



**Wallace**

# Wallace

Illustrated with Full-Color Photographs by Kristen Merola

## 8.0 An Incomplete Owner's Guide

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## 8.1 FIRST CONSIDERATIONS

*The reasons for acquiring a bulldog are far more important than how a bulldog is acquired. A dog is not a fashion statement, a lifestyle assertion, or a declaration of superiority. Acquiring a bulldog is a personal decision for which you do not have to answer to anyone but yourself and those with whom you live. If you make that decision for the wrong reasons, however, you will not be the only one to suffer the consequences, so make the decision wisely. Why do you want a bulldog?*

### Companionship, Three Instances

THE FIRST HINTS at my dog interest occur in August 2000. I'm twenty-three and have recently moved from Kansas City to Nashville for the PhD program of my then wife of less than one year. I'm not entirely cognizant of it, but I long for several male friends with whom I fear a loss of connection. Unable to hang out in their recording space, go out to see live music together, watch strange movies, and discuss authors, how would we perform our kinship? Before leaving KC, where most of these friends remain and have families today, somehow incapable of simply saying that I love and will miss them, I impulsively rack up thousands of dollars in credit card debt on paperbacks and records so I might always have material enough for us to talk about. Yet I don't recall ever using what I collected as an excuse to write or call.

At this point I am unwell and fear my vulnerability with other people. I don't trust my first wife whose vague ambitions brought me here to contend alone with her nightly drinking that can unpredictably turn forbidding and

psychologically malicious. I start having paranoid delusions that strangers in the Kroger aisle are snickering when I pass them. Agoraphobic nets will cover me for days without my once opening the apartment door or window shades. Needing help, I put myself in psychoanalysis for the first time. Without insurance or money enough for more practiced treatment, I sit twice a week in a fluorescent-lit cinder block basement office three feet away from Gabe, a Vanderbilt student-shrink in need of clinical hours. His pained expressions of helplessness while I describe the neighbors and strangers whom I believe are gossiping about me does not bode well for my treatment. After ten-minute check-ins, he sends me home with worksheets to circle the emotions I'm feeling between our meetings.

But then I encounter Gershwin, an overweight English Bulldog, companion to Max, a piano playing med student neighbor who looks like celebrity chef Guy Fieri wearing robin's egg blue hospital scrubs. Many nights Max brings

Gershwin to the inner courtyard of our building where "Gore 2000" placards hang in windows above the tenants who smoke and chat, some waiting while their dogs sniff and pee. Gershwin frequently toddles over to me for pets and in time Max welcomes me to take the dog out when he works long hours in the hospital. For months Gershwin is my companion on many evenings, huffing and leaning all his weight against my shins while I smoke as many as ten Parliament Lights. As Gershwin struggles to cool himself (in a climate too warm for a breed that struggles with breathing), his commitment to propping himself against me as I puff away and look out into the empty night sky bolsters a semblance of sought-after solidarity.

CASE TWO, documented five years later between 2 and 3am the night before Christmas Eve—according to the time stamp on the blurry photos I made of every part of my single-man's apartment, is more phantasmagoric. Maybe I made the pictures to send to my family in place of visiting for Christmas to show them where I live and will be spending the holiday. I had resided in the two-room Fortress of Solitude for several months by then and during every weekly phone conversation I'd been made more aware of Mom's need to visualize where I'm calling from. In the pictures my neglect of relations clings to every square foot of the private dwelling.

Or maybe I made the pictures purely out of pleasure and in celebration of seclusion. I am alone, finally. Eighteen months earlier I was officially divorced from my first wife of



### David Foster Wallace

ONE OF THE SIGNIFICANT AUTHORS my KC friends and I share an affinity with is David Foster Wallace, to whose writing I was highly impressionable at the time. After DFW's suicide critic A.O. Scott conveyed that his voice

...was something you instantly recognized even hearing it for the first time. It was—is—the voice in your own head.

Or mine, at any rate. When, as an undergraduate with a head full of literary theory and a heartsick longing for authenticity, I first encountered David Foster Wallace, I experienced what is commonly called the shock of recognition. Actually, shock is too clean, too safe a word for my uncomfortable sense that not only did I know this guy, but he knew me.

I also sensed I knew DFW and felt he knew me all too well. Academic studies of DFW's writing likewise see me when they identify his anti-rebel "New Sincerity" that I also longed to achieve in bookworks. Going beyond literary analysis into the cultural reception of DFW's fanboys and online network of devotees, queer theoretical readings of the "homosocial intimacies between the author and white male readers" further identify my preoccupations. Though I could be self-deprecating about my DFW adulation with my first wife (who was not an admirer), I remain obsessive and consumed with his writing and fixate on personal details about him.

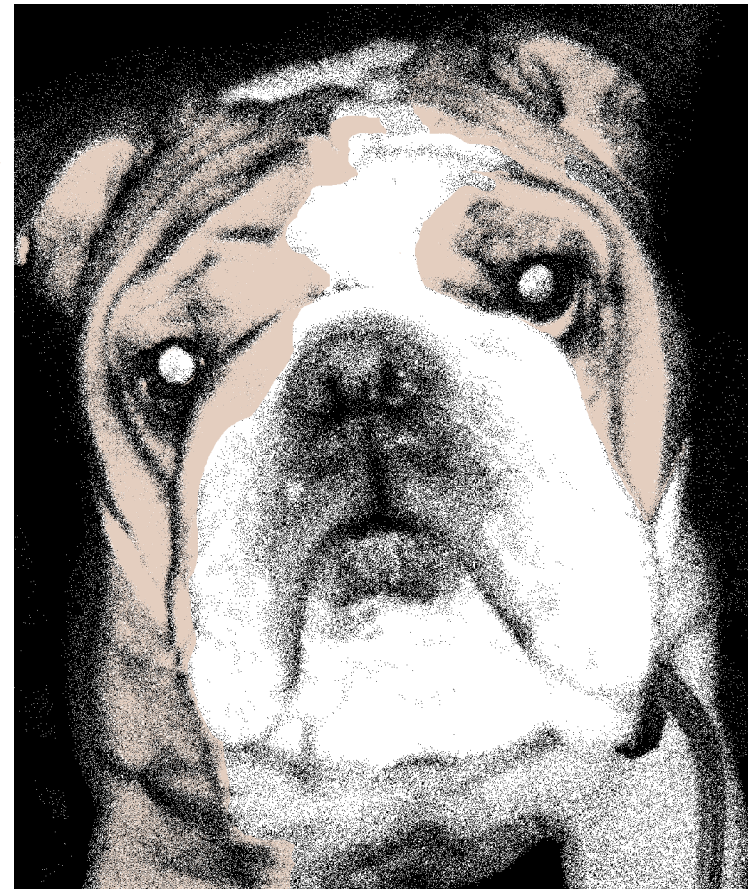
Like the time in Nashville, listening to an online KCRW "Bookworm" interview of DFW, who called in to the LA studio "from an outpost of Illinois," his dogs, Jeeves and Drone, occasionally barking in the background. While DFW speaks as unpretentiously as is possible about the potential for literature to form connections between human beings when it is outside the transactional machinations of consumerist art, all I'm thinking of is the unexpected prospect of his attendant dogs. Although my previous canine encounters mostly include being chased or bitten [See SPOT Animal Behavior] the company of another species awakes in me possibilities.

five years and before then had never lived without a roommate or family member; twelve months prior to taking the pictures I abruptly ended a satisfying, months-long, rebound affair just as emotional intimacy was developing; ten months before making the photos, Kris, my deepest intimate, introduced me to a lovely, older woman whom I moved in with after four months because she was going back to school and in need of someone to share the mortgage payment, but then a couple of months later I ended that fine relationship over the phone while a thousand miles away on a six-week retreat. To settle here at this apartment, three months before making these pictures, Kris and her husband Dan helped me transfer my belongings from their garage where they had been kind and generous enough to personally move and store them after my forsaken ex had justifiably cast the stuff curbside before I returned to town.

Perhaps the shakiness and creeping shapes in the photos' shadows is from the ecstatic tipsiness of drinking beers and listening to music all night. A winter solstice mix cd is evidence from the same evening. On Christmas morning I find joy in presenting it and other gifts to Kris and Dan, newly married then after a decade of being together. They may have preferred some privacy, but I was never made to feel a nuisance. Instead, Kris got us all felt pajama pants and invited me to sleep on the couch Christmas Eve. And in the morning the gift I treasure upon waking is the shimmering, gleaming, tinsel-draped freedom of feeling completely at ease, free of family, free of tradition, free of any reminders whatsoever of baby Jesus.

Yet later, when returning to the emptiness of the apartment, notwithstanding a family who wishes I were near, having dear friends who will do anything for me, and the several former partners I rebuffed without grounds, I am pulled into a black hole of gravitational loneliness not felt since Nashville—unable to escape feelings of ineffectualness at preserving human connection. Looking back now at the pictures made in the early morning that Christmas Eve, they read like spirit photos: captured on the camera sensor is the apparition of a presence deemed absent in my isolation.

