

Whose city?

Tracing entangled lives in the more-than-human city to explore human-pigeon co-existence in Amsterdam



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Summary

This thesis explores co-existence between humans and feral pigeons in the more-than-human city of Amsterdam, drawing on theoretical frameworks from multispecies studies, including animal geography, multispecies ethics, and cosmopolitics. The central research question: *How do humans and pigeons co-exist in the city and what insights does this provide for the potentials of more-than-human (cosmo)politics?* is answered through a multi-method approach combining literature review, newspaper analysis, and covert observations of humans and pigeons.

The study begins by exploring academic literature on feral pigeons to highlight important ethological aspects. However, this literature search revealed that much of what is known about them is socially constructed. Research on feral pigeons centres around finding ways how to best control their populations, rather than finding out more about the feral pigeons themselves. This has added to the idea that pigeons are pests, or are often seen as being beggars. Following this literature review, a newspaper analysis was performed to gain insights into how humans and pigeons have co-existed in the past. The search range was from 1950 until 2024 and showed that pigeons were initially welcomed and cherished as new “stadsgenoten” (fellow city inhabitants), however, moving into the 1970s pigeons were more often seen as a nuisance and concerns over the threat they pose to human health grew. This led to framing pigeons as a pest more often. Still, not all despised the feral pigeons or wanted them killed, meaning that the city was struggling to find ways to foster sustainable co-existence between humans and pigeons. Complementing these historical insights, observations of humans and pigeons took place at different locations in Amsterdam to see what types of interactions occur between them. These interactions ranged from avoidance to acts of care and play, demonstrating that co-existence is not static, but rather it differs per location, per person and also per pigeons. The findings support the idea that the more-than-human city is co-constituted and storied not only by humans, but also by non-human others, like the feral pigeons. Building on these empirical findings, this thesis makes use of cosmopolitical theory to reflect on the ethical and political implications of human-pigeon co-existence. This perspective requires a shift from speaking of and for pigeons, to finding ways to communicate with them. Moreover, we should acknowledge that the political is also to be found in the (in the eyes of humans) seemingly mundane interactions that take place between humans and pigeons. In that sense, simple acts such as a pigeon taking up space and making a human get out of the way for them, is inherently political from a cosmopolitical point of view.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that pigeons are more than just a nuisance or symbolic figures used to convey peace and victory, rather they active participants in shaping life in the more-than-human city. The interactions that take place between humans and pigeons and can be complex, where the meaning behind it is not always so clear. These complex interactions go beyond the idea of pigeons being beggars, rather these interactions can involve mutual exchanges whereby the human can receive things like attention, company or even friendship from one or more pigeons. By taking pigeons, alongside humans, as the central object of study in this thesis I have shown that pigeons are more than just passive background creatures and are to be taken seriously, both in everyday life and in the political.

1. Introduction

A growing body of research across multiple scientific disciplines now acknowledges the city as a more-than-human endeavour characterized by many human-animal entanglements (Robertson, 2018). This shift in perspective has initiated a re-evaluation of the traditional notion that cities are exclusively human constructs that ought to be free of beastly presence (Franklin, 2017). By embracing the concept of a more-than-human city, critical questions arise relating to human responsibility towards animals, meaning, and value (Van Dooren & Rose, 2012). In response to these challenges, fields such as animal geography, animal ethics and political science have developed new theoretical frameworks that incorporate the recognition of animal agency, interests, and concerns within the context of a more-than-human world (Franklin, 2017).

In anthropocentric human societies, animals have often been constructed as the ‘other’, therefore creating a distinction between humans and those that do not belong to the human species. The creation of this division between humans and nonhuman-animals allows for humans to exert power over non-humans. Historically, this has shown itself in the idea that humans like to be in control of their environment. This prevails in the private sphere, but also extends to public places in urban areas (Malamud, 2013, p. 4).

As part of solidifying this distinction between humans and animals in urban areas, some even go as far as referring to certain animal-others as mere ‘trash’ (Malamud, 2013, p. 4). These derogatory frames about animals stem from cultural prejudices about which species deserve, or do not, to exist in human-built environments (Nagy & David Johnson II, 2013, p. 2). Human classifications of these animal co-inhabitants of the city have two implications. On the one hand, it affects the cultural phenomenon, of an animal being considered as, for example, trash, that describes the animal. On the other hand, it affects the individual animal itself belonging to that particular species (Nagy & David Johnson II, 2013, p. 4). Therefore, classifying an animal as trash not only inherently attributes negative, or even disgusting, features to species as a whole, but it can negatively impact individual animals’ livelihoods.

An example of what some consider to be trash animals living in human-built cities are pigeons. Even though they share the same spaces, walk the same pavements, and even share the same meals as humans do, these birds are a typical example of trash animals and therefore, according to some, do not belong in the modern metropolis (Jerolmack, 2007). Pigeons have a history of being deemed unclean and seen as a threat to humans when it comes to hygiene, disease and property damage. These accusations have led to framing pigeons as ‘rats with wings’ and naming them ‘nuisance species’. This has prevented taking the role that pigeons play in constituting the more-than-human city seriously. Problematizing the pigeon in this manner has led to a multitude of attempts to eradicate pigeons from urban areas. These methods can range from gassing and shooting pigeons to altering architecture by placing spikes to avert pigeon presence (Jerolmack, 2008).

One of such cities that is struggling with the presence of pigeons, is the city of Amsterdam. Even though numbers of reported nuisance caused by these birds have declined, pigeons still remain a cause of trouble in the eyes of some for a multitude of reasons (Heyblom, 2024). However, a growing number of people are now starting to recognize that pigeons have just as much right to exist in the city of Amsterdam as humans do (van Wijk, 2024). In this context of everchanging and differing views, those responsible for the management of pigeons

are seeking ways to develop management that ensures a way of sustainable co-existence in the more-than-human city.

Researching human-pigeon relations presents itself as an opportunity to find out more about human-animal entanglements in multispecies environments, such as cities. Concepts developed in animal geography offer important insights with regards to how humans view the ideal city and whether or not certain species fit into these ‘imagined geographies’ (Philo & Wilbert, 2000). Employing this animal geography based approach can shed light on how pigeons came to be placed in human societies as the marginalized other in relation to their human co-habitants of the city.

In this thesis I wish to, as much as I can as a human researcher, immerse myself in the world of pigeons, rather than looking human-pigeon relations only from a purely human perspective. In order to do so, the book *The Wake of Crows* (2019) by Van Dooren serves as an inspiration. In this book the author researches the pigeons’ fellow nuisances bird species, crows, employing methods stemming from multispecies ethics. Van Dooren herein aims to “see-with” these nuisance species and uncover the myriad of ways in which crows shape their worlds in human dominated societies. In my research, I will extend this approach to researching pigeons in the more-than-human city by closely observing human-pigeon interactions.

Combining theoretical and methodological approaches from both animal geography and multispecies ethics, that fall under the broader umbrella of multispecies studies, allows me to create a novel approach in researching human-animal entanglements in a multispecies environment, like the more-than-human city. Doing so will allow me to not only show that these theoretical perspectives go hand-in-hand when researching human-animal relations, but will also enable me to take on a situated in-depth approach to uncover more about how pigeons live in the city of Amsterdam.

Pigeons have been researched as being co-constructors of human social environments (see for example: Jerolmack, 2013), however, research about how pigeons lives are shaped by co-existence with humans in a more-than-city is lacking. Moreover, pigeons are sometimes described as being beggars in academic literature (Weber, J., Haag, D., & Durrer, H., 1994). Which has led to the idea that pigeons are always looking to get something from humans, rather than humans and pigeons taking part in reciprocal exchanges that recognizes the pigeons’ agency. Seeing pigeons as beggars also does no justice to the part they play in shaping the more-than-human city.

As part of describing human-pigeon co-existence in a more-than-human city, it is important to consider the political dimension. A concept that does so is cosmopolitics. Unlike traditional politics focused on human interests, cosmopolitics seeks to explore the implications of acknowledging non-human agency in shared spaces (Hinchcliffe et al., 2005). It ultimately sees a society as more than exclusively human and made up of countless associations by all beings, that are continuously formed and evolving (Robbert & Mickey, 2013). To take seriously the notion that humans and pigeons co-construct the more-than-human city it is crucial to also reflect on how these pigeons take part in politics. While doing so, the concept of cosmopolitics can find its way from academic literature into a practical reality and thereby contribute to the growing body of research on more-than-human politics.

Next to this novelty in academic research, this thesis also wishes to fulfil some deeper debts humans owe to the pigeons living with us in cities. One must not underestimate the possible

negative affects these 'rats with wings' frames might have on the ways in which humans approach both individual pigeons and the species as a whole. Historically, and maybe even currently, decisions on how to live with, or even eradicate, pigeons from public spaces in cities have been made on the basis of culturally constructed images of what a pigeon is, and what a city is ought to be, rather than based on ecological knowledge (Malamud, 2013, p. 5).

2. Research objectives and research questions

2.1. Research objectives

Within this thesis I aim to contribute to the growing body of research in multispecies studies concerning human-animal relations by examining human-pigeon co-existence within a more-than-human city. While doing so, a central focus is to investigate how these modes of co-existence may vary across different spaces within a city, enriching animal geography through place-based analysis of human-pigeon relations. I will also explore the ways in which pigeons are placed in human minds by studying the shared history of humans and pigeons in Amsterdam through an extensive newspaper analysis. Next to contributing to animal geography, this thesis will use concepts that are used in multispecies ethics. These can offer new insights into how pigeons, alongside humans, story and, therefore, take part in shaping shared city spaces. This adds to the body of knowledge that explains how the more-than-human city is constituted by both humans and non-human actors, by taking the animals' perspective into consideration. Additionally, this thesis will explore how cosmopolitical theory can inspire the political by studying what may seem as somewhat mundane everyday events, such as encounters between humans and pigeons in Amsterdam. By doing so, a glance into the future can be given on how humans can further improve towards a sustainable and equal way of co-existing with pigeons.

Ultimately, this thesis seeks to inform how more-than-human cities can be designed and managed to enable all those living in a city to flourish. This thesis will aid in doing so by researching human-pigeons relations, both from a humans and a pigeons perspective. These insights will in turn provide useful information to further inform strategies on how to further design and manage the more-than-human city. While this thesis will contribute to finding ways to design the city in such a way that it enables all beings to flourish, it will not provide specific management strategies. And, hopefully, doing so might serve as an inspiration to discover ways in which this can be done for likewise non-humans living in the more-than-human city.

2.2. Research questions

The previously discussed research objectives have resulted in the following main research question:

How do humans and pigeons co-exist in the city and what insights does this provide for the potential of more-than-human (cosmo)politics?

This question will be answered by answering four sub-research questions. The first of which is:

- *What are the characteristics of feral pigeons living in cities according to literature?*

This question will provide insights into the behaviour of feral pigeons and how they became so well-adapted to life in cities. Additionally, it will reflect on how academic literature might have contributed to the way pigeons are being seen in human society. The next question is:

- *What is the shared history of humans and pigeons in Amsterdam?*

Answering this question will reveal how humans and pigeons have co-inhabited the city in the past. Next to this, it will also show how humans have written about pigeons up until the present day, showing how pigeons can potentially be framed. The third question is:

- *What are the different types of places in Amsterdam where humans and pigeons co-exist and what types of interactions occur?*

Within this part of answering the main research question of this thesis, an overview of different places where humans and pigeons can co-exist will be provided. Additionally, it shows what co-existence currently looks like in the present day and shows how this might differ between the different places. The last question is:

- *How can cosmopolitical theory inform sustainable co-existence between humans and pigeons, in view of the different forms of co-existence they take part in?*

After having answered the previous questions, this question reflects on how human-pigeon co-existence can be seen in the context of cosmopolitics and sees what this could mean for future co-existence.

3. Theoretical framework

In order to make inferences about human-pigeon co-existence and what possible political implications would be if humans were to take pigeons seriously, I will make use of three scientific disciplines that fall under the broader umbrella of multispecies studies. Firstly, animal geography can provide insights into how human-pigeons relations came to exist as we know them today. Additionally, it can aid in the place-based analysis of human-pigeon relations with concepts such as ‘animal spaces’ and ‘beastly places’. Secondly, I will turn to multispecies ethics. From this theory I will elaborate on the concepts of ‘worlding’ and ‘storytelling’ that can help in finding out more about how both humans and pigeons are co-constitutors of the more-than-human city. Alongside, it will help in immersing myself in the world of pigeons by enabling me to see in what possible ways pigeons partake in shaping their own worlds. Third, and lastly, I will expand on cosmopolitics. This curious and open way of practicing politics explores what the consequences would be if we, as humans, were to take non-human agency seriously. By doing so, it also explores how ways of (human) knowing can affect the frames that exist about a particular animal.

3.1. Multispecies studies

As van Dooren, Kirksey and Münster (2016) put it, life does not arise nor is sustained in isolation. Rather, all beings are emergent in a larger whole, consisting of intricate webs of co-evolution and interwoven patterns of living and dying, creating a lively, closely intertwined world. And therefore, species, or singular organisms, are in this never ending mode of becoming, or rather, becoming-with others. Within scientific research, the diverse disciplinary and interdisciplinary field of multispecies studies has emerged in an attempt to uncover more about this becoming-with. Multispecies scholars hereby create spaces for new, and exploratory, interdisciplinary research. While doing so, they focus on a web of entanglements, rather than merely focussing on people’s relations with animals in the terms of predator-prey, parasite-host and so forth. However, these relationships are never completely disregarded since they, for a large part, are powerful determinants of existing power-relations (van Dooren, Kirksey & Münster, 2016).

As a scientific discipline, multispecies studies encompasses diverse fields, such as multispecies ethnography, more-than-human geographies, anthropology et cetera. What connects all these fields is a shared interest in uncovering more on how different forms of life matter, and what are ethical, political and epistemological implications if we, as humans, were to take them seriously in both science and all forms of everyday life (van Dooren, Kirksey & Münster, 2016).

Within multispecies studies, scholars often refer to what Tsing calls the “arts of noticing” (Tsing, 2011) as a way of immersing oneself in others’ lives as a manner of research. This art of noticing entails being attentive to non-human others and their modes of being and becoming. By paying careful attention to non-human others, the aim is to discover what actually matters to them and how they shape their world accordingly. Multispecies scholars thereby aim to go beyond a purely human perspective. Combining these aspects results in an approach that is based on genuine curiosity about others, wanting to truly understand non-human others and deeply caring about and for others (van Dooren, Kirksey & Münster, 2016).

3.2. Animal geography

Animal geography has evolved into a highly diverse field of research, offering new insights into the complex relationships between humans and animals. As Hovorka (2017) notes, “existing global animal geographies offer a wealth of insights and illustrations as to the complex, nuanced and varied relations that humans have with animals, and that animals have with humans around the world”. This sub-field of geography has emerged from a growing willingness to take animals seriously in both the academic world and beyond (Wolch & Emell, p. xii, 1998). Historically, human-animal relations are often built upon foundations of unequal power, often resulting in a dominating and oppressive power of humans over animals. Consequently, animals have often come to be known as a relatively powerless beings in human shaped societies. Alongside other scientific disciplines such as anthropology, psychology and sociology, animal geography seeks to explain how these unequal relations between humans and non-humans, came into existence. It does so through a critical examination of the spatial and social dimensions that are at the foundation of these human-animal relationships (Philo & Wilbert, p. 4, 2000).

