecting the urban environment,’ whereas those seen as pets more passively ‘provide companionship, an aesthetic amenity to property owners, or recreational opportunities’ (Wolch 36). Raccoons, however, can be both at once – a scourge on the city and



yet a treasured vestige of wildness in an urban landscape. Nathalie Karvonen, director of a busy wildlife rehabilitation centre in Toronto, comments about raccoons that ‘half the people hate them, but the other half love them’ (Hume, ‘What the #!%\*?’).

A few months prior to the Nguyen incident, CBC’s *The Nature of Things* released *Raccoon Nation*, a short TV documentary. The film referred to Toronto as the ‘raccoon capital of the world,’ a phrase which the media proceeded to repeat with gusto in articles and posts about the Nguyen case.<sup>3</sup> A central theme of the documentary was raccoons’ extreme adaptability to urban living and their ability to defy human-set boundaries. A new kind of ‘super-raccoon’ had been created by city life, it suggested, one that is distinct from its rural cousins. Made smarter and bolder through confronting the many challenges of city space, the new urban raccoon is more skilled at besting human technologies. Despite their exponential population growth – a twenty-fold increase over the last seventy years – raccoons are becoming more adept at exploiting human habitats by stealth. The makers of the documentary highlighted Toronto-based research that made use of various surveillance technologies: infrared cameras eyed raccoons travelling by night using their own ‘above-ground highway system.’ Researchers tracked radio collared raccoons and made digital maps of their nightly movements. A thriving raccoon nation, the film-makers suggest, was quietly emerging while Torontonians slept.

Underlining such clandestine activities doesn’t help raccoons, who, like other liminal animals, are already ‘doomed to be considered morally transgressive’ inside the bounds of the city (Jerolmack 88). Lauren Corman looks at parallels between the way that raccoons and freegans,<sup>4</sup> both scavengers of city waste, are perceived as threats to a consumerist ideology. Serving as neither producers nor legitimate consumers, both groups are marked as ‘beyond acceptable to civil society’ (Corman 38) through representations of them as ‘dirty, disruptive, and conniving freeloaders’ (Corman 32). The rhetoric of animality utilised for both groups often centres on the notions of dirt and pollution – concepts, Corman notes, frequently used to dehumanise racial groups – that threaten human purity and moral order (39). Dan O’Brien’s poem, ‘Raccoons’, highlights the unsettling nature of these liminals:

‘...every evening  
they'd return, with their dexterous,  
human hands, and leave the yard

littered with our shame: diapers  
 filled with shit, the carcasses  
 of chicken roasters, tampons  
 and maxi pads, our father's  
 condom wrappers. All flung out  
 in the pachysandras, caught  
 in the teeth of a rotting  
 fence. All cooking in the sun  
 and the heavenly rattle  
 of the August cicadas.  
 All desecrated further  
 by their scat like berries flung  
 and sizzling with flies.' (51)

Raccoons – irreverent, indecent transgressors of the boundaries that separate us from our own animality – threaten the boundaries of the urban moral order. If, as we have seen, narratives about cruelty to animals implement morality as a tool of socio-spatial discipline, what can it mean to use the concept of cruelty to protect animals who are *themselves* transgressors of that order? The moral order is exactly what was at contest in debates about the Nguyen's case. Whose behaviour was less civil – Nguyen, as an apparent abuser of animals, or the Toronto raccoons themselves? At the root of this contestation is the notion that what we owe to animals depends on whether we see them as belonging to urban space and cooperating in the larger social project. What kind of ethic, then, might help us develop a picture of urban space that allows inhabitation by both humans and raccoons?

### **Legitimate Residents in the Civil City**

An ethic based on civility has some advantages for animals. Its enormous power to maintain moral discipline within the urban space may curtail some types of animal abuse. But the slipperiness of civility – whether applied in the form of inconsistent cruelty laws or socially exclusive rhetoric – makes it problematic as an ethical guideline. Animal cruelty should never be

tolerated, of course, and animal cruelty laws are often needed to enforce this negative imperative. But we should be cautious about a wholesale acceptance of their benevolence.