OCCURRENCE THREE is a year and a half after the spirit photos, following one of the late nightly walks I take then to polish off any surface residue from the day and smooth myself enough for sleep. Leaving the Fortress of Solitude around 11pm, my face framed in the blue light from an iPod screen, I stand on the otherwise darkened front porch selecting an album to listen to while walking. At the time I'm on a mid-Sixties Dylan jag, entranced by his grounded yet surreal writing—the rhythms and words both warm and impaling—best demonstrated for me by *Blonde on Blonde*.



I walk in the middle of my short, dead-end street as the album's opener shambles to life with hollers and rattles like a hobo parade. Looking to the lighted windows of those relatively new on the block like me—other artists and teachers, musicians, bartenders, librarians, baristas—their yellow rooms checkered brightly against the darkened windows of the more longstanding, working-class families living in adjacent apartments and rental homes. At the top of the hill is a nightly decision: go right and north toward more of the low-to-middle income apartment houses, where there are few streetlights and several recently opened bars, or go left and south toward the quieter, brighter lit streets nearer the park with middle-class houses

and kept-up lawns? Wishing to wear myself out fully so I will sleep through the night, I take the calmer route south where I can be less alert.

Along the sidewalk is the familiar, white brick Spanish-language church; a spinning barber pole; the tiny vegan bakery's glass case; heat blasting from the pizzeria's screen door; middle-aged men sagging in café chairs at the gay coffeehouse, their eyes trailing various parts of me while I pass; a massive, disordered, pleather sectional couch left curbside for garbage pickup; smokers talking with their hands outside the Irish-named bar across the way; a man in a stained, oversize t-shirt walking in the street with a yoga-ball-sized garbage bag full of return-deposit cans and bottles slung over his shoulder.

"Ain't it just like the night to play tricks when you're trying to be so quiet" begins "Visions of Johanna"—perhaps my favorite-ever Dylan song—as I turn down the street with retaining walls elevating five feet up from the sidewalk that form the raised borderlines of green lawns that stretch ten yards back to colonials. A large shape passes before a porch light, the staccato flash catching my peripheral vision as above me on the grass I see a darting, shirtless, barefooted man in a rush of white flesh. Recoiling and stumbling off the curb into the street, I prepare for the worst while water droplets from above riddle my t-shirt and hair. Opening my eyes, I look up to see the man crouching on his lawn to quickly adjust a sprinkler before dashing back toward the house.

So much for calm.

My senses now heightened and seeking out anything skulking in the night, I detect a large gray cat scurrying from a bush nearly a block ahead.

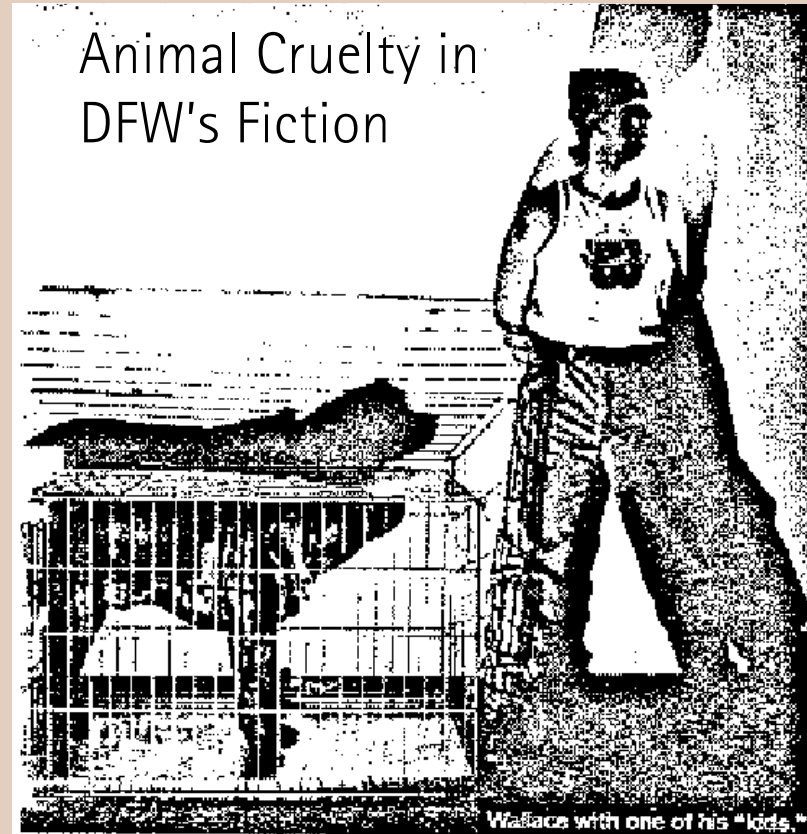
Loping along with the rollick of "Leopard-Skin Pillbox Hat," the album's mid-point, my nerves are finally calmed enough to start sinking into the sought-after, worn-down state.

Over eight more songs my thinking parallels my walking as I make turns down stretches wandering past dwellings until I reach the lullaby album closer, "Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands."

Having circled several miles northeast I re-approach the neighborhood boundary between the single-family south-side homes and the prospect of encountering north-side amblers around bar-closing time. Determined to simultaneously end the walk and complete the album upon reaching my porch, I let its woozy lilt and shuffle push me northward to finish the eleven-minute song.

As I enter a familiar but darkened block, I notice but pay little mind to some men smoking outside a doorway. Being stoned myself from the walking and music, I lightly smile upon feeling someone tugging at my shoulder. Something hard now surges into my right external oblique, yet I calmly turn to greet whoever is stopping me. Taken aback, I come face-to-face with a young man in a black cap, white fear circling his pupils, his teeth flashing inside his short, black beard as he utters something, yet with my earbuds still inserted, all I hear is "My warehouse has

## Animal Cruelty in DFW's Fiction



ENCOUNTERING ANIMALS on these late-night solo walks always put me in mind of a DFW bit character from *Infinite Jest*, Randy Lenz. A cocaine addict in recovery, Lenz attends NA meetings with fellow halfway house dwellers, but walks back from them alone, taking side streets and alleys. He spots a rat preoccupied with eating a wiener by a dumpster and slams a hunk of asphalt down on it while decreeing, "There!" Finding that this vocalized pronouncement, along with the spontaneously violent verdict over a defenseless creature resolves in him the subjection and internal wrath he experiences during the early stages of cocaine abstinence, Lenz then takes to carrying bits of tuna in rolled-up baggies as bait to lure

alley cats close enough for capture in industrial, gunmetal-gray trash bags. Depriving each cat of oxygen inside its bag, he crouches and meditatively watches as it *animates*, morphing and contorting into abstract shapes until the suffocated creature is done for and Lenz's own internal powerlessness is momentarily resolved.

Lenz's unspeakably heinous resolutions repeatedly confront his own mortality

by proxy to beings he objectifies to escape feeling small, weak, and dominated. His escalating transgressive behavior toward them leads him perpetually in the direction of death or ego annihilation the way he used drugs to destroy the ego that kept him from connecting with other humans. Monstrous ritual animal cruelty stabs at readers in several other DFW stories too. Punks light stray dogs on fire; a man on the street uses puppies to meet women and then drowns them after their function is met. It is the late 1980s heyday of neoliberalism's mutant capitalism. Perhaps such a portfolio of dismaying images reflects the nihilistic, total amoral capitulation to market society and the individualism of the period.



## SPOT the Marks

IT DAWNS upon me much later that I'm part of a decade-long, slow wave of gentrifiers moving into the neighborhood. In the year leading up to and following the mugging, for example, a bistro with seemingly a hundred microbrew IPAs, a wine bar, another bistro plus grocery store that sold mostly pricey non-staples, an artisan chocolatier, a hipster lifestyle store, and small clothing boutique all opened.

For those being encroached upon, perhaps a reasonable and decent hustle is to holdup the interlopers—those loose and free who after hours slither to cars taking up the limited spaces on these alternate-side-parking, residential cross streets. Scrape something of value from them to temporarily and partially recover the power lost through market disenfranchisement. This makes marks of white encroachers, disrupting our ability to move through the world freely and unfettered, without notice or distinction.

Beyond my obvious whiteness, another sign of conformity of the time is the only thing of monetary value I have on my person this night: the iPod—sold to me as a device for individualism and personal expression in iconic ads of black-silhouetted dancing bodies. But conformity is perhaps less desirable to the impinged—worthless without all its companion features and devices.

my Arabian drums, should I put them by your gate.”

Facing him, the hard thing—is it a gun?—covered by the kangaroo pocket of his hoodie forces into my abdomen. I keep repeating “What the fuck?” not comprehending what is happening or what he says despite removing the headphones. Money, I finally realize, and like a clown I pull my pockets inside-out out to show I have none.