3.2.1. *Animal spaces and beastly places*

A central focus in animal geography is the conception of place and its relationship to non-human animals. This theme is extensively explored in *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places* by Philo and Wilbert (2000), where the authors aim to define and explain two interrelated senses of place. The first is the conception of ‘place’, which refers to how non-human animals can be placed in human classification of the world and is called ‘animal spaces’. Within this classification, each being is attributed their proper place in which they can, or are allowed to, exist. These placings are relative to other beings and can be precisely identified and delimited. These placings where beings belong are not to overlap with the places other beings are assigned to. Foucault (1970) explains that this distinctive human manner of placing animals in human society roots deeply in culture. Examples of these cultural classifications are pre-Neolithic totemic societies and classification found in the bible (Shepard, 1993; Sibley, 2002). However, as culture is inherently dynamic, these classifications are not fixed. They are fluid and continuously shaped by human culture and can therefore vary widely across localities and time (Philo & Wilbert, p. 6, 2000).

In practice, the placing of animals in these classifications manifests itself in human ideas on which are the proper physical places which animals should occupy. This idea of creating a ‘niche’ for an animal extends the classification from a conceptual idea to a materialized reality (Kingsland, 1991). With turning this classified idea into a practical reality, ‘imaginative geographies’ come into being. This term proposed by Said (1978), describes how, alongside conceptual ‘othering’ (setting apart and highlighting the difference between humans and non-humans) animals are also subject to geographical ‘othering’. Therefore, animals are assigned worldly places which they are meant to occupy. Imaginative geographies, like their conceptual counterparts, are also inherently unstable and subject to cultural and social shifts and their geographical context. Philo and Wilbert (2000) propose that, unlike conceptual classifications of humans and animals, these imaginative geographies can in fact overlap. However, this is highly influenced by factors such as the specific animal under consideration, the cultural and geographical context, and the human perspectives creating these spaces.

Alongside these mental and physical spaces humans assign to animals, animals are also capable of claiming their own spaces. These spaces are referred to as ‘beastly places’, the second sense of place described by Philo and Wilbert (2000). These beastly places are formed

when animals transgress the spatial boundaries set by humans for animal presence and thereby create spaces wherein animals can follow their own ‘beastly’ manners, highlighting the agency of animals in shaping their own environments (Philo & Wilbert, p. 13, 2000).

3.2.2. *Animal geography in the city*

A significant site where humans and animals come together is the city. Historically, cities have often been areas of conflict between humans and animals, with animals frequently disadvantaged and subjected to human agendas driven by anti-animal sentiments (Philo, 1998). It can therefore be said that, ideally, cities are historically seen as places free of beastly animal presence. However, more recently, the city is being recognized as a more-than-human endeavour, and is therefore being seen as a place that is constituted not only by humans, but also by animals (Gibbs, 2024). This perspective challenges the anthropocentric conception of the city and acknowledges the many multispecies entanglements that exist in urban spaces.

While contemporary conception on which species ought to inhabit the city have changed compared to the past, they still remain partly intact. One species particularly influenced by prevailing human classifications concerning which animals should exist in the city, is the feral pigeon. Research has shown that pigeons are still marginalized in the city, because of prevailing ideas that pigeons do not deserve to exist in the city, this can even result in the justification of the loss of pigeons lives (Pitas, 2021). Moreover, Wilson (2022) argues that “avian claims to space have prompted fraught debates on coexistence, urban planning, and socio-environmental futures that reveal an inherently ambivalent politics”. Additionally, Campbell (2007) further shows that animal geography is especially relevant in human-avian interactions in the context of city spaces. Firstly, birds occupy human built spaces in large numbers, in some cases in such large numbers that it has profoundly influenced human land use management. Secondly, the reactions to this presence of birds can vary between people, periods and spaces. Thirdly, the occupation of birds in human made city spaces constitute new ways of human interaction with the environment, which in turn influences the experience of these birds. Lastly, alongside the birds, humans are also subject to ever changing and evolving co-existence in city spaces (Campbell, 2007).

3.2.3. *Constructions of animals in the human mind*

In addition to uncovering the ways in which animals are placed in material spaces, animal geographers also seek to discern the ways in which animals are ‘placed’ in society, thus also exploring how animals are constructed in human minds. This can be researched by looking at imaginary, literary, psychological and even virtual spaces. Animal geography, therefore, goes beyond mere physical presence and looks at how animals exist in the human mind (Wilbert, 1993).

When considering the ways in which certain animals are imagined, one must always consider the specific ‘animal-human mode of production’ that is prevalent within a given society, as this is highly influential in shaping these imaginings (Tapper, 1994). In this sense, seeing how animals are labelled or constructed in the human mind, are always part of a bigger picture. By acknowledging this, animal geography seeks to move beyond viewing animals as passive objects onto which humans project their ideas. It instead wants to explore how animals themselves are influenced by and respond to these human perceptions. This endeavour leads to questions on animal agency and to what extent animals can actually destabilise human orderings, both imaginative and spatial ones (Philo & Wilbert, 2000). In this sense, animal geography is aiming to develop a way to study active animal agency (Campbell, 2007). However, this endeavour raises important questions on the limitations of such an approach.

Most importantly is the consideration of whether it is actually possible to practice such an animal geography, or is it rather just an anthropocentric inquiry into how humans exist in relation to animals? (Noske, 1998). Is it possible to grasp at an animals' lived experience within inherently human centred frameworks?

3.2.4. *Grasping the animals lived experience*

While Noske (1998) posed this question on whether scientists are able to transcend their anthropocentric viewpoints already in 1998, animal geography scholars are still seeking ways to overcome this limitation and develop new methods (Buller, 2014; Gibbs, 2024). In recent years, however, a growing body of work is aiming to decentralize the human experience and give privilege to the animal and non-human lived experiences (Gibbs, 2024). The biggest challenge in doing so lies in finding appropriate methodological ways that truly grasp the non-human side of human-animal relations (Greenhough & Roe, 2019). As part of this movement Bear et al (2017) noted that studies still mainly favour text or voice-based approaches, which are inherently favouring human experiences. In response, animal geographers have experimented with visual methods, ethnography, ethology and art to try and centre animals experience (Bear et al., 2017; Greenhough & Roe, 2019; Barua & Sinha, 2019; Magrane & Johnson, 2017). Combining the diversity of the sub-discipline of animal geography and the many, and ever evolving, more-than-human methodological approaches show that this field of science is promising in uncovering more about human-animal relations in a multitude of contexts, including the more-than-human city.

3.3. **Multispecies ethics**

In his book *The Wake of Crows*, Thom van Dooren (2009) delves into human-crow relations and investigates how both humans and crows live and die in a shared and everchanging world (p. 2). Herein he wants to take crows seriously. Therefore not only looking at what crows would need to survive, but also what they can actually do. By taking on this approach he moves beyond the idea that crows are merely subjects to human ideas, but he sees them as beings who themselves shape our shared more-than-human world in consequential manners (Van Dooren, p. 3, 2019). In his book van Dooren takes on an approach of multispecies ethics, which he himself describes as; “multispecies ethics is one that takes seriously the fact that all life, including human life, occurs within fundamental and constitutive relationships with other kinds of beings, living and not” (Van Dooren, p. 7, 2009). Multispecies ethical theories offer multiple approaches that challenge humans to step out of their anthropocentric worldview and find ways to come closer to grasping the animals' experience. In this section I will expand two of these concepts, namely ‘worlding’ and ‘storytelling’ in the context of a more-than-human city.

3.3.1. *Worlding and seeing-with others*

A way to transcend an anthropocentric (and often Western) worldview, is to take seriously the notion that the world is not composed of a singular, objective reality. Instead, multiple realities exist through diverse notions of culture, ideas and perspectives which lead to different ways of understanding and inhabiting the world. This plurality of perspectives reflects the idea that there are countless ways of "doing" worlds (Van Dooren, 2019, p. 8). Within multispecies ethics this process has come to be known as ‘worlding’, referring to the way a multitude of worlds are being made. Recognising that worlds are being made, not only by humans, but also by non-humans, is to acknowledge that various forms of agency exist, even if certain types of agency have been constrained and have been of unequal influence in past times (Haraway, 1997).

Although multiple worlds exist, there is still a common space of existence. However, it

is important to realize that these spaces of existence are made sense of differently by all those according to their own mode of worlding. Thus, while these worlds are distinct, they also interact and contribute to the construction of a common reality. The worlds that exist in the minds of both humans and animals are brought into being through relationships with others, shaped by the lives these beings live, and the ways in which they influence the present and future (Van Dooren, 2019, p. 8). As Mol (2002) puts it; “we exist in the multiple”.

An important consideration in the context of worlding, is to realize that there is no final or correct way of worlding. Instead, ethical responsibility demands that we attend to the particularities of others and engage with them to understand what matters to them and what possibilities they have. This attentiveness to others, therefore, becomes an ethical consideration. We are responsible for enabling others, both human and non-human, to ‘world well’ and flourish (Van Dooren, 2019, p. 9). This idea of flourishing is where the challenge lies for multispecies ethics, particularly in asking what it would actually mean in practice for non-human animals to flourish (Van Dooren, 2019, p. 11). To better understand worlding and flourishing in non-human others, it is essential to engage in a practice of “seeing” and “seeing-with” these animal others, alongside recognizing their agency and their roles in shaping a shared reality (Van Dooren, 2019, p. 12).

3.3.2. *Storying the more-than-human city*

One particular way of overcoming human centrism is the use of ‘storytelling’, particularly within urban contexts. This approach emphasizes cities as multispecies spaces co-constituted by both human and non-human actors (Rose & van Dooren, 2012). To fully grasp the concept of storying, it is essential to understand the concept of ‘place’ and how a place is constituted. A place is not merely a geographical location; it is embodied, situated, kinetic, and inherently narrative. It is woven into broader histories and systems of meaning, each layered into the physical and symbolic structure of the place itself (Ingold, 2000). This narrational nature of places show itself in the making up of a place. A place is both impacted by the stories that exist about it and at the same time affects the stories being formed about the place itself (Haraway, 1997). In the context of multispecies ethics, this means that we need to acknowledge that this storying of places is not only done by humans, but also by non-human actors, thus creating a more-than-human place, or in this case, a more-than-human city (Rose & van Dooren, 2012).

Rose and van Dooren (2012) define a story as follows: “a story is that which emerges out of an ability to engage with happenings in the world as sequential and meaningful events”. Telling a story does not require strict chronological structure. Rather, it involves placing meaningful events in relation to one another within a broader context (Rose & van Dooren, 2012). According to Shepard (1996), animals possess the capacity to place events into a meaningful sequence. For example, an animal can put together sounds, smells or other happenings to assess whether a predator is near and on the basis of that make decisions on what action to take next. Therefore, by creating bridges between one event and another and produce meaning, animals are capable of producing stories (Rose & van Dooren, 2012). To accept non-humans as ‘narrative subjects’ (Plumwood, 2005) does not directly require animals to be able to share their stories directly with others, however it could include this (Rose & van Dooren, 2012). Rather, it requires recognizing that animals participate in meaningful storytelling by engaging with and interpreting their environments, thus contributing to shaping of a multispecies city.

In his study on pigeons in Maryland, Pitas (2022) employs a method he refers to as ecological storytelling. The term ecology has multiple implications here. Firstly, it refers to the scientific discipline ecology itself. Ecology as a discipline looks beyond the organism itself and researches the relationship between different organisms and their environment. Secondly, Pitas (2022) considers ecology in a wider sense as well. He hereby refers to ecology as a set of relationships that exist within spaces and transcend the boundaries of scientific analyses. An important concept in this context is 'lay ecology'. Employed by, for example, Eden & Bear (2011), it takes seriously the way that non-experts understand relationships between different species and their environment. By including this way of understanding ecology, it goes beyond the scientific discipline that concerns itself with these relational modes of being, but also looks at how non-experts understand these relations between beings and between beings and their environment.

3.4. Cosmopolitics

In order to take seriously the role that pigeons play in co-constituting the more-than-human city, it is important to understand the political implications this might have. To do so, the concept of cosmopolitics will be delved further into. Cosmopolitics refers to the politics of the cosmos. Here the cosmos can be defined as the multitude of beings, that jointly construct a reality and, therefore, shape a collective society. This multitude of beings entails humans, non-humans, living, non-living entities and so forth. Although various efforts have been made to define society as solely human, these attempts fail in capturing the continual forming of associations between humans and non-humans. It is through these associations that the cosmos becomes inherently political, as diverse beings interact, influence, and co-constitute shared spaces (Robbert & Mickey, 2013).

The main issue that concerns cosmopolitical scholars is what to be political consequences would be if humans were to fully recognize that no space is exclusively human. In reality, spaces are inhabited by a multitude of beings, human and non-human. Contrary to traditional politics, which is typically centred around the interests of humans and human modes of existence, cosmopolitics seeks to challenge the boundary division between humans and non-humans. By rethinking conventional politics in a cosmopolitical context, cosmopolitics seeks to navigate the challenging dynamics of coexistence in a more-than-human world (Hinchcliff et al., 2003).

3.4.1. How to do cosmopolitics?

One of the practical issues cosmopolitics is concerned with, is how to include non-humans in political processes. Often, the idea exists that inclusion of beings in political processes is achieved through means of accurate representation. Scholars following cosmopolitical thought would argue against this (Hinchcliff et al., 2003). If humans were to "represent" non-humans in a traditional way, it would only make the non-humans look like lesser humans (Haraway, 1992). Additionally, Foucault (1974) argues that humans should avoid speaking of and for others. And perhaps more fundamentally, how does one "represent" an entire species? In reality, species are made up of countless of specimens of which one can ask themselves if these specimens are rightfully represented as a unified species. Representing non-humans through their assigned species identity robs them of the possibility of singularity and difference (Hinchcliff et al., 2003).

As Paulson (2001, p. 112) describes cosmopolitics: “it is not enough to decide to include nonhumans in collectives, or to acknowledge that societies live in a physical and biological world, as useful as these steps may be. The crucial point is to learn how new types of encounter (and conviviality) with nonhumans, which emerge in the practice of the sciences over the course of their history, can give rise to new modes of relation with humans, i.e. to new political practices”. Following this definition, cosmopolitics is a risky endeavour, whereby humans are challenged to experiment with new ways of collectively engaging with non-humans. In doing so, the non-humans we work with, should be approached as colleagues and not as representatives of a unified species (Hinchcliff et al., 2003). The process of practicing cosmopolitics is therefore an open one. Humans should be willing to experiment with new modes of politics and, while doing so, should be open to interference from members of all species, both human and non-human, to learn how things matter to them (Latour, 1997).

3.4.2. *Cosmopolitics in a multispecies city*

In their research McKiernan and Instone (2015) critically examine the role the White ibis takes in a more-than-human city. Alongside investigating how the pest narrative that is projected on this bird has come into being, the writers also think about what it would mean if humans were to take the White ibis seriously in a more-than-human city from a cosmopolitical point of view. Firstly, the authors question the current modes of relating to the White ibis, this means critically re-evaluating in what way relationships are formed and thinking on who and what belongs where in the city, or does not belong in the city at all. Additionally, it is crucial to query into what it means for a species to flourish (Haraway, 2008). Consistent with how, among others, Hinchcliff et al (2003) describe cosmopolitics, McKiernan and Instone (2015) see practicing cosmopolitics as an open process which presents itself with never-ending opportunities to question our ways of relating between humans and non-humans: “Cosmopolitics opens the possibilities to grapple with those nonhuman animals, estranged and familiar, loved and loathed, pulling us into the unpredictable world-makings of multispecies intra-actions.” (McKiernan & Instone, 2015).

The end result of cosmopolitics is not necessarily producing a society where all is well and where all beings live together happily ever after, rather, it is about accepting the opposite. Taking seriously non-human beings in a political sense, means accepting that both humans and non-humans need each other for survival and are both crucial in shaping their shared worlds (Stengers, 2005; Haraway, 2008). Within the context of a multispecies city, it is necessary to ask how this co-dependency can translate into new, sustainable, modes of relating. These new modes of relating, therefore, do not necessarily result in an always harmonious way of co-existence, rather, we should embrace uncomfortable futures whereby we take seriously all forms of life and do not shy away from the ethical dilemmas that arise from this. Ultimately, to realise this in the more-than-human city, humans should see non-humans as partners and work towards non-hierarchical modes of cohabitation (McKiernan & Instone, 2015).