Cruelty protection laws may best be seen as a useful baseline. O’Sullivan claims that if we are to adhere to the principle of equity, which is a foundation of liberal democratic societies, it is critical that we do *not* treat animals differently simply because they are in different contexts – laws should reflect the fact that what is cruel to a companion dog is cruel to a laboratory dog (168). As long as we are concerned only with setting a minimum standard for protection from harm, this principle seems sound enough. As Nguyen’s case shows, however, protection from cruelty is only one part of a larger story about belonging. An ethic that takes the rest of the story into account begins with attention to the socio-spatial context of our interactions. The need for attention to minimum standards of care notwithstanding, we lose much when we forget about context – nowhere is this clearer than in our relations with liminal animals. To be fair, O’Sullivan qualifies that her proposal for internal consistency in cruelty laws applies to captive animals only, which seems to be an acknowledgement that context does matter. It would be difficult to refute her charge that our industries affect the ‘*minutiae* of [captive animals]’ lives in ways that differentiate them from other animals’ (28; emphasis in original), and so ensuring their fair protection is indeed an urgent case. It is harder, however, to know what to make of her suggestion that only captive animals share our social space (O’Sullivan 28). Nguyen’s case is strong evidence that our urban lives are tightly bound, socially and spatially, with wild animals. Animal ethics has not traditionally considered these unique relations because it has been hard to know where they fit. Donaldson and Kymlicka attempt to fill in this gap by extending citizenship theory to animal rights, an approach to which we now turn.

## Citizens and Denizens

In her book *Reordering the Natural World*, Annabelle Sabloff examines the way that animal advocates have tried to use citizenship as an organising metaphor for relations between humans and animals. Activists have attempted, through the use of the citizenship metaphor, to humanise animals and to assert their rights as co-actors in the world (Sabloff 114). Donaldson and Kymlicka suggest that this animal rights theory has had low resonance with the public in part

because the metaphor of citizenship has been so poorly applied (5). The impossibility of moral contracts between animals and humans has been especially difficult for traditional animal rights theory. If citizenship entails both rights *and* political responsibilities, critics have argued, can we really expect animals to hold up their end of the bargain?

Such criticisms, Donaldson and Kymlicka suggest, stem from the failure of animal ethicists to develop a contextualised theory of rights, one that appreciates the diversity of ways in which we interact with animals (54). Democratic political participation – sometimes considered the defining feature of citizenship – is really only one of several equally valid components (Donaldson and Kymlicka 55). Drawing on work in the disability movement, Donaldson and Kymlicka show that cognitive sophistication is not a prerequisite for participation in social contracts. It is possible, they point out, to use models of dependent agency in which disabled citizens work with collaborators to express their interests, and participate politically through social relationships (Donaldson and Kymlicka 59). In a similar way, animals in a domestic context can be appropriate candidates, through their collaborators, for full citizenship within human communities. Our relationships with wild animals, however, cannot use this model. Because they have their own self-determining communities, the authors suggest, our interactions with them can only be based on a model of international relations between sovereign states (Donaldson and Kymlicka 157).

This basic argument, which differentiates relationships with wild and domestic animals, is not wholly distinct from ideas proposed by others. Grace Clement, for example, also suggests that an ethic of care, one in which we attempt to communicate with animals and understand their needs, is most appropriate for domestic animals. For free-living wild animals, an ethic of non-interference is more suitable (Clement 10). Donaldson and Kymlicka's theory does, however, make two significant improvements to previous treatments: it has an emphasis on our positive obligations to animals that goes beyond mere protection of their negative rights, and it contains guidelines for interacting with liminal species that do not fit neatly in either domestic or wild categories. Liminal animals, claim Donaldson and Kymlicka, present the greatest challenge to a citizenship ethics in mixed-species communities. Even though they avoid human companionship, liminal animals are still dependent to some degree on humans, just as domesticated animals are. Since we cannot communicate with liminals in the same way we do with domestic animals, we are not able to draw them into our bounded communities, despite

their physical proximity. The solution Donaldson and Kymlicka propose for these liminal species, which include feral animals, introduced exotics, niche specialists, and opportunists such as raccoons, is *denizenship*. Denizens are spatial occupants that are not, for one reason or another, full citizens, but are accepted as residents and entitled to some basic residential rights. Human denizens, in comparison, may include isolationist communities who opt out of the full responsibilities and rights of citizenship, such as the Amish, or those who do not have citizenship for other reasons, such as illegal immigrants or seasonal migrant workers (Donaldson and Kymlicka 215).

Donaldson and Kymlicka's nuanced approach to the animals-as-citizens metaphor opens up an exciting new territory for animal ethics, especially because the notion of denizenship recognises a number of previously overlooked animals and interactive contexts. It acknowledges that ethical relationships are social and spatial and that these socio-spatial dynamics are highly complex. This approach also highlights how the same problematic binary of citizen/other limits human relationships, since we tend to see other people as 'either co-citizens who are one of us or foreigners that belong elsewhere' (Donaldson and Kymlicka 230).