“The iPod,” he concedes, and when I deposit the smooth-as-a-bullet older model in his palm we both look down at it, pausing as “My warehouse has my Arabian drums” tinnily rings around our knees from the dangling cords.

Our eyes catch momentarily, his movements quicken and he slaps the iPod back in my hand. Laughing loudly, he shouts “Just playing, I got you, dog, I got you. I got you, dog, I got you...” and more laughter as he promptly hurtles away up the block.

I watch him charge away before stumbling the few remaining blocks home. The silhouetted shape of him running away, “I got you, dog,” and his laughter repeating in my ears won't leave me alone for days.

I never take a late-night walk wearing headphones in the neighborhood again. But after several weeks, I start to imagine how I might manage it a different way. A month passes and “I got you, dog” mentally morphs into get a dog. Then I find myself in the pet section of a chain bookstore, browsing a slim bulldog owner's guidebook.

## 8.2 BULLY FOR YOU

*More important than why you want a bulldog is why a bulldog would want you. Few people think of asking themselves if they would make good dog owners. They spend a lot of time worrying about whether a bulldog will shed, how much it barks, how much it eats, and whether bullies are as stubborn as some say they are, rather than putting themselves in the bulldog's place and asking, “Do I have the right stuff to be a bulldog owner?” Have you studied the breed and are you attracted to its characteristics? [See Understanding your Bulldog.] Should you have one bulldog or two? How can you tell if the dog you like is healthy and likes you? What do bulldogs cost? Where is the best place to get a bulldog—from a breeder, a pet shop, a bully rescue group?*

MY FRIEND MARNI tells me about a bulldog she sees on Buffalo Craigslist for \$800, which I can afford if I continue my second job waiting tables on Sundays for a few more months. Pets are forbidden on my apartment's lease, but my science-teacher neighbor upstairs keeps a rabbit scurrying across the hardwoods above me, so I figure I can also get away with a pet. I message the Craigslist ad to see if the bulldog is still available, leaving my phone number and requesting a visit. Five days pass and I ping the ad again. “We decided against selling him. He's going to live at my uncle's,” comes the reply. Then several weeks later I get a text: “We are selling Nico [the bulldog] again. Do you want to see him?” It's minor kismet that Kris and I are already scheduled to be guest speakers in a friend's printmaking class in Buffalo a few days later.

Parking across the street from the driveway, we arrive at the address just after dusk. A

woman seated in a lawn chair inside the open garage holds a leashed, red-and-white English bulldog extended out from her. She is older than I imagined, and I learn she is the dog owner's mother.

“This must be Nico,” I pronounce in the dog's direction, unable to fully comprehend its bulk as it gazes into the beyond, its muzzle investigating the air while it holds down the driveway.

I propose taking him for a walk and am handed the retractable, thin-worn leash. At first Nico pulls like a tugboat towing me down the sidewalk until, after a couple of turns, he stops at a corner house as if it were his own, pressing a shoulder against the storm door to enter.

“Do you know this house?” I stupidly query, inviting some sign as to why he pulled me here. Looking through a small window in the door, I see the light of a TV



flashing but no shapes of moving bodies, and quickly decide to turn back before encountering whoever is inside. Panting hoarsely from the walk, he charges up the driveway and back into the garage.

“That’s the longest walk he’s ever been on,” amazes the mother. She then reassures us that her daughter’s party should be over soon.

“No problem, I’ve worked parties before. They can run over.” This is received quizzically so I further offer up my experience as a ballroom bartender in an attempt at clarification.

“It’s an adult toy party” she explains.

Blushing, my thoughts flood with dildos as dog chew toys, giving new meaning to worrying the bone.

Other subjects are sought while we wait. There are maybe a hundred pairs of cheap black shoes of similar shapes and size on racks lining the inside walls of the garage.

“Is she having a sale?” I venture gesturing toward the shoes.

“No” is her confused reply, which shuts down further nosy observational attempts.

Nico begins pressing a shoulder against the door that leads into the house (perhaps explaining the prior encounter) where we are invited to wait. He beelines for noisy slurps of water and after drinking he collapses on the kitchen linoleum, splaying his four limbs like a flying, colossal-headed Superman.

“Is he ok?”

“Bulldogs do this,” the mother says. “You two can wait in there,” motioning to a sunken living room where a shirtless man in athletic shorts perches on a mammoth sectional couch filling half the modest room. He never takes his eyes from the Tyler Perry movie playing on a huge, mounted screen, as we cross the line of his gaze and sink into the micro-suede upholstery. Several minutes in the world of *Madea* drag on palpably long before Nico toddles in to rub against the naked legs of the shirtless man who reaches down to give a few heavy pats of the dog’s abdomen while emitting a forlorn “Ah, Nico.” Tired, the dog then makes his way to my couch section to rub his muzzle on my knee. I return a head scratch before he plops down, flattening his jowl tuft into the carpet and loudly exhaling through his diminutive nostrils.

I catch Kris’ glance across the darkened TV-lit chamber at the moment an unseen parrot squawks something unintelligible from the next room. She makes a hilarious, bug-eyed, let’s-get-out-of-here look so I rise to step over Nico.

As we exit, I hand the mother in the kitchen a check and ask what time the following day we can retrieve him. Regardless of the cost and anything the daughter may have to say, I knew I wanted him when he came to me for a goodnight scratch.

When Kris and I return the next afternoon, the mother’s much larger, gray-and-white bulldog is with her. It lunges

wildly to lick at us and stands on its hind legs to paw at my chest. Experiencing this other bulldog silences any indecision about whether Nico and I are right for each other. Kris holds the dogs' leashes in the driveway while the mother takes me to the basement to get an opened bag of food and his water bowl. As we descend the staircase, she tells me that Nico recently dragged her down the risers to land on the concrete floor below. Maybe this incident is why he is being sold I think, unphased.

When it's time to put the bulldog in the backseat of my car, it dawns upon me that this is for keeps and how unprepared I am.

In the trunk is a trash bag full of clothes I've meant to drop off at a thrift store, worn shirts and pants that I spread over the car's back seat before lifting him onto this makeshift travel bedding.

Every few minutes of the hourlong drive back to Rochester, Kris or I exert my power of naming by turning to look at the bulldog in the backseat and saying aloud what he will henceforth be called:

"Wallace."

"Wallace."



## 8.3 THE FIRST 100 DAYS

*A new presidential administration is initially judged on its performance during its first one hundred days. Your first one hundred days as a bulldog owner will set the tone for your new administration and determine if you look presidential in the eyes of your dog. You should have an agenda and certain items in place. Put yourself at the level of your new constituent. Get down on all fours and crawl around, looking for ways to make accidents happen.*

### Food and Water

WALLACE'S SHIT comes out an orange soft-serve dollop from his front-heavy frame. He forms a question-mark shape while remaining strangely compacted when pooping, which is every few hours. Leaving out an everlasting bowl of the cheap, unwholesome food his former owner gave me is no longer rational. Only drinking water when necessary, usually after walks, his droopy, loose, and dampened jowls are wiped on my pants, naked shins, or the chair upholstery, always leaving behind a white-outlined amoeba of dried saliva.

### House Training

THE POOR FOOD quality and its plenitude are unacceptable because of poop frequency, but also Wallace's house training seems spotty. Signs he needs to go out are mixed. Padding over to the apartment door he will headbutt it once or flip up one paw to scratch it a time or two indicating a desire to exit. At first this communication

appears promising but nine of ten times he simply wishes to sniff the air a moment before resting his haunches heavily on the porch's painted wood planks. Then, upon returning inside, he may suddenly shoot up from a resting spot and indicate formation of the question-mark shape without time enough for me to physically carry the compressed beast out to the devil's strip of grass between sidewalk and street. Timing is doubly a problem at the workplace where he accompanies me many evenings and where the distance to the outside doors in the overlarge castle-like building is far. Giving up even attempting to get to the grass becomes the most sensible reaction. Cleanup of the orange soft-serve from floors either at home or work always feels inadequate. Plus, more than a few times at home, I catch him staring at me while in a kind of Cobra Pose or stretch that a hated coach of mine called "dick in the dirt." Always performed on a particular felted wool rug, there have been signs of temporary discoloration and possible wetness. In the earliest days this is seen as plausible marking of a new homebase and frowned upon but tolerable, until a friend later refers to the Fortress of

Solitude as the Pee Palace and I feel taken in by my guileless confidence in Wallace's nature. I turn to fretting over him exerting dominance through this stare-down, literal pissing match that I must not let him win.