4. Methodology

4.1. Nature of the thesis work

Methods in multispecies studies inherently adopt a curiosity driven and open approach where researchers are encouraged to engage and explore diverse ways of being of non-human species (van Dooren, Kirksey & Münster, 2016). In order to contribute to this field of science, that values openness to unexpected insights and interaction between species, I adopted such an exploratory mindset within this thesis. This explorative and curiosity driven approach of doing research mostly reveals itself through the fact that the answers from my previous research questions partly informed my approach for the following research questions. Below I have expanded on the methodology that I followed to conduct my research, however, my approach when moving from one research question to the next, was continuously influenced by new findings. In doing so, I remained open to interference from whatever source, whether it was human-made scientific literature or the observed behaviour of pigeons, to further shape my thesis. I will reflect on how conducting this thesis was a continuous process in my discussion.

This research will contribute to the theories I have explained in the theoretical framework in the following ways; firstly, I will engage with animal geography by performing a place-based analysis of what human-pigeons co-existence looks like by locating various sites within Amsterdam to see how forms of co-existence might differ. While doing so, I will try to see whether it is possible to see these different sites as an example of an animal space or a beastly place. Additionally, I will explore the way pigeons exist in the human minds by looking at the way pigeons are framed, relating to how animals are placed in human orderings of the world in human minds. Secondly, I will contribute to multispecies ethics by employing the concept of storying, as described by Rose and Van Dooren (2012) by seeing what this storying might look like in practice. It is important to use concepts such as these because it highlights the importance of seeing a city as something that is shaped by more than just humans. Lastly, I want to see what a theoretical idea like cosmopolitics can offer for a practical case, like human-pigeons co-existence in Amsterdam, by examining how the literature on this theory fits with this real-life case of human and non-human co-habitation.

This thesis takes on the form of a qualitative case study. This study design allows for the opportunity to do an in-depth investigation on a real-life case that is bound in time and space, in this case pigeon-human co-existence in Amsterdam, that is part of a bigger phenomenon, human-animal co-existence in a more-than-human city. Additionally, a case study allows for the researcher to not be limited to collecting one specific kind of data, rather, it allows the researcher to combine outcomes of multiple manners of researching, such as observations, document analysis and interviews. Typically, a case study results in an intensive and comprehensive understanding of this specific case of a larger phenomenon. These newly acquired insights can offer new ways of learning and understanding a particular phenomenon (Schoch, 2020). In this case, thoroughly investigating the ways in which humans and pigeons co-exist in differing city spaces can provide new insights on how humans and non-human are currently existing alongside one another and what can be done to foster sustainable co-existence in the coming future.

4.2. Data collection design

In the text below I will explain the methods which I have employed to answer the sub-research questions. As the methods differ per question, I have structured this text per sub-question.

1. *What are the characteristics of feral pigeons living in cities according to literature?*

This question will be answered through a literature review and will result in an overview of the most important behavioural aspects of feral pigeons living in cities. This will be accompanied by an explanation as to why feral pigeons are so well-adapted to living in urban areas. Additionally, on the basis of what I have seen in pigeon ethology literature, and articles that reflect on that, I will expand on the social construction of pigeons in academic literature.

2. *What is the shared history of humans and pigeons in Amsterdam?*

Answering this question will provide insights into how humans and pigeons have co-existed in the past. It also adds to finding out how both humans and pigeons have shaped the way that Amsterdam is storied, seeing this storying a place as a multispecies act. Additionally, by looking at the history of human-pigeons co-existence, more light can be shed on the way pigeons have been approached by humans in the past and how the frames that currently exist on pigeons came into existence. Exploring the history of humans and pigeons in Amsterdam will be done by analysing what has been written in the Amsterdam-based newspaper *Het Parool* from the 1950s up until the present day. The analysis will be performed on published material in the newspaper, comprised of news articles, opinion pieces and letters from readers.

Historical research through newspapers allows for the understanding of a certain phenomenon through lived experiences and social discourse by pinpointing certain trends that characterize this phenomenon. In this way, analysing newspaper articles can serve as a means in understanding a certain cultural phenomenon (Lansdall-Welfare et al., 2016). Therefore, by closely examining what has been written on feral pigeons in a newspaper can provide a better understanding of how pigeons have been viewed by humans in the past and how they have lived with them.

I chose to analyse pieces from one particular newspaper to keep the number of published articles feasible for analysis, therefore, *Het Parool* was chosen. *Het Parool* is an Amsterdam-based newspaper, which means that this particular paper published articles that were most relevant for my research. In total, a number of 43 articles were used in the analysis. These articles were based on the relevance in explaining human-pigeon co-existence. Initially, more articles were selected, however, when moving to the actual analysis, some articles showed a lot of overlap with others and were excluded. The starting year of 1950 was chosen because it was around this time that the first feral pigeons were arriving in Amsterdam and their presence was being picked up by *Het Parool*.

I split up the search for articles in decades, as to keep an overview of what had been published. Articles that appeared from 01-01-1950 until 31-12-1999 were found through *Delpher.nl*, a database for historical newspapers. The articles that appeared from 01-01-2000 until 05-12-2024 (the date my last search took place) were found on *NexisUni*, a newspaper archive that is accessible to university students. I specified the search terms used in *Delpher* to make sure that the articles that were shown were on feral pigeons and not on sporting-pigeons, this was: “(((duiven amsterdam) not postduif not postduiven) not duivenhouders) not postduivenhouders”. For *NexisUni* this was not necessary, the number of articles published on

pigeons in Amsterdam was lot smaller than in previous decades and made this made it possible to select relevant articles without specific search terms. The search term used was: “duiven in Amsterdam”. I aimed to keep the number of articles used to describe human-pigeons co-existence somewhat consistent per decade, however, this was not always possible. The number of relevant published pieces saw a steep decline when comparing 1950-1960 to 2010-2020 and most recent years.

To analyse the published materials, the method of a (mini)discourse analysis was employed. Following a discourse analysis allows the researcher to start reading the material and let interpreting the material, and what it could mean in relation to the research, evolve along the way. However, it is useful to start readings texts with certain questions in mind to perform the analysis in a somewhat structured manner (Jóhannesson, 2010). Since the studied newspaper articles were already selected on the basis of their relevance on the relations that exist between feral pigeons and humans, these questions were not very specified. Rather, I started reading the texts and extracted what was deemed relevant to explain the history of human-pigeons co-existence in Amsterdam, this mostly consisted of the following questions: “What are forms in which humans and pigeons relate to each other?” and “What are different sites where humans and pigeons co-exist?”. The next step in a discourse analysis is to look out for potential struggles and tensions and expand on the specific arguments in these discussions (Jóhannesson, 2010). These did in fact emerge from analysing the articles and are further elaborated on in the results chapter. To add to the findings of the written pieces that appeared in *Het Parool*, pictures were added to further show the history of humans and pigeons in Amsterdam. This pictures were all found online on the Beeldbank. The Beeldbank is part of the historical city archive of Amsterdam.

3. What are the different types of places in Amsterdam where humans and pigeons co-exist and what types of interactions occur

After having examined the history of human-pigeons relations in the past, I moved on to see what it looks like today, by means of covert observations. Before doing these observations, I located specific sites in Amsterdam to see if forms of co-existence might differ between these sites.

The locating of these sites was partly informed by places that kept reappearing in the newspaper articles that were used to tell the history of humans and pigeons. Other places I encountered when walking through Amsterdam myself and were different from the sites that were already chosen on the basis of the newspaper analysis. In order to make sure that the places where observations would take place were sufficiently different from one another, several factors were identified that influence the way humans and pigeons co-exist. These factors were informed by the literature research and history of humans and pigeons. Some additional literature was used as well. What these factors are and how they influence human-pigeon co-existence, is presented the results chapter. In total, five sites in Amsterdam were selected where observations would take place. These are Central Station, Dam square, het Spui, Museumplein and the Vondelpark.

In the process of figuring out how to approach observing humans and pigeons, I conducted an interview with an artist, G.C. Heemskerck, who creates art of and with pigeons. This interview took place at an exhibition she organized with another artist on how pigeons have been portrayed in human society. It was also through finding out about this exhibition, that I came into contact with her via e-mail. The exhibition took place in a small museum in Rotterdam.

When conducting the interview, we sat down in the hallway to have a short conversation. Since this was in a public accessible hallway, and multiple people approached us during the conversation, I decided not to record the interview. This would have led to constant disruption of the interview, as I would have to ask every passerby for their consent to be recorded. However, I did take notes that can be found in Appendix 1. The notes that I took do not cover our whole conversations, as some topics that came up were not directly relevant for the goal of this interview. So, the notes mostly cover these relevant aspects and not the full interview. The interview itself was semi-structured and the questions can be found in Appendix 2. Consent to use the artists' name and the information from the interview in this thesis was given by G.C. Heemskerck. The way the interview had further inspired my approach to observing human-pigeon interactions can be found in the results chapter.

Observations of human-pigeons interactions that took place at the pre-determined locations were covert. I chose to do covert observations because this allows the researcher to truly see the behaviour of humans, because when the subject is aware that they are being observed, there is the possibility that their behaviour may change (Walters & Godbold, 2014). However, covert observations are not without ethical concerns. Subjects are not aware that they are being observed and are essentially being used as an object of study. While this not desirable, it is also unavoidable. Additionally, Spicker (2011) argues that research within public spaces should be accepted as a part of academic inquiry, as information that arises from observing behaviour at public spaces does not need consent to be used. I attempted to overcome these ethical concerns that are connected to covert observations by keeping the descriptions of humans I observed as minimal as possible, limiting myself purely to describing their behaviour (this is not true for one person, The Pigeon Man, however, after having talked to him shortly, I asked him whether it was okay to use his name. He agreed to this). Alongside, I only used the pictures which show people as unrecognizable. I took the pictures because, quite often, I describe a certain place or encounter and this much easier conveyed to the reader through an image, than a (large) piece of text.

After careful consideration, I decided to keep to just covertly observing the humans in Amsterdam and to not do interviews. I was more interested in their 'raw' reactions to the pigeons, rather than having them answer questions on their behaviour, of which they may have not even been aware. I also could not interview the pigeons, so it would seem unfair to let humans contribute more to the data and letting them have a bigger influence on my results. Additionally, the observations rendered enough results to do my analysis of current day human-pigeon co-existence.

As an aid in observing, I created an observation guide that can be found in Appendix 3. I took notes on the basis of this guide, however, I also took notes of other things that were deemed important. During observations, I took notes on my phone and these can be found in Appendix 4. In this Appendix it can also be found how many hours I observed at a particular spot and the date on which the observations took place.

4. *How can cosmopolitical theory inform sustainable co-existence between humans and pigeons, in view of the different forms of co-existence they take part in?*

In answering this question, I will reflect on the past and present, and look towards the future and see how humans and pigeons can create more sustainable and equal forms of co-existence. This will be done by revisiting how I have described cosmopolitics in the

theoretical framework and, subsequently, look at my results from the previous research questions through a cosmopolitical lens. A central focus here is to reflect on different modes of relating between humans and pigeons and see how they both actively take part in co-constituting and storying the more-than-human city. By doing so, I aim to make inferences on how the theoretical concept of cosmopolitics can be used in a real-life case and to acknowledge the political practices that pigeons take part in. Looking at possible ways of how to further develop doing politics with pigeons to design a sustainable more-than-human city would be the next step, but is not within the scope of my thesis, as already described in the research objectives.

5. Results

5.1. What are the characteristics of feral pigeons living in cities according to literature?

This chapter will largely draw on two related studies conducted in the 1970s by Murton, Thearle and Thompson (1972) and Murton, Coombs & Thearle (1972), supplemented with additional sources, like the research done by Weber, Haag & Durrer (1994) which focusses on feeding behaviour of feral pigeons in urban areas. By doing so, an overview will be presented of what is known about the behaviour of feral pigeons. As will become apparent throughout this chapter, feral pigeons are extremely well-adapted to life in human-built cities, leading them to be a synanthropic species (Nuoverta, 1971; Giunchi et al., 2012). However, as is common in non-native bird species, feral pigeons are severely understudied. The ecological research that is dedicated to feral pigeons, is mostly focussed on (perceived) ecological problems caused by feral pigeons. Within these studies it is mostly population reduction methods that are thoroughly researched, rather than the behavioural ecology of these feral birds themselves (Capoccia, Boyle & Darnell, 2018). Therefore, next to presenting the most important characteristics of feral pigeons, some concluding remarks will reflect on the social construction of pigeons in science to acknowledge and analyse the different ways pigeons have been described throughout the history in academic literature.

5.1.2. Studies on pigeons

In their study *Ecological studies of the feral pigeon Columba livia var. I. Population, breeding biology and methods of control*, Murton, Thearle and Thompson (1972) investigated a population of feral pigeons (*Columba livia*) residing in the Salford Docks in Manchester. Like those observed in that study, the feral pigeons inhabiting Amsterdam are descendants of domesticated rock doves (*Columba livia*), which have become feral over time (Buijs & van Wijnen, 2001).

This research was later extended in a follow-up paper, *Ecological Studies of the Feral Pigeon Columba livia var. II* (Murton, Coombs & Thearle, 1972). While this study might be dated, it was one of few that described the behaviour of feral pigeons so extensively. However, as noted in the introduction, most research on the behaviour of feral pigeons was (partly) motivated by researching and/or designing measures to control pigeon populations, rather than exploring their ecological behaviours in depth. This includes the two studies that will be the main point of reference in this chapter.

5.1.2.1. Food supply & begging behaviour

Feral pigeons (*Columba livia*) primarily rely on food spillage resulting from human activities for feeding, such as dropped food or overflowing trash cans. Although pigeons standing still on rooftops or other structures are often presumed to be resting, they are mostly observing and awaiting availability of new food sources (Murton, Thearle & Thompson, 1972). When a new food source becomes available, a flock of pigeons quickly moves to this new feeding site. The amount in which these feeding sites, due to human spillage, are available, is the determining factor of the size of a flock of feral pigeons. The pigeons observed in this study spend around 60 minutes a day on actual eating (Murton, Coombs & Thearle, 1972).

When large numbers of pigeons arrive at a new food resource, it is possible for some individuals to be excluded from the food. According to these researchers this is due to a delayed response

and, therefore, arriving too late to get access to the centre of a flock of pigeons at the feeding site. Research by Murton, Coombs, and Thearle (1972) indicates that the distribution of pigeons around a food source is relatively stable, with the same individuals found at the centre of the flock, while others are consistently found at the edges. This pattern potentially suggests the existence of a social hierarchy within a flock of pigeons. Herein, pigeons that often position themselves at the centre of a flock have a better access to food and therefore a higher chance of survival. The pigeons that find themselves at the edges of a flock while at feeding sites are often juveniles and less dominant, uncertain adults (Murton, Coombs & Thearle, 1972).

Another study, conducted by Zahavi (1971), supports the social dynamics of pigeon feeding behaviour. Zahavi (1971) shows that birds often follow individuals, who have already found a good spot for food, from roosting sites to feeding sites. This indicates that communal roosting offers advantageous opportunities for birds. Moreover, whenever pigeons are roosting, they are always ready to fly towards newly available food sources within certain distance of the roosting site. Additionally, pigeons exhibit a tendency to mimic the feeding patterns of others, enabling flocks to collectively exploit the most profitable food items in their environment (Murton, 1971).

Feral pigeons are very flexible when it comes to their diet, they consume whatever food has become available to them due to human spillage or humans feeding them. However, there is one distinction that exists in the feeding behaviour of feral pigeons. According to Weber, Haag & Durrer (1994) pigeons can either be categorized as food-seekers or food-beggars. Those that can be classified as food-seekers are less dependent on close proximity to humans and live farther away from urban centres. On the contrary, food-beggars, that live in densely populated urban areas, are more reliant on food that becomes available due to human activity and have developed specific food-begging behaviour (Konijnenberg, 2020; Weber, Haag & Durrer, 1994). As this thesis focusses on feral pigeons living in Amsterdam in close proximity with humans, there will only be an expansion on food-begging behaviour.

