Enrico Forestieri
New hybrid spaces in a "more than human" city

Abstract

This research project aims to analyse the processes of transformation of physical spaces and relational practices between humans and animals, according to diverse and changing cultural paradigms, social conventions and economical structures.
This analysis is based on a rich and current trans-disciplinary debate and aims to propose, from an architectural point of view, multiscalar scenarios and forms of interaction and negotiation of spaces within a context of "more than human" relations.

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Project description

[Animals] are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendour and travail of the earth.
Beston, *The Outermost House*, 1928

Introduction

Humans and animals have always been linked by inextricable relations. Our relationship with them has, for centuries, marked an important and inescapable counterpoint for the definition and development of our psychological and moral identities (Lévi Strauss 1968 in Philo,Wilbert, 2000: 24 and Wolch,1998: 122), as well as enhancing our capacity to perceive and convey meaning to space and place (Brownlow, 2000: 144). Yet a divisive tension has evolved between these relationships and across space and time according to diverse cultural paradigms, social conventions and economic structures. These links determine both a physical and symbolic "field of relations" in which new imagined and materially constructed spatial forms are constantly generated. These spatial forms -which include the boundaries within and between these forms- represent a locally relevant and adaptive response to specific, and often conflicting, practices of transition, inclusion, separation and marginalisation.

Why human - animal relation matters now?

Throughout history, the turbulent growth of the Modern city has stimulated the hasty disappearance of animals from the urban context in accordance with functional, sanitary and moral concerns (Philo, 1998: 58 and ff.). The "city of humans" represents itself as an efficient, sanitised and rational mechanism in which the animal instinct is perceived to be "out of place" -therefore, removed or hidden. This dualistic and excluding construction is rooted in the premise of Western culture and is based on Cartesian and Illuministic thinking (Anderson, 1998: 30).

Since the Seventies, the postmodern, postcolonial, feminist and, more recently, ANT (Actor Network Theory) perspective has gradually eroded the Modern paradigm (Emel,Wolch, 1998: 16 and ff.; Philo,Wilbert, 2000: 16 and ff.; Urbanik, 2012: 5) and its reductive approach founded upon strategies of denial, exclusion, spatial separation and the stereotyping of minorities (women, ethnic minorities, non-humans, nature) (Haraway, 1988: 575-599).

Beyond anthropocentrism, the flexible and inclusive paradigm emerging from the Seventies recognises an individual agency to a wider assembly of subjects. Therefore our identities do not emerge ex nihilo, but appear as a result of a constant negotiation with other animated beings and objects (Callon,Law, 1995: 502 in Philo,Wilbert, 2000: 17; Castree,Nash 2006: 501-504) within a more than human *parliament of things* (Latour, 1993: 142-145). During daily interactions, animals represent for humans (and vice versa) a *significant otherness* (Haraway, 2003 and 2008), *they are bodies and voices, not merely ideologies or conceptual tools* (Johnston, 2008: 634).

Beyond Modern spatial patterns: Third Natures

The weakening of anthropocentrism and the *decentering of the dualistic perspective* (Emel,Wolch, 1998: 18) question the formal and functional rigidity of "modern space" and its schematic articulation of the borders between different areas. Therefore, the resulting model of space is in constant redefinition, shaped by cultural, technical and natural issues: a Third Nature (*Diaz Moreno,Garcia Grinda, 2014: 124*).

It is a fluid field, where functional areas blur seamlessly and generate novel and controversial hybrids (Havlick, 2011 and Whatmore,Lorraine Thorne, 1998: 435-347 from a geographical perspective; Branzi 1997; 2006; 2010: 110-111 from a designer perspective). At the same time, the mutual feedbacks among agents deform ceaselessly the net topology in a non-definitive way which is *closer to the management of agricultural systems, linked to seasonal cycles, weather, and the reversibility of crops more than to the paradigms of the urban government, which act through traditional architecture* (Branzi, 2006: 27). In the essay Zoopolis, prominent geographer Jennifer Wolch and others show how these premises can help envision the development of a *transpecies urban theory* (Wolch,West,Gaines, 1995: 735-760, Wolch, 1998: 121) based on a recognition of both kinship and difference between humans and non-humans. Moreover, this theoretical framework allows both researchers and designers to shape/design, at different scales, the landscape and infrastructural changes needed within this new shared territory (Wolch, 1998: 119-135).