## Exercise

ALL WALKS BEGIN with Wallace making himself low and strong to heave and drag me to any spot where his poor-performing nostrils sniff out another dog's presence to then sign his own existence by also marking nearby. Once all energy is expended from the pulling and claiming of his immediate territory (usually less than one block), Wallace then lollygags a few steps behind, barely raising his forefeet, his wrist joints lazily flipping out such that I can audibly hear his toenails scratching the sidewalk with each step. Imagining late-night walks with a dog to deter human advances did not properly account for a bulldog—or this bulldog—whose slow plod through the neighborhood in fact invites human advancement. Almost every passerby stops to pet or acknowledge the jowly little Godfather. Several times different men pull over from driving the avenue we walk along to inquire about us breeding some puppies together and making bank. My explanation that Wallace is neutered is met with exuberant dissatisfaction or even mild infuriation with me for wasting this obvious opportunity. All this attention is the opposite of the initial intent of having a late-night walking companion. When attempting to get Wallace up to my true walking speed, he quickly

becomes an overheated mess of crackling bronchial grunts, his panting exhalations sounding ominous. It signals as fear-raising growls to passersby, and while I'm apologizing to them my internal concern is that Wallace may quickly expire, so I beeline it home—albeit at the necessary, drag-ass pace.

## Collar and Lead

WHEN ATTEMPTING to walk Wallace, he will sometimes outright refuse to move by heavily sitting, or occasionally laying, all his condensed weight on the sidewalk. No tugs at the leash will budge him. Once, while crossing before a stoplight, he did this in the middle of the street and I kept walking without knowing that I had pulled the collar right off his oversize head until honks, hollering, and laughter came from cars headed in both directions. Alarmed, I scurried back to carry him like a fat baby across the street.

## Bulldog Proofing

MY FIRST WEEKEND with Wallace I am overly self-confident about leaving him alone in the apartment. Almost every Saturday Kris and Dan will pick me up to see a movie followed by sushi or noodles. When I return from this standard, few-hour outing, Wallace has a half-circle line of blood across his short snout from the broken ceramic planter he obviously dug his nose into and knocked over. A book I had left on a side table is gnawed and so is one boot, pulled from the closet door left or pushed open, with some measure of

the leather chewed off and nowhere to be found, and therefore probably eaten.

## Crate

SO A FRIEND loans me a dog crate his obedient Labrador no longer uses.

## Dog Beds

I ALSO GO OUT to buy a dog bed for inside the crate, along with a different collar, leash, better food, bowls, a couple of chew toys, and earplugs from a nearby pharmacy. I haven't slept well since Wallace's arrival, due to him being on a folded blanket in the corner of my bedroom and snoring like a fat, old grandpa. This first (and all subsequent) dog bed he immediately shakes in his jaws and carries around the place until lying beside it to chew it and eventually tear some of its stuffing out before finally wallowing onto the dominated plot where he then retires.

## Toys

DESPITE HAVING chew toys now, Wallace only wants or uses the misappropriated boot he vanishes more bits of leather from each day, or plastic bottles from the recycling bin that he snouts around until eventually crushing, crackling, and squeezing over and again in his smiling jaws. Being prepared with these items at hand to toss across the room repeatedly is an absolute necessity for getting any work done in the apartment, which is my

preferred writing, studio, and teaching-prep space.

## Obedience Training

HAVING ANOTHER incredibly needy being that pads around, pisses, and shits in what was the Fortress of Solitude overwhelms my interest in this companion. I'm only two weeks into dog ownership when I start having the same conversations with Kris that I did when preparing my extraction from several previous romantic or sexual relationships. She convinces me to give it six weeks, toward the end of which is Thanksgiving at her house, where for years Dan has prepared the feast and they have hosted me and their wider virtual family of friends. From numerous previous visits, Wallace has already left his mark at their home with wiry, white hairs that weave into all fabrics and yet he is more than welcome there for the daylong feast and festivity. Literally the moment he enters the door that holiday mid-morning, he curls his body into the question-mark shape, inexplicably pooping in their foyer. This feels like the moment I commit to giving him up. While I grow characteristically disconsolate at my solipsistic world being wrecked by this animal's cataclysmic power, Kris laughs off his pooping pathology with her characteristic jocularly toward him for so obviously hurting his own case.

Still within the six-week window, I am later convinced by Marni to enroll Wallace (and myself) in basic obedience training. A true believer in and friend of the trainer, Marni stands by the socialization these

courses provided Barkly, her terrier. Barkly has his own complicated set of behavioral issues including biting me and more than half her friends or their dogs, so my skepticism and willingness to give up Wallace remains intact.

In the first session, the trainer does some basic aptitude assessment and while she acknowledges Wallace's cuteness (so far

redeeming him at home too), her disdain for and skepticism toward training bulldogs shows. Mostly, I'm surprised to hear her claim his body language around other dogs is aggressive, which keeps him separated out from open playtime. What it is about his posture and movements that make him a threat I cannot see. He is virtually the smallest dog and the cutest and most cuddly seeming of them all.

## SPOT Animal Behavior

THE ABILITY TO RECOGNIZE and be mindful of a dog's behavior is far from innate in me. A default toward anxiety for much of my life discourages a dog's calmness. As in many aspects of self-awareness (only ever partially developed) I must be convinced repeatedly of my deficits before making necessary adjustments. While there have been many more warning-nips and teeth borne in my direction, I have been aggressively bitten by dogs no fewer than six times:

As a kid, a neighborhood Doberman frequently jumped its fence to wander the block. Not knowing that running from it in terror increased its fear of me, I was summarily chased down and bitten, once in the calf and a second time in the external oblique.



A little older but none wiser, a neighbor kid told me to never stick my tongue out at his German Shephard, an instruction that sounded preposterous, so I did it anyway and was quickly mounted and had a hunk of deltoid flesh gnawed off.

Squaring up and looking a Chow directly in the eyes once got my quadricep chomped.

Marni's dog bit me when I aggressively reached for a dropped game piece, racing to get it before he did, causing him to defensively clamp down on my carpometaacarpal.

I repeated a similar hand-snatching action years later while at the house and kennel of Wallace's obedience trainer. There to seek a dog we might pair with Coco (our rebound rescue pit bull after Wallace's death that was in debilitating fear of me), my quick reach for a windblown dog bandana somehow triggered a nearby mixed breed to lunge upward to get an incisors grip on my abdominal fat. This was a dog that the professional trainer used in trauma therapy. Not even a therapy dog understood my actions around it.



When Wallace isn't separated out from the other dogs, his aggressive comportment becomes more obvious. Napoleonic, he squares off with the biggest German Shephard or mixed breed, pushing his chest out and raising his snout sometimes nudging theirs to try and lower it. The less dominant dogs shrink away or sometimes view him curiously, like an alien species (which he practically is). Other dogs aren't having it and go to rip out his throat or put him on his back while yanking their owners with them into a distressed vortex of momentary turmoil. Wallace and I are therefore weekly relegated to do our reps of sitting, staying, and laying down on the community center's stage, split off from the other dogs and owners who train on the gymnasium floor.

Now obviously part of an outgroup, my perfectionism (always failed) kicks in. I start asking the dog owners I know about their handling of dominance—asserting themselves as the alpha.

One tells me about routinely putting his dogs on their backs, holding them down by their shoulders while crouching over them to assert his dominance and maintain their pack following. Another tells me she puts her dog in the down position and then stands over it, her crotch a bridge over its head. "Put your balls over his head and he'll know who's boss," she declares. With no further guidance or knowledge of these or other methods I try them out on Wallace after our daily training homework. Clearly, he hates his shoulders being held down and wriggles like crazy,

never capitulating or giving in. Or maybe he's just uncomfortable. His chest fur is so soft and white my thumbs are compelled to give him sort of loving scratches and pets in the process. No doubt this is a mix of messages. Standing with my crotch over his head, with him on the pee-sponge rug, he simply looks up through his eyebrows at me above him, smushes his face into the knap, gives one of his loud, rasping exhales, and starts smacking his gums in his usual pre-sleep routine. I imagine him to be slightly bored and annoyed by the inanity of the drill, just as I was.

Despite this foolishness, somehow the training and reps at home work. Wallace is allowed in playtime with the other dogs before the end of the six-week course. Other dogs still don't play with him. He's alien-looking, doesn't have the breathing ability to run beyond brief athletic bursts, and won't romp and wrestle without little-man's disease suddenly taking hold and then being alpha-rolled by other dogs. He still won't heel well or do any of the basic sit-stay-come commands without me repeating them or putting him into position. But we pass the class. Our companionship gains in mutual deference

and understanding of one another. As Donna Haraway writes about training (at a much higher level for athletic breeds) in *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*:

At first, the moves seem small, insignificant; the timing too demanding. Then, dog and human figure it out, if only for a minute, how to get on together, how to move with sheer joy and skill over a hard course, how to communicate, how to be honest. The goal is the oxymoron of disciplined spontaneity. Both dog and handler have to be able to take the initiative and to respond obediently to the other. The task is to become coherent enough in an incoherent world to engage in a joint dance of being that breeds respect and response in the flesh, in the run, on the course. And then to remember how to live like that at every scale, with all the partners.

As I slowly evolve to becoming more animal, I forget about the window for surrendering Wallace to someone else and it closes. If I have a dog, Wallace now has a human.