These specific food-begging behaviours have been researched by Weber, Haag & Durrer (1994) who extensively observed feral pigeons and their human feeders to distinguish these specific behaviours. According to these researchers, food-beggars prefer open areas where potential danger is easily spotted, whenever they do find themselves in more crowded spaces, they prefer to wait off the ground on higher structures until new feeding spots emerged. Their observations also showed that pigeons actually recognize regular feeders due to visual cues such as wearing the same hat or coat every time they would feed the pigeons. Additionally, pigeons seem to react to specific sounds, such as the rustling of a plastic shopping bag, leading them to approach the human making this sound and exhibit begging behaviour. These specific behaviours included the following actions from the observed pigeons. First of all, they would get into close proximity with the (potential) feeder and then moving away from the human(s) and then returning back. While these movements from these pigeons might seem very unstructured, they in fact were not. Generally, the pigeons would move about 3-4 meters away from the human and would then return, staying within a semi-circle of the potential feeder. While doing so, the pigeons stayed within throwing distance of the food source. If pigeons approached a potential feeder they would remain a certain distance between themselves and the feeder in order to leave room for a potential escape. However, pigeons seek the attention of the human by stretching out their head and trying to make eye contact for a few seconds. If this did not result in the human feeding the pigeons, this cycle could be repeated several times, depending on the perseverance of the bird. Even if this 'begging' behaviour resulted in feeding, the pigeons would

repeat this cycle in order to get more food. The duration of this cycle can vary depending on the location, generally, the quieter the location, the longer the begging cycle would take. While begging, the pigeons remained at a distance from around 50-60 centimetres and during the actual feeding this distance got smaller and was around 0-5 centimetres. The duration of the pigeons enlarging the distance again after feeding differed per pigeons, with some taking 1 metre distance within 30 seconds and others taking a distance over 3 meters (Weber, Haag & Durrer, 1994). Within these food-begging pigeons another distinction can be made in the literature, that of active and passive pigeons. Hereby the active pigeons would use begging behaviour to get food from humans and the passive pigeons waited and observed. Whenever the feeding would begin, the passive pigeons would join in. Even though these active pigeons were the ones exposing the begging behaviour that resulted in food, they would often get pushed away by stronger, more assertive, passive pigeons. This is somewhat consistent with the findings by Murton, Coombs & Thearle (1972) described earlier. While it is often the same pigeons who find themselves at the outskirts of the flock, it is, however, not due to a delayed response. Those pushed aside were often injured, young or female pigeons, these were also observed as being the most insistent beggars and remained at the feeding site the longest while the stronger pigeons has already created a distance from 4-5 metres from the feeding site. It was only when the more assertive birds had left the spot, these weaker birds could access what little food was left. Next to stretching the neck and making eye contact, begging behaviours included (pretence) pecking, cleaning oneself, looking around and taking off (Weber, Haag & Durrer, 1994).

5.1.2.2. *Breeding & mating*

Feral pigeons (*Columba livia*) breed all year round, when a pair of breeding pigeons finds themselves in optimal conditions, they can produce up to twelve young's per year. Combining this with a low adult mortality of 11%, pigeon populations can grow rapidly (Haag-Wackernagel, 1995). Pigeons are monogamous birds and therefore stay true to one partner for the remainder of their lives. However, research suggests that not all individuals within a pigeon population partake in breeding activities. It is not known whether this is because some male pigeons fail to reach a state of full reproductive capacity, or whether there is something else causing this abstention from breeding. In the case of female feral pigeons, assessing their reproductive state and determining whether they are capable of breeding is much harder (Murton, Thearle & Thompson, 1972).

Breeding success in feral pigeons (*Columba livia*) tends to decline during winter compared to summer months. A contributing factor may be the seasonal reduction in male testes size during winter, although it remains unclear whether changes in female reproductive physiology also play a role, as their reproductive condition is more difficult to assess. Seasonal variations in breeding success, however, appear to depend significantly on the specific habitats in which the pigeons reside. Within urban habitats, non-seasonal and extended breeding is advantageous (Murton, Thearle & Thompson, 1972). In addition to physiological constraints, external factors such as predation can cause a decline in breeding success. These predators, such as cats or rats, are known to take eggs from nests. However, it is also possible that pigeons accidentally knock the eggs out of the nests themselves. (Murton & Clarke, 1968; Murton, Thearle & Thompson, 1972).

5.1.2.3. Site fidelity

Research has shown that older pigeons rarely leave their breeding colonies, however, it is more common for young birds to disperse themselves among colonies within a city (Jacob, Prévot-Julliards & Baudry, 2013). Hetmánski (2007) further researched the dispersion within a feral pigeon population and what this looks like in practice. The pigeons that disperse are most often young individuals which are not yet breeding. Adult pigeons display a strong philopatry towards their breeding sites and are therefore not very likely to disperse themselves among pigeon colonies. However, if adult pigeons pairs remained unsuccessful in breeding this did not mean that their site fidelity was different from pairs that did succeed in breeding. The direction of dispersion of young pigeons was from colonies with more pigeons towards colonies that had less pigeons. The pigeons in this study did not move to other towns, nor did they join domesticated pigeons nearby (Hetmánski, 2007). Young pigeons leaving their colonies has also been observed in cities where pigeons generally display a high site-fidelity (Sol & Senar, 1995).

5.1.3. Feral pigeons in urban areas

Urban ecology, a relatively recent sub-discipline within ecology, examines how species interact with and adapt to urban environments. While urbanization often leads to the destruction of natural habitats for many species, it simultaneously creates new niches in which others thrive well (Konijnenberg, 2020). Within urban ecology, synanthropic species are characterized as those that have adapted to living in close proximity to humans and have been particularly successful in urban areas. Feral pigeons (*Columba livia*) are a prime example of synanthropic species since they have proven to thrive extremely well in human built-environments, such as cities. According to Nuoverta (1971) and Giunchi et al. (2012), the thriving of synanthropic ferals is attributed to the accumulation of organic material that is not returned into ecological cycles and now serves as a food resource.

Feral pigeons do well in urban environments, because of the presence of buildings that mimic their natural habitat of high cliffs, rock ledges and caves. These structures not only replicate preferred nesting sites, but also provide a means of protection from predators. As primarily granivorous birds, pigeons require intensive foraging rather than complex foraging skills. Something that is easily done in cities, where the urban environment provides numerous sources of food due to human activities and waste (Richardson, Capoccia & Heart, 2016; Johnston & Janiga, 1995).

5.1.4. The social construction of pigeons within academic literature

The limited availability of impartial research on feral pigeons (*Columba livia*) in urban environments highlights a bias in how pigeons are approached within an academic context. As noted in the introduction, literature on feral pigeons often prioritizes the research of population control methods and how to limit their presence in public spaces, rather than an exploration of their behaviour and ecology (Capoccia, Boyle & Darnell, 2018). This emphasis reflects the socially constructed perceptions of feral pigeons, which can not only potentially influence the public opinion but also frame scientific research.

The main aim of research oriented to find how pigeons are better controlled in human societies, rather than understanding the pigeons themselves, is not only apparent in the natural sciences, but also in other fields of science. Jerolmack (2007) describes that most that is known about the history of feral pigeons has been described by pigeon fanciers. While these enthusiasts have significantly contributed to the body of knowledge, their research is often fragmented and

potentially biased, as it frequently centres around specific breeds of personal interest. This highlights how most what is known is essentially ‘coloured’ through a socially constructed lens created by human preferences and thought on (feral) pigeons. Therefore, humans and feral pigeons are so deeply intertwined that it is extremely challenging to achieve an unbiased and comprehensive understanding of feral pigeons as a species (Jerolmack, 2007).

An example of an ongoing debate on just how to view feral pigeons in the Netherlands, is the degree to which they can be seen as being dependent on humans. Although it is widely accepted that feral pigeons benefit significantly from their close proximity to humans, the Dutch bird research organisation Sovon asserts that feral pigeons are not dependent on humans, since they forage independently (Konijnenberg, 2020). This position aligns with Hustings & Vergeer (2002) and Bijlsma et al. (2001), who describe feral pigeons as free-living descendants of rock doves subject to natural selection. However, this perspective is contested by Osinga (2002), who argues that feral pigeons are essentially "pets without owners" and remain heavily reliant on humans due to their close genetic and behavioural ties to domesticated homing pigeons. In the paper discussed above on begging behaviour, Weber, Haag & Durrer (1994), describe the feral pigeons that exhibit begging-behaviour as having become completely dependent on humans for their food supplies. On the basis of this claim one can say that these feral pigeons are therefore reliant on humans for survival as well. However, one can ask if the term ‘beggar’ is appropriate in this context. By using a term such as ‘beggar’, humans reduce the agency a pigeon holds by ascribing them what seems a passive role. And even so, are the pigeons really begging? Or rather, are they choosing to put themselves in a situation where food is easily supplied to them?

This divergence in definitions of whether feral pigeons are reliant on humans and use of terms such as ‘beggars’ and the questions that arise here, highlight the complexity by which scientific research regarding feral pigeons is characterized. It hereby underscores and expands the point made by Jerolmack (2007) that humans and pigeons are just too intertwined to attain an unbiased understanding of just what exactly feral pigeons are. In the coming chapter, I will elaborate on a location-specific human-pigeon history, that in the city of Amsterdam to explore how public opinion has shifted throughout the years. Additionally, I will return to the question whether it is right to see pigeons as beggars later on in this thesis when exploring current day human-pigeon co-existence and what insights this provides for more-than-human cosmopolitics.

5.2. What is the shared history of humans and pigeons in Amsterdam?

During World War II, German occupiers of Amsterdam ordered for all pigeons living in the city to be executed, for fear of spying activities. Despite this, the affection that the people of Amsterdam felt towards pigeons did not fade. To the contrary, after the war had ended pigeon sport regained an immense popularity among the working class. Additionally the pigeon was widely used as a symbol of peace (Boon, 2018). This sentiment extended beyond pigeons that were being kept for sport, it was also the feral pigeon who was deeply cared for.. However, around the 1970's public attitude started to change and pigeons were more often approached as a pest and a threat to human health (Arnoldussen, 2013). By examining articles, both news reports and opinion pieces, published in the Amsterdam newspaper *Het Parool* (1950-present), this chapter explores the shifting perceptions of and discourse of what has been written on feral pigeons in Amsterdam.

5.2.1. The 1950s

Situated in post-war Amsterdam, pigeons were often used as a symbol of victory and freedom. An article that appeared in 1950 detailed the plans for the new National Monument on the Dam Square, it specifically mentioned the inclusion of pigeons. These would be depicted at the top of the monument while flying away, which would convey a sense of triumph and liberation (Het Parool, 1950). This symbolic use of pigeons was further reinforced during the Liberation Day celebrations on May 5th. According to the article describing the festivities, thousands of pigeons were released on Dam square. This was accompanied by loud cheering and celebration from the public, whose excitement was strengthened by watching the pigeons fly into freedom (Het Parool, 1955).

The admiration the people of Amsterdam felt towards pigeons extended beyond those featured in ceremonies and monuments representing peace and victory. Feral pigeons were also cherished by the public. Articles in *Het Parool* often used pigeons to describe the uniqueness of Amsterdam, placing them alongside the iconic canals and historic houses (Het Parool, 1953). It is important to note, however, that the number of pigeons living in Amsterdam was not nearly as large as it is today. An article that appeared in 1953 (Het Parool) spoke of just six feral pigeons on Dam Square, which were all lovingly fed by the taxi drivers. The writer of this article was desperately hoping for more pigeons to arrive to the city, suggesting that their presence would add to the allure of the city. It would allow Amsterdam to be compared to cities such as Paris and Venice, which were famous for their sophisticated atmosphere, partly due to the presence of pigeons. To those objecting to the presence of pigeons, the writer said, a city like Amsterdam, which is known for its love of animals, there is no place for those who are not wholeheartedly welcoming the pigeons. Concerns for potential damage to buildings caused by pigeons were deemed invalid, as their faeces would simply wash away in the rain (Het Parool, 1953).

While still few in numbers, the people of Amsterdam showed great concern for the pigeons' welfare. In a special section in *Het Parool*, where readers could submit their own short pieces, someone urged the city council to do more to care for the newly arrived pigeons on Dam Square. In his piece, the reader expressed his concern for the pigeons, who had no access to clean drinking water (Het Parool, 1956). A year later, no action was taken by the municipality and more people called for the placement of a drinking fountain, also to prevent the pigeons from overheating in the hot summer months. In the same piece, an instance whereby people on

the square came together to provide the pigeons with water. The writer goes on to explain how the pigeons have become loved members of the Amsterdam community and how they are deserving of the same care as humans (Het Parool, 1957). However, the issue of the absence of a water fountain for the pigeons remained a concern. In, yet again, the same section, another writer, calls for such a drinking fountain. They describe how the city of Amsterdam claims to be welcoming to (human) strangers, however, it is currently not doing this for the newly arrived pigeons (Het Parool, 1959).

In the year of 1958, 100 pigeons were gifted from the city of Venice to Amsterdam. After spending the winter in Artis, the zoo in Amsterdam, to adjust to the colder climate, the pigeons were placed in a dovecote on top of the Bijenkorf department store building on Dam Square. Sadly, one pigeon did not survive the harsh winter but, luckily, the other 99 were doing 'just fine' (Het Parool, 1959). The article describing the release of the pigeons on the square referred to the pigeons as new "stadsgenoten", which translates into fellow city inhabitants (Het Parool, 1959). This, again, shows that the general public felt that pigeons were equal in status of belonging to and being in place in the city.

This decade is characterized by the expression of profound feelings of care and affection from Amsterdam residents for the pigeons living alongside them in the city, even describing how they are deserving of the same care as humans. Situated in post-war Amsterdam, the way pigeons were used as symbols to convey a sense of freedom and victory, might have, either directly or indirectly, strengthened these warm feelings humans showed towards pigeons. These feelings led the people of Amsterdam to warmly welcome their new co-inhabitants of the city, and were hoping for more to come.



Picture 1: Man feeding pigeons on the Dam, 1953 (Straattaferelen. Man met Duiven op de Dam, 1953)

5.2.2. The 1960s

The decade to come partly carried on these warm feelings towards pigeons, however, as fast breeding birds, the number of pigeons living in the city was rapidly growing. This gradually led to more reported nuisance stemming from the presence of pigeons.

The people of Amsterdam often identified as being animal lovers, stating that their city should be a place where all living beings are being cared for (Het Parool, 1962). This affinity for animals and nature made the arrival of pigeons a welcome addition to urban life, as it evoked a sense of being close to nature (Het Parool, 1962). This deep affection for pigeons fostered feelings of protection over pigeons. An article that appeared in 1963, describes an incident in which a man attempted to forcefully capture a pigeon. While doing so, multiple bystanders come into action and force the man to set the pigeon free (Het Parool, 1963). Another instance, where a car hit and killed a pigeon, led someone to send a short contribution to the newspaper. In this piece, the writer describes how a car carelessly drove into a pigeon, resulting in the

pigeon's death. This led the observer to get mad at the instructor shouting at him that he willingly killed the pigeon. The driver then responded that it was stupid to care for a pigeon, there are more than enough in the city. Adding to this, the driver said that, for all he cared, all pigeons would be run over, since all they do is transmit disease (Linden, 1966).

The driver from the incident above was not the only one who perceived pigeons as a nuisance. The Royal Palace on Dam Square also faced significant challenges due to the growing pigeon population. What began as a small number of birds, quickly escalated into hundreds nesting in the palace's crevices, causing damage to the building. This led to costly cleaning and repairs (Het Parool, 1964). In a response to this, the first anti-pigeon adjustments to buildings were being made. Among the first reported solutions was the introduction of the anti-pigeon strip. This soft foam strip was designed to make roosting and nesting on ledges difficult for pigeons, as it prevented them from gaining stable footing, ultimately leading them find another spot (Het Parool, 1969).