Pet agency: re-shaping both private and collective space from the domestic epicenter

Particularly in western countries, the visibility and influence that pets as a social group (Philo, 1998: 53 and 58) have acquired over recent years is surprising. Pets *occupy a liminal position on the boundaries between "human" and "animal"* (Fox, 2006: 526) and, as "nature culture hybrids", they are a clear expression of the porous nature of the boundaries between species. At the same time, pets, with their instinctual mobility and their (un)conscious transgression of the places in which *humans seek to allot them* (Philo,Wilbert, 2000: 14), reveal criticalities and evident asynchronies between the contemporary practices of a "more than human" society and its spatial forms, which are remnants of the Modern era. They also represent a crucial link between the "wild world" (of which they are a surrogate) and the "city of the humans" (to which they have adapted to).

Although their status can vary dramatically -hanging in the balance between significant otherness, companion species, quasi human 'member of the family', objectified "furry child" (cfr. among others: Dominance and Affection: the Making of Pets. Tuan, 1988: 88-114; When Species Meet. Haraway, 2008)-, their presence in the domestic realm contributes to the creation of weak (cfr. Branzi, 2006) and sometimes precarious relations between pets and humans (Power, 2008: 536). This fact demonstrates *a willingness not to just recognise, but to engage with and incorporate non human others into family, and to explore other ways of "being" within family* (Power, 2008: 546).

The home is not anymore an exclusively human arena but is the meeting place of different species, marked by deep transformations of its territory and of its boundaries. The influence of such a paradigm change is not restricted to the domestic space, but, starting from this spatial epicenter, it projects itself and gains visibility in the public sphere, redefining accepted social practices and conditioning its spatial and formal layout (Urbanik,Morgan, 2012 in Urbanik, 2012: 63; Wolch,West,Gaines, 1995: 735-760).

Methodology and relevance

We could outline a sort of inverted urbanism based on the construction of a *web of kinship and reciprocity* starting from the domestic scale (Jaque, 2011a: 20 and Jaque, 2011b: 134-155). This is akin, in some respects, to Andrés Jaque's proposals for Tupperhome (2006) and Sweet Home Gran Via (2011), where he shifts the focus from "objects and devices *per se*" to their ability to develop and strengthen relations with the surrounding environment. Indeed, *objects don't pre-exist as such. Objects* (in this case dwellings, buildings, public spaces and functions) *are boundary project* (Haraway, 1988: 595).

Studying and defining the nature of these boundaries and relations means anticipating, intercepting and enhancing the adaptation, substitution, reconversion and emergence of novel hybrid typologies of contemporary space, in which the dualistic practices and devices of Modern origin still endure.

The main research steps would be:
- a space/time atlas would recollect recent and traditional case studies of "more than human" social/spatial practices and typologies;
- this document would be crucial to explore critically and in a quali/quantitative way the "boundary conditions" and to understand how the transition and the interaction between agents are mediated by border conditions in the theoretical framework of Zoopolis (Wolch, 1998);
- this phase would provide valuable analytical and operative tools which would eventually support the design process in the contemporary city.

Pets and their relationship with humans represent an extraordinary "oblique strategy" through which it is possible to investigate, from an architectural point of view, the recent and controversial transformations of spatial functions, moving nimbly between the diverse design scales.

The relevance of this research consists in opening up an innovative trans-disciplinary academic debate which will aim to fuse ethnographic approaches with the theoretical foundations inherent within animal geographies, creating open and inclusive interpretations of contemporary city and society viewed through the lens of the postmodern, postcolonial, feminist and ANT debates. Using a unique architectural perspective, a multiscalar dimension will be developed to examine and critically explore the often overlooked, yet vital, relationship between human and non-human subjects in contemporary urban space.

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