## 8.4 GROOMING, CARE, AND HEALTH

*Some of the bulldog's more unique traits from breeding require special care. In terms of health there is no substitute for the counsel of a professional. No longtime breeder or internet forum is a substitute for the firsthand diagnosis and prescription provided by a qualified veterinarian.*

### Wrinkles

A CERTAIN DEAD-FISH SCENT floats about Wallace until I ask my vet (recommended to me because she herself owns a bulldog) why he smells so bad. I learn a bulldog's facial wrinkles may contribute to its discomfort if not regularly cleaned. Like the cracks between couch cushions, the insides of the folds are a landfill for bits of food, tears, hairs, and other particles. He must be swabbed with cotton balls soaked in a prescribed blue antiseptic fluid near daily or the smell and his discomfort return.

Bulldog tails are like compacted corkscrews and must also be cleaned out regularly. Wallace will sometimes attempt to scratch inside his tail on his own by sitting on his haunches with his forepaws at his side like a big-bellied toddler might, then wriggling his tail into the rug. This often begins a spectacular scene of him basically butt humping the carpet while his pink lipstick penis sticks out further and further and he grunts and snorts, his face flattened into a hammerhead shark shape. The entirety of this is magnificently disturbing to watch.

### Hair Removal

EVERY PAIR OF PANTS I own is a shade lighter below the knee due to Wallace leaving a cloud of grease, dander, and his deceptively wiry, one-inch hairs woven into the fibers.

### Ear Care

ALL YOU NEED to perform ear cleaning is hydrogen peroxide and a few cotton balls to swab the visible parts carefully, still Wallace routinely gets infections. The first of these was diagnosed by a concerned German Shephard that wouldn't stop sniffing and licking inside Wallace's ear. Owned by a woman I was seeing, this dog doctor's bizarre obsession with Wallace's ears made the owner and the whole engagement uncomfortable. Soon after, dark sepia-tone eyeliner-like gunk starts appearing in Wallace's ear and grows thicker in consistency. I keep cleaning it and think I will eventually wipe away the funk, waiting a week to make a vet visit. He ends up having a triple ear infection (however that is possible) and is in the vet's office for a prescription to clear up similar ear infections every few months thereafter.



# SPOT Donald Trump Inside a Dog's Ear

WRITING IN *THE GUARDIAN* after the second televised debate between Trump and Hillary Clinton, Dutch primatologist France de Waals is convinced that knowing animal behavior matters in understanding political signs. Though Trump ominously paced the stage behind Clinton, he couldn't as easily dominate a female candidate the way he puffed up and shouted insults over his male primary challengers. In de Waals' experience from decades of studying leadership in primate packs, bullying tyrants are short-lived leaders without much evidence or parallel in primates. Physically weaker, smaller members may remain in leadership much longer by receiving support to get to the top and by forming coalitions. Looked to for their skill in settling disputes and maintaining harmony, they often express empathy for and stand with weaker members. Emotions are what structure society, de Waals argues, and though emotion in animals was only first studied in the 1960s, starting with aggression, he sees no difference between humans and other species in emotional terms. He contends with Aristotle naming humans *zoon politikon*, political animals—social beings with the capacity to tell right from wrong—because it overlooks the part emotions play. Running for US president in 1992, Bill Clinton arguably won that contest's second televised debate through sympathy. Raised in a single-mother household in rural Arkansas, one of the poorest states of the union, Clinton went on to be governor of that state, and ultimately the US president, by identifying with a middle and lower class beleaguered by a dozen years of failed



trickle-down economic theory supported by his opponent, George Bush. But Clinton also wielded sympathy for power, famously uttering, "I feel your pain" to shut-up an activist heckling him at a rally.

Knowing these differences of metacommunication at an instinctive, sympathetic level may be key to understanding how animal and human exist on a continuum. In *What Animals Teach Us about Politics* philosopher Brian Massumi describes the continuum as one of "differential mutual inclusion" for which he says there is a "one-word synonym: life." On the continuum of living things "evolution is never linear." Because we are constantly crisscrossing between long-evolved experiences, there are only variations of differences still mutually included between animal and human. A key example of Massumi's is the way a wolf or dog pup

plays. One must show ludic—undirected, spontaneously playful—signs to get another's attention implicating the other sympathetically. This could take the form of a type of nip that can't be too much of a nip. It must also signal as a type of bite, but it can't be overly bite-like, or it might communicate as a challenge and the two pups could become opponents. Knowing the differences is sympathetic and instinctual, outside the knowledge and experience of the individual pups, and outside of individual species as well.

Why would Wallace and I both simultaneously and suddenly burst into athletic sprints at times without cognition but in corporal-telekinetic detection of the ludic moment to run and chase one another in play? As Massumi notes, there was a moment of style, an aesthetic pose felt that was conflict-esque, twisting up attack (as if

I were chasing him down as prey) with a fun romp that we both knew through instinct, by "thinking-doing."

At seven, Theo wishes to wrestle with me almost daily but there are times when I know it will be bad to do so—if he is tired or hasn't had his way about something that day, for instance, he may be more physically aggressive toward me. And in the moment, any wrestler sympathetically knows when their partner suddenly transgresses the boundary of play-fighting or is about to think-do so. "Instinct is sympathy, at every level, in all its forms," writes Massumi. It is this crisscrossing of evolution and species on various mutually inclusionary levels that creates such knowledge and behavior and why he sees reason to give more attention to what this continuum can teach us about politics.

Trump, incidentally, may have mastered the style of twisting up attack and play, yet still he seems both a savage political animal and somehow anomalous in terms of his sociopathic transgression of right and wrong. Why were some people (like me) instinctively disgusted by Trump and his behavior such that they couldn't stand the sound of his voice or sight of him while others swung from the Twitter tree, cackling support for his dick-wagging, chest-pounding positions? Why could some people only reflexively hear the dog-whistle racism in Trump's statements while others understood his comments as racist on their face? What part of the human animal continuum and our mutual inclusion on it teaches us about unconscious belief? When the visionary alone sees Trump inside a dog's ear, how can they be unconvinced that theirs is a true vision by anyone who can't?

# Toe Jams and Nails

BULLDOGS ARE PLAGUED with interdigital cysts and before I learn to check and clean between the toes often, Wallace incessantly licks these growths, which sometimes bleed and develop bacterial infections.

Wallace drags his paws on the concrete when walking, so keeping his nails trimmed is a grooming chore accomplished without much additional effort. On one occasion though it seems he drags too heavily or somehow trips. I study his gait for days to inspect if he is indeed limping. He'll walk it off—says my childhood filled with the health advice of coaches and witnessing Dad frequently incur minor injuries in manual and craft-based labor. But a couple of weeks later, with the limp still noticeable, I heft him up on a metal table for the vet to squeeze his knee joints and extend his limbs. He is diagnosed with a torn ligament. Only two-and-a-half years old, I can't let him limp the rest of his life.

When he is rolled into the waiting room of the animal hospital, I see his face licked pink and raw with worry. The pale flesh of his back right half is exposed from being shaved, and staples bind the flesh on his knee joint. I am jolted as I comprehend his pain and discomfort. On his first morning back in the Fortress of Solitude I need to change his bandages and think to do this by lying him on my bed. With one hand I must keep him from flipping his thick frame away from me, while simultaneously unfurling the bloodied gauze to apply ointment and a fresh

bandage with my dominant hand. Perhaps because of the strangeness of being on the bed, compounded by any fear, anxiety, and pain he feels, or maybe because I didn't think to take him out beforehand, he quickly drenches both me and the bed in a stream of pee.

I am shocked at how limited his mobility is in recovery. Collared in one of those plastic cones while inside his crate, he can't easily turn himself around to get comfortable. Any time he exits, I must thread a sling under his belly, its two straps holding his back half virtually aloft, so his foot won't slip out from under him on the hardwoods and reinjure the knee. He isn't to put any pressure on or push off from that leg and is forbidden to spring from it. Carrying the two straps of the sling in one hand and a leash in the other while walking on snow-and-ice-covered sidewalks of a Rochester winter requires the coordination of a marionettist. There is already a strange lightness to a bulldog's hind-end (compared to its front-heavy anterior) but especially when suspended by the left hand in concert with a purposeful slack weightlessness of the leash in the right. Not mindful that his furry penis is covered by the sling's padding or unaware that its faux pelt has shifted slightly on even the shortest outing, I often find the sling urine-soaked. It lays over the shower curtain rod to dry each night as I view it dejectedly in the mirror behind me while brushing my teeth.

# "Animals Have No Rules"

PROCLAIMS THEO after sharing his sincere wish to be one.

The previous evening his kindergarten friend's family invited us to a Memorial Day cookout. They live in a suburban neighborhood where the yards are all connected by three-inch, frequently-watered, green grass. Everyone on the block are parents themselves and know to drive their cars cautiously and slowly through the sidewalk-free zone where all the running, scootering, and bike-riding is done in the road.