Picture 2: The feeding of pigeons on the Dam, between 1951-1987 (De Arbeidspers, 1951-1987)

At the beginning of the 1960s the sentiments of love and care towards pigeons persisted. However, as the pigeon population in Amsterdam grew rapidly, the negative aspects of living alongside these birds became increasingly apparent. This led people to struggle on how to reconcile their affection for pigeons and the challenges posed by their growing numbers. An article from 1966 captures this ambivalence, articulating the dilemma: something had to be done to manage the burgeoning pigeon population, but how? Amsterdam loves the pigeons, and wants to care for them, because they are just as much worthy inhabitants of the city as humans.

However, their population had just grown too large to ensure sustainable co-existence, it was argued (Parool, 1966).



Picture 3: Pigeons and Children on Dam Square, 1963 (Kinderen en Duiven op de Dam, 1963)



Picture 4: Spui, feeding pigeons, between 1960-1965 (Touissant, 1960-1965)

5.2.3. The 1970s

The developments in the previous decade left Amsterdam with a dilemma. Most people expressed love, care and protection towards pigeons. However, the rapidly growing number of pigeons also led to nuisance caused by these birds. This led to more people expressing negative feelings towards their fellow inhabitants of the city. This duality of feelings characterizes the 1970's.

In 1970 the municipality made its first attempt to reduce the pigeon population in Amsterdam. The goal was to lower the number of pigeons to a level where they would no longer cause a nuisance, while still keeping the "liveliness" pigeons bring to the city. The operation involved trapping the pigeons and examining them for identification rings, which indicated ownership by humans. Pigeons found with rings were returned to their owners, whereas unmarked birds were killed (Het Parool, 1970)

The announcement of the municipality's measures to reduce the pigeon population sparked a wave of reactions from *Het Parool* readers. While some supported the initiative, the majority expressed strong opposition. One reader criticized the policy as hypocritical, pointing out that pigeons were being killed for defecating in public spaces, yet dogs were doing the same without consequence (Wijnbelt, 1970). Another describes how she has been feeding the pigeons for years, but never caught a disease. While doing so, she calls for everyone to protect the lives of all animals in the city (Het Parool, 1970). Others, rather cynically, describe the issue as being a human one. There are not too many pigeons, rather, there are too many humans (de Vries, 1970). In the same cynical vein, someone poses another solution. Perhaps the municipality should capture some humans in Amsterdam and painlessly take their lives, after all, they cause a lot of damage as well. Likely far more than pigeons (Het Parool, 1970). Lastly, someone describes that Dam square without pigeons would be just like a bland egg without salt (Allmendinger, 1970).

As apparent from the articles described above, the trapping and killing of feral pigeons was not a success with the general public. Members of the city council also started to ask whether the trapping and killing was the right way to control the pigeon population. As a result, hormonal anticonception for pigeons was introduced. By processing hormones in pigeon food, pigeons would be unable to breed for 4-5 months, thereby limiting the number of pigeons in Amsterdam (Het Parool, 1971; Het Parool, 1972). Two years later, this new approach of combatting nuisance caused by pigeons was expanded to multiple parts of the city (Het Parool, 1974).

Although the use of the pill seemed to be a success, the municipality did not cease the trapping and killing of pigeons, as apparent from yet another piece sent by a reader to *Het Parool*. In his short piece called "Pigeonmurder" the writer questioned why the municipality would participate killing all these beautiful pigeons (Het Parool, 1978). However, not all opposed the trapping and killing of pigeons. Another reader of the newspaper wrote that he was thrilled that, finally, measures were being taken to get rid of pigeons. Moreover, most of the pieces submitted by readers were exaggerating the harm done to pigeons according to this reader (de Wind, 1978).

The previous decade highlights the growing struggle Amsterdam was facing regarding pigeons. On one hand, people saw pigeons as belonging to the city and felt deep care and love for them. On the other hand, people did experience nuisance stemming from pigeons and some were genuinely concerned for their own health. One reader of the paper captured the general feeling

well by writing “Even though we do not want the pigeons, they do not deserve to die a cruel death” (Valk, 1977).



Picture 5: Feeding pigeons on the Dam in spring, 1976 (Kandó, 1976)

5.2.4. The 1980s

An article describing the rising popularity of street artists in Amsterdam depicts Dam Square as place where “pigeons call the shots” (Het Parool, 1983). Although unrelated to pigeons, this article felt the need to refer to the, sometimes, overwhelming number of pigeons on the square, showing their ever-growing presence in the city. While the previous decade reflected Amsterdam residents' ambivalence toward pigeons, shifting between affection and frustration, the following decade would mark a turning point. In this period, pigeons transitioned in the public perception from being valued co-inhabitants of the city to being widely regarded as a pest.

In 1983, there were 500 reported instances of pigeon-related nuisance in Amsterdam. In an article from the following year, an interview with a representative from the organization

responsible for managing pigeon control described pigeons as "vermin" and emphasized that they cannot all be kept alive to ensure liveability of the city. This person also describes how pigeons are still being trapped in cages and killed with a bullet (Het Parool, 1984). An interview, again with an employee of the same organisation, that appeared a few years later, in 1987, shows how attempts to capture pigeons often fail due to interference from the public. More often than not, people prevent the catching of pigeons by making loud noises so that the pigeons flee, before pest control gets a chance to catch them. Additionally, those working at the pest control frequently got into quarrels with bystanders, sometimes even leading to serious threats or resulting in fights. This interference from the public significantly affected attempts to control the pigeon population, leading to a decrease of nearly 50% in the number of pigeons caught between 1985 and 1986. In response, pest control teams adapted their approach, conducting most of their work before sunrise to avoid confrontations, and were sometimes even accompanied by police to prevent things from getting out of hand (Het Parool, 1987).

While some members of the public actively disrupted efforts to trap and kill pigeons, others increasingly called for more effective measures to get rid of the pigeons. Pigeons caused significant amounts of pollutions with their faeces on sidewalks, buildings, windows et cetera. Moreover, the concerns for health risks were growing. One article, written by someone who suffers from asthma, detailed the impact the pigeons had on his health. His asthma attacks, combined with several allergies, had gotten so severe that he had to be rushed to the hospital several times. He, allegedly, gotten to this stage because of the immense amount of pigeons presence in his environment (de Klerk, 1985). Articles like this likely contributed to the growing fear among Amsterdam residents for their health and advocated for to the municipality to take more serious measures to deal with the pigeon issue. Symbolizing this growing sentiment among the general public, the labour party (PvdA), included measures to deal with pigeons in their party programme for the upcoming municipal elections (Heddema, 1986).

Although only one political party included measures to address pigeon-related nuisances in their party programme, this inclusion highlighted the increasing aversion towards pigeons. During this decade, there was a significant shift where pigeons were increasingly being seen as pests, rather than beings that belong in the city



*Picture 6: Youngsters playing with pigeons in front of the National Monument on the Dam, 1986
(Jaring, 1986)*

5.2.5. The 1990s

As in earlier decades, pigeons remained very visible in descriptions of Amsterdam's scenery. However, while earlier portrayals often approached pigeons with affection, describing them as graceful and as contributors to the city's prestige, this decade starts off with an article showing the shift in perception of pigeons. A 1991 article highlights different places within the city where one can sit outside on a terrace to enjoy a drink or a meal. While praising the charm of terraces in a particular area, it warns readers to watch out "hordes of pigeons" that might defecate in your glass of wine. The article suggests that those wishing to avoid this, would be better off in another neighbourhood (van de Vliet, 1991).

The ongoing search for new and effective methods for pigeon control continued. It began with an investigation into the development of a new type contraceptive pill, which was designed to terminate pigeon embryos at an early stage (Het Parool, 1991). This investigation resulted in a report that concluded that, by processing this pill with pigeon food and feeding this to pigeons twice a week, would lead damage done by pigeons to monuments and other objects to decline by 60% (Het Parool, 1994).

Despite the development of this promising method for pigeon control, the municipality did not prioritize its further testing and implementation due to limited funding. In addition to financial constraints, the ambivalent attitude of Amsterdam residents led the municipality to become more hesitant when introducing new measures for pigeon control. While Amsterdam residents loved to complain about pigeons a lot, any proposed measures to actually do something about this problem were met with resistance. Moreover, the municipality pest control was still often hindered when trying to catch pigeons (Het Parool, 1993).

Compared to the previous decade, significantly fewer articles and pieces were published about Amsterdam residents' relationship with feral pigeons. The exact reasons for this decline in coverage are not completely sure, but it is likely attributable to a combination of factors. No new measures that would evoke reactions from the general public were announced, and at the same time, the municipality probably was happy to somewhat keep the peace. Nevertheless, one constant persisted: the struggle to co-exist with pigeons. The fundamental question of how to manage their presence in the city remained.

5.2.6. The 2000s

The turn of the century saw for a new, more pragmatical approach, to tackle the problems the city had been facing because of the many pigeons. A particularly promising development was the proposal for an international conference, bringing together experts to share ideas and strategies for humane pigeon control. Moreover, a researcher showed that a quarter of the people of Amsterdam experienced nuisance from pigeons. However, half of Amsterdam residents detested the way pigeons were currently being trapped and killed (Het Parool, 2000).

In preparation for the upcoming conference on how to control the pigeon population in an effective, yet animal-friendly way, to come, a count took place to precisely see where, and how many, pigeons were living in Amsterdam. This count showed that there were around 15.000 pigeons living in public spaces Amsterdam, with Dam square being the place where the presence of pigeons was most evident. Another, maybe not so surprising, find indicated a correlation between the density of people and the number of pigeons in a given area (Leupen, 2001). During the conference, new measures were proposed to manage the pigeon population, including bans on public feeding and the introduction of dovecotes where pigeon eggs could be replaced with fake ones, preventing embryos from developing before they could reach a state of consciousness (Het Parool, 2002). Despite these promising developments, some parts of the city were still, independently, continued the killing of pigeons. This caused sharp criticism from animal protections organisations (Het Parool, 2004).

In an interview with the aldermen Guido Frankfurter, who was responsible for pigeon control in Amsterdam, they visited one of the city's newly established dovecotes. He explains how on the very same day Frankfurter took his new position as aldermen, he banned the trapping and killing of pigeons to prevent any pigeon from suffering. During the interview he emphasized that pigeons belong in Amsterdam and identifies himself as a lover and protector of the pigeons. Frankfurter also explains that the threat that pigeons form for human health is

very minimal, urging the public to stop worrying about such concerns. Moreover, he highlights the emotional complexity of these birds by noting that they are capable of experiencing human emotions, such as grief when mourning the loss of their lifelong partner (Rombouts, 2004).

Despite the good intentions to manage pigeon populations in an animal-friendly manner, the trapping of pigeons persisted. Public outrage erupted following an incident in which animal activists, dedicated to freeing caged pigeons, discovered two decapitated birds. However, it quickly became clear that this was probably done by a bird of prey, rather than a person employed for pest control (Het Parool, 2009). The problems the city was experiencing with pigeons still remained. According to some, there were still too many pigeons living in Amsterdam. Among them was an advocate for hand-catching pigeons, who argued that this method was more efficient and cost-effective than the dovecotes, which he criticized as expensive and insufficiently effective. Confident in his approach, he claimed that, if given the chance, he could resolve the city's pigeon problem by himself within four years (Sevil, 2009).

In a special section dedicated to the feeding of pigeons where readers could share their opinions, some sought to raise awareness about the negative consequences of feeding pigeons. Besides causing nuisance with increasing the number of pigeons present at a certain location, the human-food, such as fries, that was being fed to pigeons, was doing harm to the pigeons as well. Rather, pigeons should be fed seeds. Others simply stated that people should just stop feeding pigeons all together. After all, they are just rats with wings polluting the city (Het Parool, 2009).

This decade marked a shift toward a more pragmatic approach by the municipality in managing the pigeon population. The outcomes of the conference reflected a willingness to implement methods that balanced effectiveness with pigeon-friendly manners. Alderman Guido Frankfurter played a significant role in challenging the negative perceptions held by some members of the public, even suggesting that pigeons could experience human-like emotions. However, doubts persisted about the efficacy of these new measures, despite expert assurances. Meanwhile, the general public remained as divided and ambivalent about the pigeon issue as ever.

5.2.7. The 2010s

Even though pigeons are disgusting and lazy, they still belong to Amsterdam (Brandt Corstius, 2012). That is how the writer of a column described how he felt about the pigeons in Amsterdam. Over the next decade, the volume of articles and opinion pieces about pigeons in *Het Parool* declined. However, there was a newly found fascination for the intricate shared history of feral pigeons and the human inhabitants of the city.

In 2013 a reader wrote that he was wondering what happened to all that the municipality was doing to control the pigeon population. He writes that he feels as if, despite pigeons causing an incredible amount of nuisance, nothing is being done to combat this and urges the municipality to take real action for once (Wiersma, 2013). Another reader wrote a letter to the newspaper titled “Flying rats”, in which he asks how for over 30 years still nothing had changed. He particularly noted the overwhelming number of pigeons surrounding the FEBO, a popular spot for snacks and fries, which he found astonishing (Visser, 2017)

Although readers of the newspaper were as opinionated as ever about the pigeons living in their city, others refrained from merely voicing their opinions but showed interest in the history of pigeons in Amsterdam. Arnoldussen (2013) wrote an article shortly elaborating on how pigeons evolved from being Amsterdam’s sweetheart to being seen as a degenerated

creature (Arnoldussen, 2013). Another show of interest in feral pigeons, was that a yearly treasure hunt, organised around easter, was centred around the pigeon. This was done to show just how intertwined the pigeons are with the city life in Amsterdam (Boon, 2018).

This decade revealed that while people were still very opinionated about pigeons, there was a growing curiosity about their history and how human perceptions had changed over time. After all, it was interesting to see how a birds that is so often used as symbol for peace and other good things, became so despised by some.



Picture 7: On the quay a man feeds pigeons, 2010 (Kransberg, 2010)

5.2.8. The 2020s

In recent years, the primary focus of measures to control the pigeon population has shifted toward ensuring effectiveness without causing harm to the birds. As an employee of Amsterdam's pest control explains, it is most important to look at the cause of the problem. The reason why there are so many pigeons living in Amsterdam, is because of the large amount of foods available to them. This both due to people feeding them and human waste. As a response the pest control now focusses mostly on limiting the availability of food for pigeons by introducing bans on feeding. Moreover, the employee explains that the municipality is not trapping pigeons anymore nor are they using any methods of hormonal anticonception to prevent pigeons from breeding so rapidly. Lastly, he adds that number of reported nuisance caused by pigeons is currently at a stable level (Kieft, 2022).

An article that describes how pigeons love to breed on balconies, approaches the issue from a notable neutral stance. It acknowledges that pigeons can cause damage to properties and can be annoying, however, pigeons are just too well adapted to city life and we better learn to live with them. The article goes on the suggest animal-friendly methods to discourage pigeons from

nesting on balconies, while urging readers to not blame pigeons. After all, they are just looking for a space to breed in peace (Beijen, 2023).

5.2.9. Concluding remarks

Where once seen as ‘stadsgenoten’ (fellow city inhabitants) and being deserving of the same care as humans, pigeons came to be seen as a pest in the years to follow, and the municipality did not shun control methods resulting in the deaths of hundreds of pigeons. While some cheered these measures, other were strongly opposed and it even led to fighting in the streets at some point. However, most of the Amsterdam citizens’ were struggling with taking a position. Pigeons are part of the city and its life, however, the question remains how exactly do we want live with them? Recent years have shown a greater interest in how pigeons became so intertwined in city life and a willingness to create more sustainable forms of co-existence between humans and pigeons. In the coming chapter, I will explore how the people of Amsterdam are co-existing with pigeons in the current day by elaborating on observations made at different spaces in the city. This will show how, just as seen throughout history, the variety of ways in which humans and pigeons can relate to each other.