One limitation of the denizenship approach is that it continues to focus on what we cannot do to animals, rather than what we can do for them. Traditional animal rights theory, as well as the civic animal advocacy to which Sabloff refers, tends to focus on universal negative rights, which prohibit humans from violating animals' basic liberties through killing, enslaving, confining or harming them (Donaldson and Kymlicka 40). As Donaldson and Kymlicka point out, universal negative rights fail to envision the full spectrum of empowering relationships that we could have in mixed human-animal communities. Citizenship, they argue, can be a way of focusing on the richer concept of positive and relational obligations to animals, obligations that include duties of 'care, hospitality, accommodation, reciprocity, or remedial justice' (Donaldson and Kymlicka 6). The gains of this citizenship approach, however, do not extend to liminal animals who, because they either cannot or would choose not to enter into the contract of citizenship with humans, are not accorded the same positive rights. Donaldson and Kymlicka acknowledge that the comparatively restricted denizenship frame may not be able to do much more for these liminal animals than 'respect their basic negative rights and reduce the risks which we inadvertently impose on them' (244).

Accordingly, Donaldson and Kymlicka at times seem pressed to go beyond a bare-bones tolerance of the presence of liminal animals in their suggestions for how urban humans and wild animals should interact. Although they suggest adopting ‘an approach of coexistence rather than exclusion,’ (Donaldson and Kymlicka 228) they condone a variety of exclusion methods. They propose, for example, that we could trap and relocate liminal animals in conflict situations, block their access to food sources, and modify environments in such a way that they cannot occupy them (Donaldson and Kymlicka 246). Such steps can be viable methods of resolving wildlife conflicts, and they improve vastly on lethal control, the traditional approach to human-wildlife conflict resolution. These suggestions, however, feel like an anticlimax, especially given the spirit of inclusion with which Donaldson and Kymlicka approach the issue of liminal animals. Contrasting their own perspective on urban animals with Jennifer Wolch’s zoöpolis vision, they conclude that humans do not have a duty to ‘invite animals back in.’ The goal of a contextual ethic is not, they argue, to form a ‘cohesive’ community with liminal animals, but simply to see them as co-residents with whom we should preserve ‘relations of wariness and distrust’ (Donaldson and Kymlicka 299). While Donaldson and Kymlicka welcome community expressions of inclusion for wild animals (e.g., designing wildlife-friendly buildings, education campaigns to promote peaceful coexistence), they do not see an ethical imperative to provide these amenities. We can offer them if we choose to, or if the context seems appropriate, but we cannot guarantee them. In the end, because liminal animals do not qualify as full citizens of our or their communities, positive obligations to such denizens must be left up to the collective goodwill of the hosting human communities.

One wonders if this form of denizenship is the best we can offer liminal animals. Citizenship models that leave denizens as imperfect citizens, or even as potential citizens, frame citizenship as an ideal and denizenship as a lesser prize. Tim Cresswell notes that denizens have often been seen as those occupying a state between citizen and alien; they are people on the path to citizenship, though they may or may not reach it (Cresswell 264). This type of denizenship does little to challenge the urban moral order, which I suggest is based on a dichotomised narrative of belonging. We perhaps need to be wary of denizenship models that leave liminal animals in limbo. In such models animals are acknowledged to exist, but we embrace them as part of the political community only in the most minimal way. A progressive view of human denizenship, Cresswell proposes, is grounded in resistance of the categories themselves and aims

to de-center citizenship as the primary goal. Rather than viewing denizens as those who fall short of citizenship, we are encouraged to think about them as subjects that are ‘not defined by the space of the nation-state’ (Cresswell 268). If we are to take animal denizenship seriously, it is clear that we must approach it as a project of resistance. One way of resisting the framing of liminal animals as second-class residents is through affirming our recognition of them not as a choice, but as a positive obligation.

## Recognising Our Wild Neighbours

The modern city is shaped by the forces of civility: ‘good’ humans and animals are welcomed, ‘bad’ ones are expelled. Cruelty laws drafted inside the frame of civility mete out protection to visible animals but abandon invisible animals. For O’Sullivan the solution to this hypocrisy is to provide more consistent legal protections for animals who are hidden from sight. Balance must be restored by changing the laws, since to adjust the other side of the equation – to bring those invisible cruelties back into view – would be ‘impossible to achieve and entirely undesirable’ (O’Sullivan 167).