About a dozen kids—some from the neighborhood and some guests—run the block in packs, with offshoots and groups sometimes sorted by genders, age, or lung capacity. For several hours they wander and play, crossing the patio red-faced, moist, and with hair humidified into soft-edged clouds. A sip from a sugar-free juice box, a bite of hotdog, then half a cupcake gets jammed into their craw before they run off again to re-join their band.

In the meantime, between forkfuls of homemade salads and gulps of locally produced beer, the mingling amongst parents is mostly about parenting and our kids' schools.

Many parents and their offspring are wearing more red, white, and blue than usual on this unofficial start of another American summer—the promise of freedom felt most in the groups of kids running and careening in and out of adult attention. Their abandon,

I acknowledge, is enabled by the roughly three generations of influence to protect this street, this neighborhood, this suburb, this part of the county from becoming anything like what they fear of the *other* possible America, by keeping it zoned for only single-family homes and quietly campaigning against any assisted-living housing. That other America forebodes a hot summer of violently speeding cars, random shootings, open air drug deals, registered sex offenders residing on various nearby streets. ...I don't bring this up as small talk fodder on the patio.

The next morning before school, when Theo says, seemingly out of the blue, "I wish I were an animal. Animals have no rules," I think at first that he's describing figments of a dream. But then it occurs to me that the notion emerges from his dream-day, running wild and without restraint amongst the suburban pack.

I attempt to help him see that his thinking originates from the unrestrained play he experienced the previous evening, but it will be a few years before we can discuss the social, political, and economic strictures that made it possible for him to feel that his days are rules-free.

Instead, I try to clarify that he is an animal, just a different species. That the autonomous-feeling kid packs that formed yesterday had hierarchies, rules, and embodied instructions no different from the beings observed in any nature program he might watch with his mom. That, sadly, we are no more distinct from these rules and hierarchies in our own systemic constraints.

## 8.5 UNDERSTANDING YOUR BULLDOG

*To know bulldogs is to love them. Their child-like like nature and playfulness make them endlessly amusing. Their comfort in their own skin calls for an owner of equally level temperament. Their preposterousness obliges a keen appreciation of the absurd. Having a sense of the bulldog's history is to appreciate their precarity as a breed.*



BULLDOGS WERE ORIGINALLY bred for medieval bullbaiting, a savage and strange entertainment popular in England from the 13<sup>th</sup> through the early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. A bull, tethered to a stake, was attacked by dogs that often gripped onto its soft and vulnerable nose. The bovine would attempt to shake the dogs loose and send them flying from its snout into scrambling spectators, or a dog would get lip locked onto the muzzle, eventually exhausting and immobilizing the bull. One historian

commented, “The British Bulldog was the most valiant beast the Almighty (assisted by a number of sadistic breeders) had chosen to create,” going on to describe it as “the devil incarnate.”

After bullbaiting ended during the dog-crazy Victorian era, a bulldog's characteristics were greatly exaggerated for aesthetic reasons. Such traits included the layback of its face so it could breathe while locked onto a bull's muzzle; wrinkles and

folds intended to channel the bull's blood away from the dog's eyes; loose body skin to protect its internal organs; a larger head and bulging eyes to emulate the look of a human child, and short, bowed legs as a standard breed trait.

Frequently dominant traits inherited in offspring from two centuries of the genetic extremism of breeders often leads to physical problems in the breed. These can include crippling hip dysplasia, dislocated patellae, difficulty breathing caused by an elongated soft palate that obstructs the dog's airway, the recurrent

swelling of an inner eyelid gland, called cherry eye, pigmentary keratitis where melanin spots cloud the cornea and sometimes cause blindness, overly shallow bone orbits so that the eyes bulge (cutely) but are less protective of the eyes, ingrown eyelashes, lagophthalmia—a condition that prevents the eyes from fully closing—loose flesh folds that need to be cleaned often to ward off infections, heads so large they can only be birthed by Caesarean section, and legs so short they can't breed without human intervention.

In a 2011 *New York Times Magazine*





PERHAPS THE MOST FAMOUS bulldogs in the United States come from the royal line of Uga (ugh-uh), mascot to the University of Georgia's football team, owned by prominent Savannah lawyer Sonny Seiler. Always male and always purely white, the Uga line has been criticized for its sexist and racist selection.



MY OWN VAST MIXTURE is apparently 100% European. This map from the popular 23andme shows my genetic makeup to be 85.8% British and Irish; 8.3% French and German; 3.4% Northwest, and 2.5% Southern European.

article called “Can the Bulldog Be Saved?” Benoit Denizet-Lewis describes attempts to intervene and curb such extremity, citing interviews with veterinarians, breeders, owners, and dog show handlers, as well as multiple independent reports on pure breeds in need of intervention. The writer covers the gamut of views held by those who wish to protect bulldogs from being changed, those who adore the hyper-bred bulldog’s flattened face for its cuter proximity to human heads and believe having a longer snout would ruin it, and those who acknowledge the short-faced head of a bulldog as possibly detrimental to its long-term health. One report goes so far as questioning the ethical defensibility of breeding bulldogs for their current traits. Breeders have spent centuries cultivating these features in bulldogs’ gene pool. Adding more genomic diversity to make it a healthier and more sustainable breed will require extensive cultural change.

## Bulldogs and Whiteness

PUREBRED DOGS in general make an easy association with the “planned breeding” of eugenicist ideals.

In her *Companion Species Manifesto*, Donna Haraway recognizes the influence and arbitrariness of this type of sorting:

Canid, hominid; pet, professor; bitch, woman; animal, human... One of us, product of a vast mixture, is called ‘pure-bred.’ One of us, equally product of a vast mixture, is called ‘white.’ Each of these names

designates a racial discourse, and we both inherit their consequences in our flesh.

Artist Myra Greene subtly depicts this discourse and inheritance in a compendium of corporally and culturally received signs of whiteness entitled *My White Friends*. The project includes a portrait of me with Wallace. Myra shows companions from different times and aspects of her life individually with personal signs and references to whiteness as well as collectively under the sorting of *White* and *Friends*. In doing so Myra exposes the potency and subjectivity of photographically examining whiteness as a racial category. She shows how invented racial sorting is and how pathetic is the imagination required to make claims based on skin color. Myra’s photobook turns the seriously flawed illusoriness of racial sorting back on white people who have perhaps lived without consideration that they unconsciously (or not) staked claims of their own invented attributes as dominant and normative.

Although the project was criticized for its *lack* of signaling race (by colleagues both white and people of color, in the public comments of a recognized *NY Times* photo blog, on social media, by some of her white friends themselves) Myra had done what generations of mostly white, male photographers have done and been rewarded for: authored visual descriptions of a people or culture in a place and time. When white men have done this work their photographic signifiers have had the potential to become the signified for the segment of society pictured.



A BLOG THAT WAS ACTIVE a dozen years ago humorously listed “Stuff White People Like” and I can easily imagine a post stating,

*White people love to get DNA genetic heredity testing in the hopes of finding Native American, African, Middle Eastern, or Asian ancestry revealed in their newly discovered racial mixture. With a few drops of spit and new knowledge of their heredity, they may start to identify with and even explain your own culture to you.*

One of the few banner images on the “Stuff White People Like” blog is a red-and-white bulldog that could be Wallace.

Post #53 “Dogs” warns:

It should be understood that in white culture, dogs are considered training for having children. That is to say that any white couple must get a dog before they have kids. This will prepare them for responsibility by having another creature to feed, supervise its bathroom activities, and to love. If white people are ever talking about their dogs, it is essential that you reassure them that their dogs are absolutely special and unique.

## SPOT the Whiteness

IN MYRA'S PHOTO of me with Wallace, I can easily list several devised signs and references to whiteness noteworthy as surface signifiers that matter more as illustrations of their imagined significance.



Of course, there is the English bulldog, bred with hubris and an apparently oblivious sense of entitlement.

And is that an English football scarf I'm wearing? The World Cup is on the list of "Stuff White People Like."



How about the slight pompadour quaff in connection to the weird, white, Southern "King of Rock-n-Roll," Elvis, or maybe Thatcher-England's Morrissey?



Do the boots and jeans gesture toward country male whiteness?

Bruce Davidson's renowned photo essay on East 100<sup>th</sup> Street in Harlem, for example, may be seen as empathetic or esteemed for its moral sense. Activists used his images to advocate for more housing and subsistence support for residents of the Harlem block he photographed in 1966-1968.

Yet as a dominant vision of a place and its people, *East 100<sup>th</sup> Street* descends from highly flawed 19<sup>th</sup> century anthropological and Colonialist thinking. In a white supremacist system artists and writers—whether white or people of color—have more incentive and opportunities to publish depictions of people of color in terms of trauma and the difficulties of their existence.