5.3. What are the different types of places in Amsterdam where humans and pigeons co-exist and what types of interactions occur?

Can pigeons be characterized as being beggars in some places or is this a narrative created by human minds to characterize human-pigeon interaction to diminish the pigeons' agency? In this chapter, I will elaborate on observations of human-pigeons encounters at different city spaces in Amsterdam. By doing these observations, I aimed to tell and show humans and pigeons co-construct and story different city spaces simultaneously, or rather, together. Firstly, I will elaborate on how my journey of looking at pigeons and humans began, by describing a conversation I had with the artist G.C. Heemskerk about how she has experienced creating art about and with pigeons and how this has helped me in approaching observing humans and pigeons. Secondly, I will expand on the ways in which the city spaces I visited differ and expand on why these factors might influence the specific mode of co-existence at a given city space. Lastly, I will describe with words and show with pictures I took myself what the results of my observations were.

As van Dooren, Kirksey and Münster (2016) describe it, every living being is emerged in a larger whole that is constantly evolving and creating new webs of co-evolution. Therefore, the world we live in and the beings in it are in this constant state of becoming, or rather becoming-with one another. By making this claim, these authors urge us to take every form of life seriously in both science and our everyday (shared) lives. By doing these observations this is exactly what I aimed to do, by looking at both pigeons and humans going about their everyday lives I wanted to give both of them equal attention, and therefore take them both just as seriously. In this sense, I aim to tell the pigeons' story, rather than repeating the begging narrative that is projected onto them created by those who have approached pigeons as something to be eradicated from the city, instead of looking at what they are and what they can actually do (for example: Murton, Coombs & Thearle, 1972). By doing so, I bring the arts of noticing, as described by Tsing (2011), into practice. This entails being truly attentive to both humans and non-human others and paying careful attention to what their role is in the process of becoming-with and storying the more-than-human city. Additionally, I will look out for the possible existence of animal spaces and beastly places, as described by Philo and Wilbert (2000), in the city of Amsterdam when relating this to where pigeons can and are allowed to exercise their animal agency. How these observations relate to the theories used in this thesis will be further elaborated on in the discussion.

5.3.1. Start of my journey – interview with G.C. Heemskerk

In order to gain more knowledge on how to approach looking at animals, specifically pigeons, I wanted to get in contact with someone, outside of the academic world, who has experience in working in a multispecies environment. As stated in the theoretical framework, animal geography theorists have been experimenting with different methods to grasp the animals' lived experiences (Bear et al., 2017; Greenhough & Roe, 2019; Barua & Sinha, 2019; Magrane & Johnson, 2017). It was especially the idea of creating art with non-humans that spoke to me. After doing research I encountered an exposition currently being held at Zuid. Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam called 'Bericht van de duif' (in English; Message from the pigeon). The aim of this exposition is to no longer approach pigeons as mere symbols in human societies, but to see the pigeons as individuals that are possibly capable of creating art themselves (Projecten Zuid., n.d.). I contacted one of the artists, G.C. Heemskerk, that created this

exposition and asked her to do a short interview. She agreed to do so and invited me to visit the exposition as well.

The exposition showed how pigeons showed up in human societies throughout the years and how pigeons have been used as a symbol for human means. However, it also showed how, not only pigeons have been living with humans, but also how humans have been living with pigeons for a long time. After looking at the exposition, I sat down with G.C. Heemskerk to have a conversation on how she experienced working with pigeons to create this exposition. We first talked about her motivations on why she wanted to create art within a multispecies environment and she shared that her personal ontology was that every being on this earth is deserving of equal caring for and she has a long history of working with, and thinking on, animal ethics. We talked for a short while about this and different ways this specific topic has been discussed in academic literature. However, the most important for my thesis was to overcome my fear of anthropomorphism and how to approach observing the pigeons of Amsterdam. First of all, G.C. Heemskerk elaborated on how certain dichotomies existing in human society are violent. Following the likes of Derrida in '*The Animal that therefore I am*', she argues that the apparent dichotomy between humans and animals is untenable and is to be deconstructed. Therefore, one should not see humans and pigeons as totally different beings, because in reality both humans and pigeons have wants and needs and are both capable of creating art and sustaining a society. Additionally, just as when approaching humans, not all pigeons are the same and should not be reduced to a general species identity, rather, pigeons are to be seen as individuals. When relating this to how to observe pigeons and humans, one should not approach them as being too different from each other. When asking about how to deal with my fear for being too anthropomorphic, G.C. Heemskerk referred me to the work of Jessica Ullrich, in which she argues that anthropomorphism should be seen as a form of sympathy and empathy for non-humans.

As a result of this conversation, it were mainly the arguments that humans and pigeons are not really all that different and that anthropomorphism is actually a way of expressing sympathy for non-humans that were most relevant for the continuation of my research. Pigeons are to be approached as individuals and not so different from humans. Therefore, observing both should also not be that differentiated. Additionally, my feared anthropomorphism is not actually a bad thing, rather, it shows a genuine interest in non-human others and, therefore, an attempt to take them seriously. This also means to not just project existing frames, such as the beggar-frame, onto pigeons. Rather, it is important to approach observing them from a neutral point of view, to leave open the possibility of encountering new ways of interacting between humans and pigeons whereby there are no predetermined ideas of what a pigeon or what a human is supposed to be doing in that particular situation.

5.3.2. How the places differ – factors that influence human-pigeons co-existence

In order to make inferences about possible differences in human-pigeon co-existence according to different spaces in the city, it is necessary to determine factors that influence human-pigeons co-existence. By making sure that these factors vary between the city spaces, it ensures that the spaces are sufficiently different and, therefore, meaningful inferences can be made about potentially different forms of co-existence in the city of Amsterdam. These factors are described below and are derived from both literature and the newspaper analysis that can be found in the previous two parts. In the text below I will elaborate on these factors and explain why they might influence human-pigeon co-existence. It, however, is necessary to note that these factors can be dependent on each other. For example, the type of architecture will most likely affect the

amount of pigeons at a given site and the amount of people will also lead to an increase in the amount of pigeons. However, these factors are ways to select different city spaces and making sure that they vary sufficiently by ‘scoring’ differently on the factors described below.

Amount of people

While it is contested whether pigeons are dependent on humans for survival or not, it is evident from multiple sources that the amount of people present influences the amount of pigeons at a given site. As found in Murton, Coombs & Thearle (1972) the feral pigeon flock size is largely dependent on the total amount of human food spillage that occurs during the day. Additionally, the newspaper article that appeared in 2001 based on a count done on feral pigeons in the city clearly states that the more people, the more pigeons (Leupen, 2001). Furthermore, given the fact that Amsterdam is a popular location for tourists, especially the city centre, and tourists can potentially create new feeding sites for pigeons, tourism also plays a role. Whether it is through humans waste or feeding pigeons as a tourist attraction, the increased amount of people due to tourism undoubtedly influences the size of a flock of pigeon through the creation of new feeding sites (Ali et al, 2013).

Amount of pigeons

As became apparent from the newspaper analysis in the second chapter, as soon as the amount of pigeons in the city increased, the public opinion started to shift. Therefore, there is reason to believe that the amount of pigeons present at a certain space influences the co-existence between humans and pigeons, because more pigeons can lead to more perceived nuisance.

Amount of green

Research has shown that in green areas, less pigeons are to be found, such as parks (Ali et al, 2013). This potentially has to do with the fact that, especially during winter, less people go, and gather, there so there is less food from human waste available to pigeons (Johnston & Janinga, 1985). As became apparent from the analysis of the articles that appeared in *Het Parool*, when there were still very little pigeons in the city, the general public did not perceive them as being a threat to the liveability of the city. Therefore, a smaller amount of pigeons can lead to less perceived nuisance from pigeons, which could influence how humans and pigeons co-exist in green spaces.

Type of building(s)

Being synanthropic species, pigeons thrive extremely well in urban environments (Nuoverta 1971; Giunchi et al, 2012). Next to benefitting from the direct presence of humans for food supply, the architecture that largely dominates cities mimics the natural habitat of rock doves, of which feral pigeons in Amsterdam are descendants (Richardson & Capoccia, 2016; Johnston & Janiga, 1995). The structures of these buildings, such as higher buildings with ledges meaning that there is ample opportunity for pigeons to roost, are therefore expected to somehow influence the specific form of co-existence at a given city space.

5.3.3. Specific city spaces in Amsterdam – what places were visited?

The newspaper article *Alle duiven op de Dam: 149 precies* (Leupen, 2001) describes a count done on pigeons in Amsterdam and offers insights on city spaces where most pigeons reside. However, it appeared 24 years ago, meaning it is quite dated and some buildings and places that have been mentioned have been demolished in the meantime. Still, this article offers some leads on specific city spaces that might have distinctive modes of co-existence. Therefore, some of the city spaces I visited were inspired by this article, others I have encountered myself while walking through the city.

In the table below an overview is presented of how the city spaces ‘score’ on the different factors, to show how they are sufficiently different from one another. The remainder of this chapter elaborates on these city spaces by showing the outcomes of my observations.

	Amount of people	Amount of pigeons	Green space	Type of building(s)
Central Station	A lot	On the outside, a lot On the inside, very few	None	One, grand building. Has a high structure with loads of ledges
De Dam	A lot	A lot	None	Multiple buildings. Mostly high structures with loads of ledges. There is also the monument
Spui	A few	A few	Some trees	Older buildings with loads of ledges, however, the structures are not as high as in other spaces
Museumplein	A lot	A lot	Large field and trees	Different museums. All are high structures, however, not all have ledges
Vondelpark	Not so much	A few	A lot	A few, such as a restaurant or café

5.3.4. Observations of human-pigeons interactions at the different city spaces

5.3.4.1. Central Station

The Central Station in Amsterdam was the starting point of my walk through Amsterdam to observe its pigeons and its people¹. Just as it was the beginning of this journey, the Central Station is where the day starts for many arriving in Amsterdam for a day or longer. Additionally, many people leave the city to go to work, school et cetera elsewhere. This leads to a constant movement of persons, resulting the Central Station itself and surrounding area around to be filled with people, as well as pigeons.

Upon arrival, I placed myself at the window to get a view of the Ij-zijde of the station. This is located at the exit of the station facing over the water, het Ij. One could immediately notice that the weather conditions were not optimal. It was a cold, rainy and typically Dutch winter day, leading people to seek shelter in the building of the Central Station. On this side of the station the building is characterized by high and open structures which result in ample opportunities for pigeons to roost and look out for potential new feeding sites and also led to some opportunity for people to seek shelter from the rain. When looking out of the window at my seat, I immediately saw some pigeons circling around people who were eating sandwiches. These people seemed to not really care about these birds and carried on eating without reacting to the pigeons.

After sitting inside for a few minutes, I moved to the outside of the station, still at the Ij-zijde. Here I witnessed a few notable interactions, or lack thereof, between human(s) and pigeons. Since the weather conditions were not inviting people to sit outside and enjoy their lunch there, not many people were outside eating. However, most interactions I saw at this particular site were centred around people eating, and pigeons wanting to get some of the humans food. One observation in particular caught my attention. A few people were sitting on a bench and were eating sandwiches, leading to some crumbs falling on the ground which quickly led to around eight pigeons to arrive. After these pigeons had joined the group of people, one person grabbed their phone and started filming the scene. The people seemed to be enjoying the presence of the pigeons and wanted to make a video of it. This resulted in them throwing more crumbs on the ground and the pigeons to get very close to them, leading to more enjoyment and laughter from the group of people. This situation lasted for about 2 minutes, the pigeons left and the interaction ended. And so did the filming. Quite soon after this particular interaction I witnessed a similar interaction at the same site where pigeons were getting up close to people, who had no food, and they started filming the whole situation. During this interaction, the people did not give the pigeons any food. One particular thing I noticed was, that the pigeons did seem to try and make eye contact with the humans. This is consistent with the begging behaviour described in the chapter on how pigeons are portrayed in scientific literature. Next to these observations, not much interaction was to be seen. Mostly people and pigeons were, individually, going about their day without paying much attention to one another. Some pigeons approached people, either standing still smoking or sitting on a bench, but did not always get a reaction. However, not all people sitting on benches eating evoked a reaction from pigeons.

¹ Not all observations took place on the same date. However, the places are presented as a single sequence of visits.

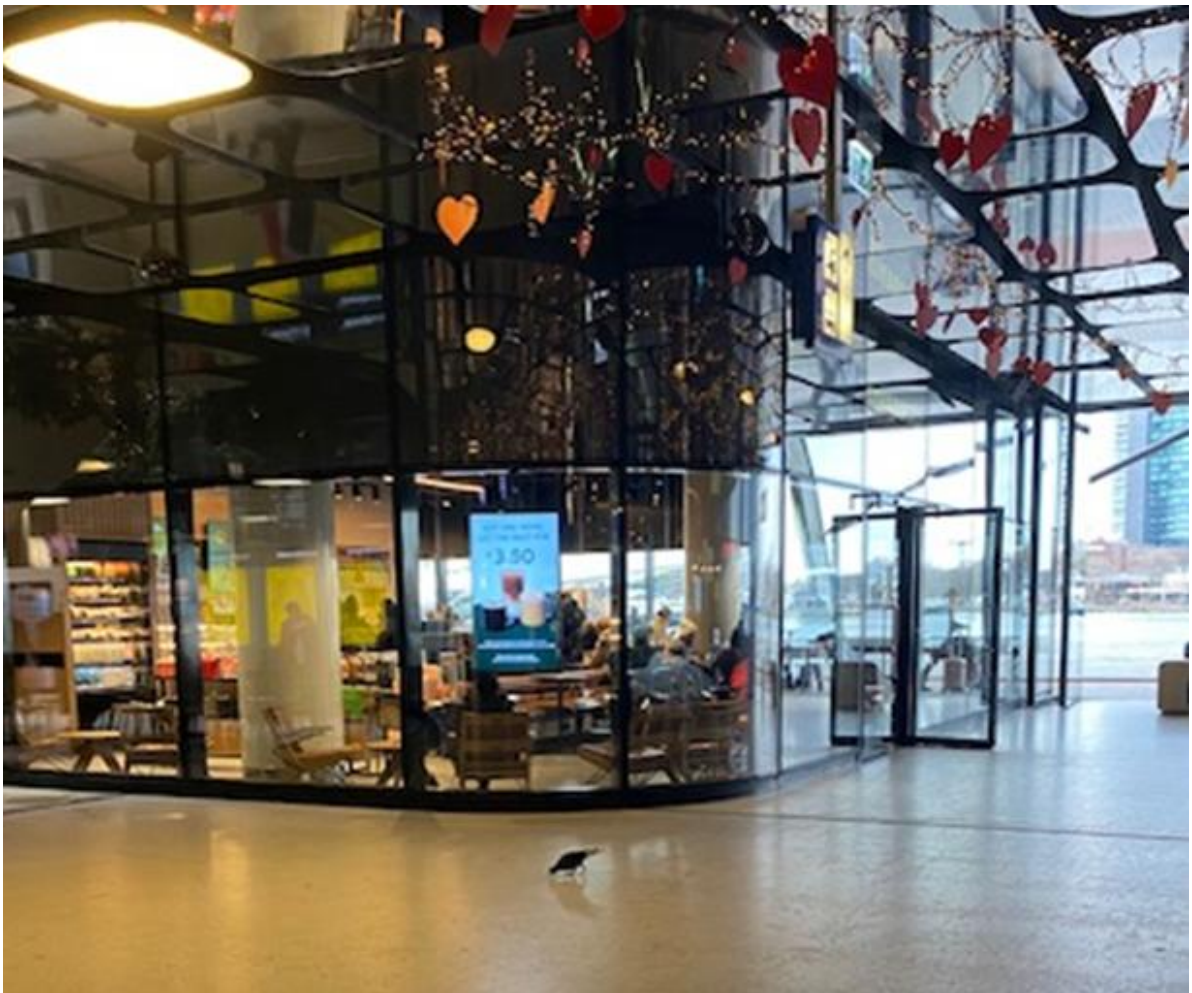


Picture 8: outside the station at Ij-zijde, pigeons and seagulls approaching people sitting on a bench



Picture 9: pigeons roosting on a structure outside the station at Ij-zijde

Since the weather was bad a lot of people gathered on the inside of the station. While many people were there, there were not as many pigeons as on the outside. At this part of the inside of Central Station I did not notice any measure to avert pigeons presence, such as spikes. Still, people were not always pleased with the pigeons being there. One person was sitting down eating a sandwich and one pigeons got close to him and started circling around him and seeking eye contact. The man did not appreciate this and tried to kick the pigeons to get the bird to move. This worked and the pigeon walked away, while doing so, the pigeons looked at other people sitting on the bench but then decided to fly elsewhere. Next to this interaction, I did not see any others. Again, both the pigeons that were there and the people seemed to be minding their own business. After moving to the other side of the train station, that of the city centre, the number of pigeons on the inside of the building reduced to zero. While bustling with people, pigeons were absent. The main entrance hall of the Central Station was very well maintained and the architecture made clear that others than human travellers were not welcome here. Both hostile architecture aimed to avert people from sleeping on benches and pigeons from roosting on higher places, such as lamps, could immediately be noticed.