O’Sullivan is surely correct that most people would not want to return to a situation in which animal suffering is in public view, with livestock slaughtered in city streets and rabbits vivisected in public demonstrations. This conclusion accepts too readily, however, the corollary that the civil city is a place where we now live without animals. The case of liminal animals tells us that there are still opportunities to contest this presumed disappearance. We also must wonder how far improved cruelty laws could go in challenging the status quo, since these laws remain semantically bound to a separationist logic that dictates who does and does not belong. They reinforce, moreover, the prerogative of humans to set those boundaries. Posthumanist scholars have questioned whether theories of animal rights can be emancipatory at all, yoked as they are to the same humanist framework that has justified violence toward animals (Calarco 128). A posthumanist critique could also be directed at citizenship theory, since it relies on the same absolutist frame of human rights. Nevertheless, the metaphor of denizenship has some potential to challenge the strict boundaries of belonging that are linked to notions of citizenship, since it compels us to recognise animals who don’t fit neatly in our mental schemas.

Donaldson and Kymlicka's work suggests that recognising liminal animals as co-occupants of our urban social space is in itself transformative. Liminal animals, however, can be hard to see since they are 'visible when they become a problem, but invisible as ubiquitous members of the community' (Donaldson and Kymlicka 68). The case involving Nguyen and his backyard raccoons demonstrates the way liminal animals typically come into view: here the clash of interests between the two parties was rapidly transformed into a struggle between human and raccoon nations. This led certain media treatments of the case to a denizenship frame. One newspaper reported, for example, that '[r]accoons are here to stay.... There are more than 100,000 of the nocturnal critters in Toronto, so learn to live with them' (Lem). But the legitimacy of raccoon denizens was also met with resistance. We cannot, claimed one commentator, 'withstand the coordinated, relentless nightly (and daily) raccoon blitzkrieg' (Preville). As the Nguyen case shows, events that tear at the social fabric can create a space where our cultural anxieties attach themselves to otherwise invisible urban animals. The suddenly-visible animals can become a catalyzing force that 'make transparent the social forces behind our society's confusion and conflict over cruelty' (Arluke 186). In a world where raccoons and other liminals are better recognised as part of a pluralistic urban community, it is unlikely that incidents like these could so effectively wield the rhetoric of civility and belonging.

If we are to take the task of recognising denizens seriously, increasing their visibility in creative ways – through inclusive urban designs, for example, or artistic interventions – should be seen as a positive obligation. In its most liberating form, the metaphor of denizenship becomes a way of re-visioning the urban wild, a way to think about how we might, as Wolch says, 're-enchant the city' (29). In an intriguing artistic intervention titled after and inspired by Wolch's zoöpolis, Una Chaudhuri and Marina Zurkow impose images of urban animals over images from Google Street View. Each image represents a sort of industrialised Eden. Liminal animals and naked humans loiter together outside Broadway station and raccoon faces loom over the city on billboards. Their work, they say, comments on the notion that 'urban animality is both physically and conceptually constricted: each category of animals is confined within an identity which is also a location: pets in the home, meat in the freezer, pests out of sight. Refusing this



restrictive spatialisation of species, *Zoöpolis* seeks to imagine the city as a space of shared animality.’ Chaudhuri and Zurkow’s work suggests that an ethic for urban human-wildlife relations that embodies our mutual residency must be approached, at the very least, with great imagination.

## Notes

1. The issue of ethnicity received curiously little attention in coverage of Nguyen’s case. One media treatment chalked the incident up to a cultural gap, noting that beating a raccoon would not be seen as a ‘big issue’ in Vietnam (Hume, ‘This Week’s Raccoon’).
2. While the photo caption and article clearly imply the pictured raccoon’s posture should be read as aggressive, the raccoon’s body position suggests otherwise. Leaning back with his/her belly exposed and legs off the ground, the raccoon appears to have been caught in the middle of a yawn or a self-grooming session.
3. The number of web hits returned on the phrase suggests that it is now becoming naturalised as common parlance. As this phrase appeared in a number of the articles covering Nguyen’s case, it is reasonable to assume the film had some priming effect on perception of the incident. See Jerolmack’s (2008) *How Pigeons Became Rats: The Cultural-Spatial Logic of Problem Animals* for a compelling example of how a phrase such as this one can become embedded in public discourse.
4. ‘Freegans are people who employ alternative strategies for living based on limited participation in the conventional economy and minimal consumption of resources. Freegans embrace community, generosity, social concern, freedom, cooperation, and sharing in opposition to a society based on materialism, moral apathy, competition, conformity, and greed.’ (<http://freegan.info/> )

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