Such portrayals push emotional reactions to empathize with or marvel at the subjects' abilities to persevere and grit their way through despite—*yet because of*—the system's additional challenges. The reinforcement of images of poverty and degradation as the signified of Blackness or people of color in Harlem, and vice versa, perpetuates an inherited Colonialism in photography, thus overwhelming any supportive impact Davidson's pictures may have had.

Of course, it would help if imagemakers weren't rewarded for reinforcing these visions. Centuries were spent embedding white supremacy into photography and its publishing—like in establishing the limited genetic pool for bulldog breeding. Adding more diversity to make these institutions more sustainable still requires widespread disruption.

## SPOT Colonialist-Style Photography

MYRA GREENE grew up in Harlem near where Bruce Davidson's body of work was made. How do their visions relate?

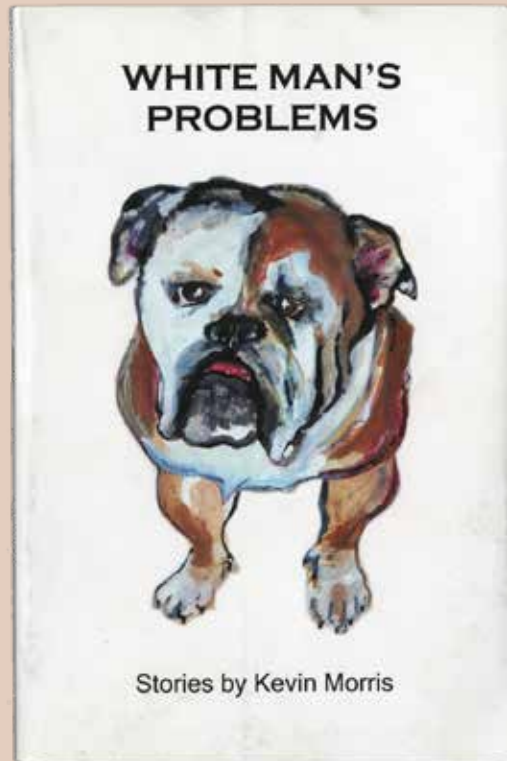


A picture by Davidson that is convergent with Myra's photo of me is titled only *Untitled, East 100<sup>th</sup> Street (Drug Addict Standing in Vacant Lot)*. Does it directly or arbitrarily associate the surface identifiers of the nameless man, his visage, and the environment where he's momentarily situated, with the label of addict? Pictures are fictions and without more contextual information our brains, evolved to repeat patterns, may routinely default to associating, say, strewn litter, or addiction, with Blackness, if more effort isn't made to challenge received signs that get repeated throughout various media.

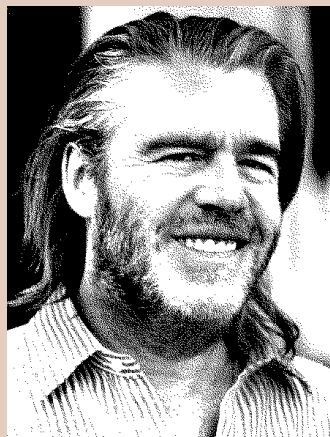
## Maintaining Dominance

ON THE PAPERBACK COVER of a story collection called *White Man's Problems*, another red-and-white bulldog that could be Wallace stared out at me from a shelf at Skylight Books in LA, where I visited Kris at her new home. Authored by Kevin Morris, a high-powered LA-based attorney and producer, every story in the collection has a white, straight, cis, hetero male protagonist, most of whom are middle-aged, successful, based in LA, think and care about achievement in their respective fields, explain at great length the details of their vocations, and appear to routinely disaffect immediate family members who have lives independent of but no less subject to the men's power and problems.

In the story "Mulligan's Travels," the eponymous character, after being away on a three-day business trip for his financial systems career, is tired and late for lunch at the club with his spouse and daughter. Rushing, he backs his Mercedes onto the family bulldog, Henry. After much hullabaloo for a jack to raise the car tire off the crunched and softly whimpering dog, Henry is ultimately rescued unharmed (due to his compact and muscular frame, we're later told). When the spurned but worried wife and daughter come home, they find Henry recovering on "his big doggy pillow in the den" and Mulligan in a lounge chair by the pool, smoking a cigar after downing a Valium. Like the famed stubbornness of bulldogs, the white, straight, hetero men of these stories somehow prevail through their urgent "problems" with their dominance intact.



Incidentally, the painting used for the paperback cover of *White Man's Problems* is credited to Karen Green, DFW's widow. At least I believe or want it to be the same Karen Green. She is a visual artist and writer and had a gallery in Claremont, CA



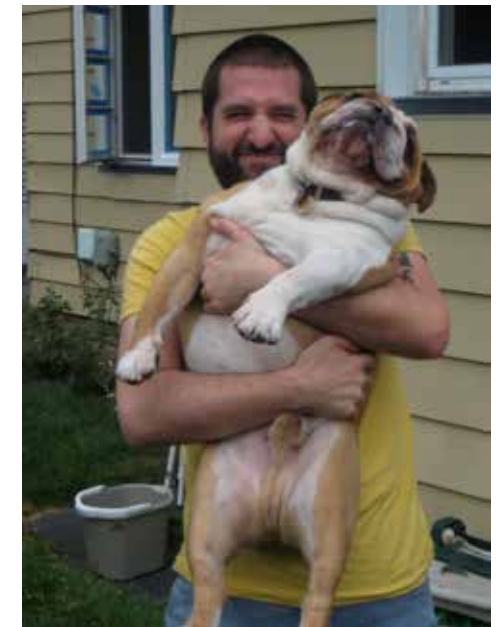
outside of LA at the time Morris self-published the stories. Morris's long-haired resemblance to DFW is also noteworthy in my personal literature of coincidences.

## 8.6 COMPANIONSHIP AND LOSS

*No matter how well we care for our bulldogs, time will eventually assert its claim on them. When it does, we may have to decide between prolonging or ending our dogs' lives. That is a decision in which selfishness has no place. The privilege of having a dog companion hinges upon us adding as much to a dog's life as the dog adds to ours. Obviously to prolong suffering simply because you cannot face saying good-bye exploits that companionship.*

ONE YEAR into living with and caring for Wallace, I am starting to develop animal-human instincts for perhaps the first time. I'm less an individual and more a collective entity including Wallace. I take him with me everywhere especially to Kris and Dan's home almost daily and where on weekends we gather to play Mexican Train, have cookouts, and share holidays with a consistent core group of friends including Myra.

Kris and I are seemingly inseparable. She is my confidante, consultant on everything, my collaborator and co-publisher, big sister, platonic lover, and mother. Wallace is like the deformed child of our virtual family arrangement. She cares for him when I'm gone on weekends or air travel trips away. Dan is also there in the home they share of course, and I study his ease with Wallace, how his calmness exudes and affects this stubborn bulldog whose anxious pacing for playtime, pets, or more food—always more food—is so easily cooled by Dan's demeanor. Wallace is as much theirs as mine and we are happy, loving companions.



DURING MY SECOND YEAR of living with Wallace, Visual Studies Workshop, the artist space, school, and community where Kris and I first met and where she has worked for several years and I teach part-time, is dying. We are offered positions as the interim directors to get it off life support. We're co-directors, but I'm given the official title Director and she the title Assistant Director, despite her already working there and my having less leadership experience and knowledge of its inner workings. Also, my salary will

be incrementally greater, but we are still co-directing, collaborating, cohabiting, just on a different level and on a different type of project—says my wetness behind the ears. At thirty-one I'm full of optimism and a vision for how to repair the place. It won't be such a significant change to my life and relationships, I think. Unconsciously, however, a blind desire is taking me over. It makes me believe I have earned some new level of freedom, but it is really the desire to be dominated. Having the desire to be acknowledged as Director—alpha—serves to keep me in a dominated state by the organization's board chair, its founder, and my dean at the college that partially funds the place, the white-haired, white men over sixty who together made the decision to give me—the nearest, tallest, straightest, outwardly family-less, white

man at hand—ever so slightly more power and money than Kris.

We still family together on evenings and weekends with Wallace at our side, but now virtually every conversation is about work or planning the Lazarus-raising of the institution. With our equality and the equity of our positions externally shifted, there is new tension, an anger and frustration felt in the epic task—her realism and my desire subtly, though frequently, at odds. Before, if anything I deferred to her, the wise, older sister-mother-lover who had helped to extract me from uncomfortable relationships while also keeping me from prospective monk-ness. I am oblivious to the power shift and don't get why she's slightly pissed about constantly working, about the upending of the dynamics, and about

her loss of influence and authority after having labored three-times as hard to build it up, simply because of my being male and white and more willing to wield power than I could recognize or accept at the time. Always Wallace is there padding around the asbestos-laden linoleum at the Workshop, where we worked late into evenings. Cleaning up after him walking on paint can lids and drop cloths and tracking paw prints or pooping in the halls, constantly throwing plastic bottles or anything toylike and crunchable in his jaws so he may lay down and worry these makeshift bones are additional tasks to which Kris concedes in this new work-life arrangement.