Picture 10: Lone pigeons on the inside of the station at Ij-zijde



Picture 11: Spikes to deter pigeons presence on lamps in the main entrance hall

Moving to the other side of the station and leaving the building again, towards the side where people can make their way to the city centre of Amsterdam, the amount of both humans and pigeons drastically increased. However, as people were mostly occupied with catching their train or finding their way to explore Amsterdam, the amount of interaction did not necessarily increase as well. Since people were mostly on the move, pigeons did not seem to be seeking human attention. Even when there was a person with two children eating a sandwich the pigeons did not seem to approach these humans. However, the amount of pigeons roaming the area did seem to attract one of the children's attention. The child asked the parent if they could feed the pigeons. To which the parent responded; 'you better not, these pigeons are gross and carry disease so stay away from them!', after some discussion the child gave in and refrained from feeding pigeons. While the pigeons did not approach the people while eating, as soon as these people left the spot where they ate, multiple pigeons came looking for leftovers. In this instance, there was not directly an interaction between the humans and pigeons, it did, however, evoke a reaction from both sides. Additionally, I observed one group of around 5 pigeons which were following a cleaner emptying trash cans to probably catch some food scraps.

The most notable situation I observed was that a passerby seemed to secretly feed the pigeons. This person, while walking by a group of pigeons, put their hand in a bag and dropped a handful of seeds on the ground. After they dropped the food this human quickly walked away. This secrecy was probably due to the fact that, since 2022, there is a ban on feeding animals in public spaces and doing so could result in a 70 euros fine (GGD Amsterdam, n.d.). This newly available feeding site attracted a large amount of pigeons within seconds. No human passerby's seemed to be shocked by the person feeding the pigeons in such a hurry and the number of pigeons it attracted.



Picture 12: Pigeons feeding on the site where they were fed in secrecy

As for the Central Station itself, it is hard to approach it as being one specific city space. The inside and the outside are very different from each other, and even the outside at different exits presented itself with different structures and different human-pigeons interactions.

5.3.4.2. Dam Square

After having visited the Central Station, I continued my walk through Amsterdam towards Dam Square. When thinking about Amsterdam Dam Square with the Royal Palace and many other famous structures surrounding it cannot be ignored. Especially when talking about human-pigeon relations, Dam Square is a quintessential site to uncover more about different ways humans and pigeons can co-exist.

Dam Square appeared multiple times in the newspaper analyses that examined all that has been written about humans and pigeons in *Het Parool* from the 1950s up until now. It all began when just 6 pigeons were living on the square and almost all humans living in the city cared about them deeply and wanted to ensure their welfare by advocating for the placement of a water fountain among other things (*Het Parool*, 1953; *Het Parool*, 1956). In the article written by Leupen that appeared in 2001, it was described that by that time a total of 149 pigeons were living on the square. It is not exactly known how much pigeons are to be found at the square today, but it goes without saying that the pigeons living there in a large numbers are an essential part of life on Dam Square.



Picture 13: Pigeons, people, protests and entertainment on the square

The square is characterized by its dynamic character and the famous buildings surrounding it. When I visited the square there were two protests happening, a performance by a fire-breather, loads of people visiting and traffic crossing the square. However, what was most striking was the large group of pigeons occupying the square. In the middle of this large group there was a person who had loads of pigeons sitting on his shoulders, head and arms and attracted a lot of attention. He used the attention he received to hand out seeds to people who were willing to feed the pigeons, the pigeons would then get up close with the person feeding them and would often sit on their shoulders, arms and would eat out of their hands. This resulted in opportunities to take pictures or video's. All of these different activities taking place on the square generated an overall very lively atmosphere. Looking at the architecture surrounding the square which is characterized by high structures, one can easily identify places where pigeons can find places to roost and await new feeding sites to present themselves. Some of these buildings did have spikes placed on ledges to deter pigeons, but not all. One structure that particularly attracted pigeons was the National Monument. This monument was widely discussed in the newspaper analysis, since it also included the imagery of pigeons to convey a sense of liberty and victory (like in: *Het Parool*, 1950). Next to portraying pigeons as a symbol, it presents feral pigeons nowadays with a spot to roost and overlook the square. Another famous building on the square is the Royal Palace. At my time of visiting the square, there was an event taking place at the palace, meaning that part of the square was closed off due to safety measures. This meant that people could not freely access this part of the square, however, pigeons could and did so in large amounts. Some people I observed did their best to avoid the large group of pigeons in the (accessible) middle of the square, but it was hard to get around them. Others, however, embraced the pigeons and really saw them as something unique for Dam Square, leading the pigeons to be the biggest tourist attraction at this location. Responsible for the pigeons

becoming the thing that attracts so much human attention, is the formerly described person feeding pigeons and who hands out seeds to feed the pigeons. This person, fittingly, calls himself the Pigeon Man. He saw me looking at, and taking pictures of, him and the people and pigeons surrounding him and asked if I wanted to feed the pigeons as well. I agreed to this and fed the pigeons some seeds and they came to me in large amounts, crowding my arms, shoulders and even sat on my head to get their share of the seeds. I also asked him some questions about if he was at Dam square all of the time and what his motivations were to feed the pigeons. He quickly responded that, unless he absolutely was not able to, he was there every day. Because he spends so much time there with the pigeons, he started to form special relationships with some. Especially, this older pigeon that loved to sit on his shoulder all day. Additionally, he also believes that most pigeons recognize him as they always hurry towards him as soon as he arrives at the square every morning. He also expressed that he recognizes pigeons by marks on their beak and also names most of them. With his presence and actions on the square, he truly wants to care for the pigeons and by feeding them the seeds, he wants to prevent them from eating human trash such as fries and wishes to create some awareness that people should not feed the pigeons human food, as it can be very damaging to them. Additionally, he looks out for pigeons that are sick or wounded who need taking care of and he takes action to help them get the care that they need. While the Pigeon Man does admit that for most people, these pigeons are merely entertainment and just want to get a good picture, he sees no harm in this. The pigeons get food that is good for them and he sometimes receives donations that help him take care of the pigeons.

Despite the Pigeon Man's good intentions there were still a lot of people feeding the pigeons human food, mainly unhealthy things such as fries. A few people were observed while throwing fries at the pigeons, which to their enjoyment attracted loads of pigeons. One instance that stood out to me was a child feeding the pigeons fries, to which the parent did not react very positively. However, the child was quite stubborn and kept on feeding the pigeons, much to the parents' avail. This carried on for a while, until someone came up to them and told the child, quite aggressively, to stop feeding the fries since it is harmful to the pigeons. The parent was visibly impressed by this intervention and took the child to leave the square. The person who told the child to stop throwing fries to attract pigeons, had previously entered the square. This person looked quite scruffy and I assumed that he was one of the many homeless people roaming the streets of Amsterdam. While this person might not have been so happy with the people on the square, he did seem to greet the pigeons lovingly and the pigeons seemed to welcome him as well and sat on his shoulders. This person told multiple people, to some nicely and to some not so nicely, that human food is damaging to pigeon health, however, most people discarded these comments and kept on feeding the pigeons. After a while, this person left the square appearing visibly frustrated, some pigeons followed him for a short distance until he completely left the square.

Another observation I repeatedly made, was that it was mostly children who were fascinated by all the pigeons. This ranged from wanting to feed them, asking the Pigeon Man for more seeds to feed the pigeons and playing with them by chasing after the pigeons. If this could be considered as playing and fun for the pigeons as well, I do not know, but they did not seem to be scared away. However, the children, and sometimes their parents, seemed to truly enjoy these human-pigeon interactions.



Picture 14: Child feeding the pigeons fries



Picture 15: A child playfully chasing after the pigeons

The pigeons themselves were always on the lookout for new feeding sites to become available. Whenever that did happen, there they did seem to be competitive to get to the centre and get access to the food. This competitiveness showed itself by some pigeons picking others on the head. It was also clear that multiple pigeons were attempting to mate, this became apparent because I observed multiple pigeons that were moving their head and were excessively cooing. The pigeons partaking in this were clearly busy and did not have time for any human interaction.

Even though they were there in the largest amounts, pigeons were not the only birds occupying the square. There were also a lot of seagulls to be seen. Overall, people seemed to be more scared of the large seagulls and would react to these birds more strongly. It was not only the people who reacted to the seagulls, it was also the pigeons who seemed to be subservient to the seagulls and would often do with whatever food the seagulls left. However, this could only be observed when the pigeons would not gather in large numbers, as they did when surrounding the Pigeon Man and the tourists that were feeding them the seeds.



Picture 16: Feral pigeons accompanying the pigeons portrayed on the National Monument

5.3.4.3. *Het Spui*

Although frequently visited by tourists and others visiting and living in Amsterdam, this square looks and feels calmer compared to the bustling Dam Square. There were less people, buildings were smaller and less high, and overall atmosphere was serener than both Dam Square and Central Station I visited before arriving here. Overall, less people were present than at the places I visited before, but also less pigeons were to be seen.

Upon closer inspection of the buildings surrounding the square, I did not observe any noticeable spikes on buildings or any other measures to avert pigeon presence. Unlike the high structures that can be found on Dam Square or at Central Station, the architecture here lacks the features that mimic the pigeons' natural cliff-like habitats, possibly making it less attractive to them. Considering the availability of food on this particular site, there were many restaurants and cafés located at this square. However, it did not seem to attract significant amount of pigeons at my time of visiting. Another thing to note is that this particular city space was a lot cleaner than Dam Square and Central station, meaning that there was barely any human trash or food waste to be seen.



Picture 17: Less tall buildings surrounding the square

Het Spui appears to be dominated by humans and their activities. At my time of visiting there was a little market taking place, where people were selling books and prints et cetera, which attracted some visitors. Other humans were sitting on terraces enjoying the few moments of sunlight that was finally coming through. While people were present in large numbers and enjoying live on the square, there were not many pigeons to be seen. After spending half an hour sitting on a bench, I saw about five pigeons. Two of which approached people sitting on the same bench eating some fries but without any success. Sometime later, someone dropped some fries, which attracted a few pigeons looking for something to eat, however, their numbers were not nearly as large as at the places I visited before coming to het Spui. It was notable that

almost no humans that were eating were approach by pigeons, nor did they seek out people having lunch on one of the terraces adjoining the square. The pigeons that were there were mainly just wagging around or flying over. Even at a small fish vendor, there were nearly no pigeons to be seen. As for human-pigeons interaction, not much of note was observed. However, it was striking that the pigeons here really got out of the way for humans. If there was a pigeon walking on the pavement and a human would be walking in their way, it was the pigeon getting out of the way, rather than the human stepping aside to let the pigeon be.



Picture 18: The few pigeons roaming het Spui

Visiting Het Spui did not generate any notable observation of human-pigeon interactions and, except for the two people being approached by pigeons while they were eating. To what exactly this lack of pigeon presence at this square is due I do not know, it could be the lack of high structures that mimic their natural habitat or the fact that this square was a lot cleaner than Central Station and Dam Square. However, it was not that visiting this square was not an important part of my walk through Amsterdam to observe its people and its pigeons, it showed that even if there are less pigeons present, there are still different forms of co-existence within the city.



Picture 19: The market attracting human visitors

5.3.4.4. Museumplein

This square is well known for the museums that surround it, the Rijksmuseum, Stedelijk Museum, Moco Museum and the Van Gogh Museum all attract significant numbers of human visitors. The square itself features a large open grassy field and is known for its dynamic character. Next to the museums, the square hosts various activities, such as ice skating during the winter months which I saw while passing through the square.

Entering the square from the side of the Rijksmuseum, I immediately noticed that the architectural design of the building, reaching high up in the sky and full of ledges, could potentially attract pigeons. While I did not see any deterrents like spikes at first glance, some ornaments were protected with nets. Despite the building's potential appeal to pigeons, their presence was minimal in this area. As I moved further into the square, the number of pigeons gradually increased, especially near areas where people were gathering. It was mainly towards the far end of the square on the grassy fields, where the number of pigeons increased quickly. This probably had to do with the fact that there was a supermarket near and people sat down on the benches to have lunch, which resulted in feeding opportunities for pigeons. In terms of the architecture, the Rijksmuseum initially appeared to offer an attractive habitat for pigeons, but their presence was not that noticeable. Further along the square, the buildings of the Van Gogh Museum and Stedelijk Museum were high but did not contain any or much ledges and provided little opportunity for pigeons to roost on them. Even though the structures appeared to be less attractive to pigeons, most of the pigeons could be found here. This could have to do with the amount of people eating there, which possible results in a new feeding opportunity for pigeons.



Picture 20: Pigeon roaming the spot where schooltrips gather

After visiting het Spui, the increase in the number of pigeons was immediately noticeable. It started out with a few pigeons I noticed roaming a particular area, which I after some time realised was a spot where school trips had to gather before they could enter the Rijksmuseum. The pigeons I noticed there were all looking around for possible crumbs to eat and since it was a place where loads of children gathered, there probably was a lot to find. This could mean that it was a known feeding site for pigeons as well. Here, the pigeons really seemed to mind their own business and paid no attention to human passersby's. The other way around this was the same, humans walking on the pavement largely ignored the pigeons. However, one human looked upon the eating pigeons and smiled and some school children shouted in excitement when the pigeons got closer to them. After a while, one pigeon found a piece of bread lying on the cycling path and this attracted a few other pigeons and as a result a few pigeons gathered in the middle of the cycling path. This meant that the road was partly blocked for cyclists and since the pigeons were busy with feeding, it meant that the cyclists had to get out of their way because the pigeons would not move. It was only when a large group of schoolchildren from around 8 to 9 years old, that produced a lot of noise, arrived at this spot that the pigeons left temporarily. As soon as the group had left, the pigeons returned.

Making my way towards the other end of the square, I saw a few terraces. However, since it was raining there were not many people sitting there. There were also not that many pigeons there, a few were roaming the terraces and getting up close to humans. Most pigeons did inspect the tables where people sat down as soon as they had left to scan for any leftover food. After the weather had cleared up, more people sat down at the terraces and more pigeons gathered. It was also at the middle of the square where groups of children were gathering,

presumably on a schooltrip. I observed a group of pigeons which approached this group of children who were standing still and eating sandwiches. At first, the children seemed to scare the pigeons away and did not appear to enjoy their presence but after some time they started to see the fun of it. The children began gathering pigeons with crumbs and then chasing after them while laughing. It only seemed to generate more enjoyment with the children when they realised they could tease other children, who were scared, by making the pigeons get up close to them. Later on during my visit to the Museumplein I witnessed a similar interaction between children and pigeons. However the second time, both the group of children and the group of pigeons were a lot larger and seemed to continually attract both more children and pigeons to join in. During both these observations it was not only pigeons but also seagulls were part of the interaction.