IN YEAR THREE with Wallace, Myra and most of the rest of our family of friends move to different cities, leaving just Kris and Dan and me with Wallace. *Good*, I think, myopically spurned by the loss of their leaving. Work, Wallace, and my companionship with Kris and Dan and their attachments—these I have all to myself now and I act entitled to them. Entitlement begets settlement, and fear of settlement begets longing, and I go on my first dates in years. I quickly grow close with a woman who is good with Wallace, but then suddenly try to break it off with her even as she pushes back, refusing the breakup and calling out my fear of intimacy, which wins out in the end anyway. I fall in love with a woman newly divorced and, technically, formerly my student, though we're about the same age and were friends for years prior. She's already connected to Kris and Dan, accepts Wallace's and my weirdness, and has family dinner and watches HBO

with us each Sunday night. I wish us to all be together somehow, but I'm also a serial monogamist only serviceable to one living connection at a time. To be with her, I start secreting time and details away from Kris and leaving Wallace alone for hours on end, occasionally even sleeping by himself overnight in the apartment—entitlement and desire growing in me like a well-fed child. She leaves the country for citizenship reasons, and her distance makes it easier for me to question our connection. It ends badly with my regrettably unfeeling, lopsided extraction.

Then, a couple of months later, I ask out Christine. Our constant dialog goes past the restaurant, to a bar, to my car in her driveway, to making out on her couch like teenagers, and continues to this day. She invites me to travel to Iceland with her toward the end of summer on a work trip, and I arrange for a friend to sleep at the Pee Palace for part of the ten days I'll be away. Kris will take Wallace during the rest of my trip. When I return, the time away and late summer coolness has me more comfortable and in love with Wallace than ever. Whenever I return from a trip, we stick to one another in a flattering, buttering-up type of way, reconnecting. I keep him with me now always at Christine's, where we have a lovely week of homemaking together despite her cat's disapproval of the alien creature moving in. Wallace lays contentedly in the driveway each night as the sun sets, bouncing its orange-pink light off the white aluminum garage door and warming him. That Saturday evening, we take a two-block walk to a neighborhood pizza place. His gait is its standard, ponderous lilt along the



concrete. Inside, I wait for them to heat our slices and look back lovingly through the plate glass window at my partner and my heavily panting dog. He lays down on his belly to Superman, but something about his forepaws flipping back toward his body is wrong, more like collapsing forward than laying outward. Christine crouches down to check on him as I exit to find him unresponsive, unbreathing. I sprint in flip flops, cutting through back yards and hurtling fences to get my car to drive him to the emergency animal hospital. He's already dead, I know it. When I retrieve his lifeless body from the car before racing him inside the hospital, his tongue is splayed out grossly, cartoonishly. I imagine the vets behind the hospital wall immediately realized his lifeless state and simply waited a while, leaving him on the gurney before calling us back to confirm the news. I deeply kiss the soft, white fur of his head before walking back to the car, stunned. Back at Christine's house I lay face down on the couch, sobbing, incapable of anything else. The following day, after the shock and the difficulty of sharing the news with Kris and Dan, and after their own tears settle, Kris declares perfectly, "He was an enigma in life, and now in death."

I never spend another night in the Fortress of Solitude, only returning a few times to remove my belongings and clean Wallace's hair and grunge out of every crevice as best I can. My last time there I take a now less familiar walk up the dead-end street and around the block—the same comforting stroll I took with Wallace the day I learned his namesake, DFW, had hung himself. Carrying with me the recipe-box-like decorative tin that holds a plastic bag of



his ashes, my aim is to tag a dusty patch of what is left of him on all the places where he used to obsessively sniff. The ceremony I imagined to create some dignity around Wallace's death doesn't go well because what I mourned wasn't humanly dignified or exalted; it was the animal-human I was with him and the daily melding of our instincts, living down in the mire and grime, the funk infective stuck to everything growing out of us viscerally being together—no matter how much I tried to scrub away or deny it. The chalky whiteness of his skeletal carbonates and calcium phosphates don't spread like ash; instead they mass in clingy clumps, sticking to my skin and getting lodged under my fingernails. Crouched on sidewalks he

marked in urine, I wipe his ground bone fragments on my pants below the knees, where his dander should be smeared.

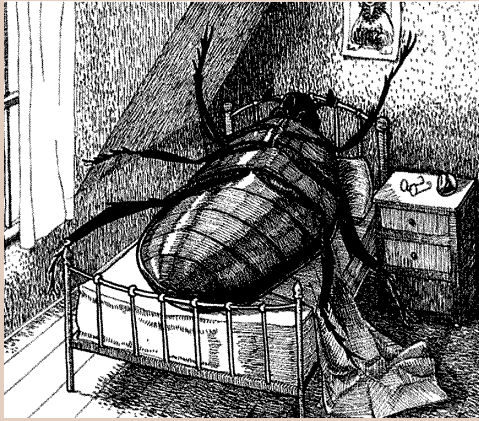
I throw myself into more work, where the fracturing of my companionship with Kris splinters easiest, especially now, I fear, since the malformed child born from our slightly unorthodox relationship is dead. I seek more solitary professional opportunities because it serves to make me feel freer, away from the collective and collaborative existence built with Kris. The more individualistic I get, the more dominated by want of achievement I become.

I fully move in with Christine but am hardly a collective partner to start. I'm literally impotent for months and a flaccid mess in other ways, except for a rigidity toward bringing regularity and tidiness to Christine's less-tamed existence. In the aftermath of Wallace's death, I seem to cycle backward toward convention and a status quo upbringing to a time well before I learned there was an animal-unconscious to be had instinctually. I disrupt and try disposing of the small sculptures Christine lives with and will possibly photograph one day—withered apple sections, dried flower cuttings, ashtrays overflowing with cigarette butts on the porch, piles of unopened mail, deflated balloons lying on the stairs, chewed bubblegum nailed to walls, stacks of books coated in dust, sun-faded crumpled paper the size of medium boulders—her feral studio unbounded by walls or a door. I see it all as undomesticated mess. To be with Christine, I must re-learn how to live outside my own individuality again. It is

## Becoming-Animal to Survive Normalcy



IN *WHAT ANIMALS TEACH US ABOUT POLITICS* Massumi draws out the becoming-animal work of Deleuze and Guattari. Becoming-animal is born of the necessity for creative survival in the face of entirely normative human day-to-day existence. For example, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that Kafka writes Gregor Samsa's cockroach *Metamorphosis* into being as a way out of the unlivable, all-too-human family situation. It is an Oedipal manifestation of horror. In the face of incest, the son mutates into something you wish to step upon and squish its abnormality in disgust. Yet the recourse of becoming-animal also creates a space of survival. Through writing, Kafka finds his "line of flight from the family enclosure."



Massumi writes:

In the becoming-animal of the human, creativity and survival are one. If the situation were not imperative, there would be no reason not to remain ensconced in the familiar comforts of home. The problem is that these comforts come with a price: normality; acquiescence to the already-expressed; the stifling of the supernormal tendency that immanently agitates and instinctively rouses all animals, human or otherwise, toward surpassing the dealt hand of the given. There is only one choice: renounce one's animal instincts, or leave the comfort of home. There is only one way out: deterritorialize oneself, to quit the human arena and reclaim animal existential territory.

Or else there is *normopathy* as outlined by Jean Oury, a "neurotic normativity, which invests itself body and soul in the compulsion to repeat the same, to the extent humanly possible...defended at all costs in the name of 'the way things are.'"

disorderly and uncontrollable and induces recurrences of desire to be holed up in the Fortress of Solitude without collectivity or any civic engagement.

IT'S A FEW MONTHS since Wallace died, and Marni comes to dinner one December night. She shows us a picture of Coco, a pit bull in need of rescuing from an over-breeder. We're both struck by the image on Marni's phone. We set up a visit but aren't allowed inside the house due to the number of dogs in basement kennels and the smell, we're told. We walk Coco on the ice-covered sidewalk. Her teats dangle well below her from their overuse, but she bears no other outward signs of being physically abused. We agree to try Coco in our home.

I return from a weekend conference on a Sunday night and Coco is in the kitchen, barking and shrinking away from me, terrified. When I enter a room she's already in, or if she hears me move in the next room over, she starts furiously barking, skittering around, and uncontrollably peeing. I can't pet or get within a few feet of her without her panicking in fear, literally quivering.

Yet Coco is in love with Christine and Christine with Coco. I get the feeling that Coco stays, with or without me. A trainer from the rescue group comes to the house and recommends that while at home I always carry cheese in my pockets to drop treats in my wake for Coco. I smell constantly of Provolone.

I'm woeful at not having a supposedly normal dog or life. But am back to *becoming* made alive again by lived abstraction.

# DOMINANCE DIARIES

PAMPHLET  
SERIES NO. 8

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