Picture 21: Children playing with pigeons



Picture 22: Children playing with pigeons and parent taking pictures

Continuing my way on the Museumplein, I passed the entrances of Moco Museum, Van Gogh Museum and Het Stedelijk Museum. While many people gathered here, not many pigeons were to be seen. Even if there were some, the pigeons and the humans did not pay each other a lot of attention. The humans were busy searching for museum tickets on their phones and pigeons were just walking around.

It was at the far end of the square, next to the large field where I observed the most interaction between humans and pigeons. This was probably due to the fact that there was a supermarket, where people got lunch and would eat it on one of the benches next to it. The interactions that took place were mostly initiated by the pigeons. It was both the number in which they were present and the close proximity into which they got with humans made it impossible to ignore them. Even if people did not seem to want to interact with the pigeons, they had no choice. One couple who sat down to eat was also approached by the pigeons, but they did not like it and try to scare the pigeons away. This was to no avail and it led them to leave the place as a result. Others did seem to enjoy the pigeons being there, and although not always feeding them, the presence of pigeons did generate some enjoyment. During one interaction there were two people

eating, one of them was scared of birds and the other was not. The person who was not scared jokingly threw a few crumbs on the ground which attracted pigeons, leading the other person to get scared and made the other person laugh. However, there were, yet again, not only pigeons there, but also seagulls. It was mostly when the seagulls joined in the humans started to appear more scared of birds.



Picture 23: Pigeons and seagulls roaming het Museumplein near the supermarket

Overall, the large Museumplein showed me a lot of human-pigeon interaction. These interactions showed humans emotions ranging from play and enjoyment to fear. From the pigeons' side, they, just as at Dam Square partook in playing with humans. It was especially at the end of my journey through the square that I noticed just how much the pigeons were initiating the interactions and were in control of it, even causing people to leave the square.



Picture 24: Pigeons flying closely over my head

5.3.4.5. Vondelpark

As my journey through Amsterdam came to an end, I visited the Vondelpark as final city space. The Vondelpark is Amsterdam's most iconic green space, it is a large park which situated in the heart of the city and serves as a means to escape the busy city for a moment, for both residents and visitors. Compared to the city spaces I visited before arriving at Vondelpark, it is unique as it is a park and is therefore entirely composed of green space. More than at the previously city spaces, I noticed how species other than pigeons and humans were all interacting with each other, leading the Vondelpark to be a truly multispecies endeavour.

When walking through the park, I did observe very few pigeons compared to the other sites. The few pigeons I did observe were concentrated around specific areas, primarily near the cafés and a playground. These locations are places where people gather and therefore lead to food spillage which results in feeding sites for pigeons. Next to these eating facilities for humans, there was no other notable human-made architecture at the park. Overall, the park itself was busy with people, but they were all on the move and did not seem to gather in specific places at my time of visiting. While there were a lot of other bird species to be seen, not that many pigeons were observed.

As for human-pigeon interactions, I did not observe any direct interaction. Humans were walking around or sitting on a bench enjoying the park. Pigeons were looking for food in the grass, mostly joining or being joint by other animals, such as coots. The only human-pigeons interactions I observed, were actually indirect and were being facilitated by dogs. Dogs would chase after the pigeons to which the humans would react by telling their dog not to do so or pull them by their leashes to return to their owner.

Another thing I noticed was, just like at Dam Square, that there were pigeons trying to mate by moving their heads and excessively cooing.



Picture 25: The few pigeons in the park accompanied by coots

5.4. How can cosmopolitical theory inform sustainable co-existence between humans and pigeons, in view of the different forms of co-existence they take part in?

Within cosmopolitical theory, it is essential to recognize that no space is exclusively human, rather, all spaces are co-inhabited by a diverse array of beings, both human and non-human (Hinchcliffe et al., 2003). This perspective challenges the notion that spaces are shaped solely by human actors and instead emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the roles that non-human beings play in constructing our shared worlds (Robbert & Mickey, 2013). An important concept in cosmopolitics is the modes of relating, which shows what different ways of relating between beings exist (McKiernan & Instone, 2015). The following chapter reflects on how these modes of relating between humans and pigeons in Amsterdam have changed over time and are currently constructed. The chapter ends with what insights this provides for how we can move into a future whereby humans take pigeons seriously in shaping the more-than-human city.

5.4.1. The past – how pigeons transformed from loved to loathed

According to McKiernan and Instone (2015), cosmopolitics in practice means looking at modes of relating between different species, both humans and non-humans. In the case of humans and pigeons, their specific modes of relating are not fixed, rather, as became apparent from the newspaper analysis these modes of relating can shift over time. When pigeons first arrived in Amsterdam, the residents spoke lovingly of their new ‘stadsgenoten’ (fellow city inhabitants) (Het Parool, 1959). However, as time progressed, the feral pigeons transformed from being a symbol of peace and freedom to being seen as a pest and something that should be eradicated from the human-city. Growing concerns for the threats that feral pigeons pose to human health and the overall liveability of a city have contributed to the rise of the pest-frame that has prevailed in the second half of the last century.

This specific mode of relating to pigeons as a pest has not only prevailed in everyday life, but has extended itself into academic literature. Much of the existing research on feral pigeons focuses on methods for controlling or eradicating their populations rather than on understanding their behaviours or ecological roles (for example: Murton, Coombs & Thearle, 1972 and Murton, Thearle and Thompson 1972). As a result, the way pigeons are perceived is largely a product of social construction. As part of this, the aforementioned beggar-frame came into existence (Weber, Haag & Durrer, 1994). This social construction of what a feral pigeon is, and what a feral pigeon is ought to be in the city, has diminished the role that pigeons play in creating a shared world and constituting shared spaces, such as a city. Although various attempts have been made to eradicate pigeons from public spaces through the method of trapping and killing pigeons (Het Parool, 1970), those wishing to do so, never fully succeeded. Robbert and Mickey (2013) argue that, as part of practicing cosmopolitics, it is to be acknowledged that no space is entirely human. Therefore, speaking from a cosmopolitical viewpoint, the failed attempts to eradicate pigeons from public spaces, shows that, indeed, no space is exclusively human, even if some would wish it to be. Thus, humans should accept the role that pigeons play in shaping the more-than-human city and pigeons are ought to be taken seriously.

5.4.2. The present – humans and pigeons storying shared spaces and problematizing the beggar-frame

Moving into the present day, the most recent newspaper articles show a newfound interest in the feral pigeon and their entanglement in urban life in Amsterdam (Arnoldussen, 2013). Rather than being seen as a nuisance, there is a growing recognition of their role in shaping and co-constituting urban spaces alongside humans. To further analyse the present-day dynamics of human-pigeon relations, I will revisit the findings from my observations across various city spaces in Amsterdam and expand on them through a cosmopolitical lens, especially focussing on different modes of relating between humans and pigeons. These observations revealed that modes of relating not only shift over time, but also vary across different urban environments. Each space produced a somewhat distinct pattern of human-pigeon interactions, demonstrating that the spatial context can influence human-pigeons co-existence. Additionally, closely observing humans and pigeons also revealed that modes of relating are often coloured from a human perspective resulting in a socially constructed image of pigeons, such as seeing them as beggars. However, when closely observing humans and pigeons and how they interact, I got to question, who are the true beggars in these encounters, humans or pigeons?

The first location I visited was the Central Station of Amsterdam. There was one observation in particular that stood out to me, which could be drawn on to argue against the dominant beggar-frame. A group of people sat eating while a few pigeons approached them, then the people started filming the pigeons and feeding them more to attract more pigeons. What struck me most was that, while the pigeons may have been begging for food, the humans were, in a sense, begging as well. Next to their visible enjoyment of the situation, they got media content out of it. This raised a question: Were the pigeons truly the only ones begging, or were the humans also begging, for attention and engagement through their interactions with the birds? While this most definitely does not immediately discard the beggar-frame concerning feral pigeons in cities, it did get me thinking. Who were the real beggars in this situation? Pigeons or humans? Or rather, is none of them begging and can the interaction be seen as a reciprocal exchange? In this particular case, food for content. This reciprocal exchange of food for content could also be observed at Dam Square. Here, tourists were posing for pictures or videos with pigeons after feeding them seeds provided by The Pigeon Man. Another example of humans begging was when children would ask their parents to feed the pigeons, only to be met with refusal which sometimes led to conflict. This was observed both at the Central Station and Dam Square, suggesting that in some cases, it was not the pigeons but the humans who were doing the begging for the opportunity to engage with the birds.

While I would not argue that the begging-frame should be disregarded as a whole, I do believe that it should be critically re-evaluated. Pigeons do exhibit behaviours that could be labelled as ‘begging’ in their search for food, such as approaching humans, maintaining eye contact, and circling in anticipation of food (Weber, Haag & Durrer, 1994). However, reducing them solely to the status of beggars overlooks their agency in these interactions. The very construct of the beggar-frame, shaped by human perceptions and cultural assumptions, fails to acknowledge that humans, too, can seek something from pigeons. Whether it be amusement, attention or some form of media content. It was mainly at the Museumplein where I observed that pigeons hold more agency in human interactions than what would be suggested when following the idea that pigeons are merely beggars. A lot of interactions at this specific site were initiated by these birds. Not all humans appreciated this and even caused people to completely leave the square. Another instance was when pigeons were obstructing the cycling

path, leading people to having to make place for the pigeons. This shows that pigeons do indeed claim their space. Merely seeing pigeons as beggars, and therefore somewhat perceiving them as passive recipients of human generosity, fails to acknowledge the agency pigeons hold in in human-pigeons interactions. It may be more accurate to recognize these interactions as complex exchanges, in which both species negotiate their place in the shared more-than-human city.

These interactions between humans and pigeons, in that sense, shape the stories that are formed in that particular place. It is through these encounters that beings assign meaning to a place and also story it. The exchanges that constitute these interactions are not limited to the classic ideas of a 'market exchange' where both parties exchange goods. Rather, in the more-than-human-city, which provides a scene for a complex sociability, these exchanges can include gifting and risk-taking, or simply not wanting to eat alone and share a meal with one or more pigeons. For example, the Pigeon Man can be seen as gifting the pigeons food and not asking anything back of them and the person secretly feeding the pigeons was taking the risk of being fined. However, it is not always clear who exactly gets what out of these exchanges, but it can range from things such as getting content in exchange for food, playfulness in exchange for food, or simply having company. It is through these complex exchanges, of which the meaning is not always so obvious, that different modes of relating come into existence.

Returning to modes of relating, I observed multiple instances of humans expressing care for pigeons and engaging in forms of play with them. The most obvious form of care that I encountered was The Pigeon Man, who spends most of his time with pigeons on Dam Square to make sure the pigeons eat healthy and are being taken care of when sick or wounded. When I spoke to him about what he does, spending so much time on Dam Square to care for the pigeons by feeding them and 'looking out for' them, I genuinely sensed a lot of care and love for the pigeons residing Dam Square. Another human who expressed care for the pigeons at Dam Square was a homeless person who actively intervened when he saw people feeding pigeons anything other than seeds. Sometimes he approached them kindly, sometimes not so much. While I did not speak to him I, again, noticed sincere concern for the pigeons well-being, because he made an emotional and somewhat aggressive appeal to stop a child from feeding the pigeons human junk food. As for both The Pigeon Man and this homeless person, the pigeons seemed to reciprocate their care by getting close to them and sitting on their shoulders. Although I do not have the expertise to determine whether pigeons can express affection in the way humans do, their behaviour suggested a genuine bond between them and these human individuals. A more subtle form of care was evident at Central Station, where I observed a person secretly feeding the pigeons. Unlike the overt displays of care at Dam Square, this act was brief and quiet, yet it still signified a particular mode of relating, one in which humans provide for pigeons despite the prevailing ideas that discourages it by means of fining those who feed the pigeons.

Beyond care, I also noticed humans engaging in play with pigeons. Children, in particular, seemed fascinated by them, running toward them, attempting to attract them, or chasing after them as they flew away. Just as with humans showing care and not knowing whether this is reciprocated by pigeons as caring for humans, I do not know if this is being seen as play for pigeons as well. However, it does show a mode of relating whereby human children were showing an interest in non-humans others and playing with them as they would with their humans peers. This genuine taking interest in pigeons suggest that for these children, pigeons are active participants in storying these spaces in the more-than-human city and are not just passive background creatures.

As for the political character of shared spaces and how this affects the interaction between humans and non-humans, some insights can be derived as well. In some spaces spikes to deter pigeons presence could be found on buildings or structures within buildings, this was most obvious in the main entrance hall of the Central Station. These deterrence methods were highly effective, as no pigeons were observed at this location. In a political sense, this implies a form of exclusion for non-humans and reinforces the idea that some places are to be exclusively human. However, this form of exclusion was not limited to pigeons alone, it extended to exclusion of humans as well by other forms of hostile architecture, such as making it impossible to sleep on benches. This was probably aimed at deterring the presence of homeless people seeking a place to sleep. The design of the entrance hall at the Central Stations demonstrates that architectural decisions do not only regulate behaviour, but actively determines who gets to exist in certain spaces and under what conditions. These methods of exclusion through architecture make the design of public spaces highly political as it influences, or even constitutes, how beings interact (or not) and should therefore be included in the discussion on how we should move towards a practical understanding of cosmopolitics in view of human-pigeon co-existence.

Observations reveal that modes of relating differ not only per location, but also across different groups of humans. Children seemed to be mostly relating to pigeons through play, those marginalized in human society connected with the pigeons through a form of care and tourists saw pigeons as an attraction helping them to get a good video or picture. All these different modes of relating to pigeons show that pigeons are not just merely tolerated or avoided, but in many cases they are acknowledged, appreciated, and sometimes even befriended. These ways of relating between humans and pigeons have an effect on how places are understood and, therefore, storied by both species. The fact that these modes of relating vary between locations and can change over time, shows that human-pigeons co-existence is not something static, rather it is a continuous process of becoming-with in a multispecies environment.

5.4.3. The future – approaching pigeons as partners

Drawing on the insights which show that pigeons are actively taking part in co-shaping the more-than-human-city of Amsterdam, suggest the need to move beyond seeing pigeons as beggars or passive background creatures and move towards seeing interactions between humans and pigeons as a reciprocal exchange, rather than a one-sided begging situation. The mere use of the word beggar diminishes the agency pigeons hold in a situation and the role that they play in constituting and storying shared places. By viewing human-pigeons interactions, and, therefore, co-existence, as complex exchanges, rather than something one-directional we acknowledge the mutual influence both humans and pigeons have in constituting shared spaces. This shift in perspective aligns with the core principles of cosmopolitics, which advocates for a non-hierarchical modes of cohabitation grounded in an ethics of conviviality (McKiernan & Instone, 2015). Recognizing interactions as exchanges rather than acts of dependency fosters a more equal understanding of human-pigeon co-existence. Therefore, pigeons are not merely beggars, but also choosers which chose to partake in a certain interaction. By seeing them as choosers, rather than beggars, humans recognize the agency that a pigeon holds.

A crucial step toward achieving this mode of co-existence is recognizing the role pigeons play in co-constituting public spaces alongside humans and, in doing so, acknowledging that society is not solely a human endeavour. Consistent with cosmopolitical thought, and as seen during my observations, humans and pigeons are continuously forming new relationships and it is

through these relationships that these places become political (Robbert & Mickey, 2013). Therefore, we, as humans, should accept that pigeons are taking part in this political process as well. However, this recognition presents a challenge. How do we include pigeons in politics, when politics is traditionally considered an exclusively human domain? Departing from this human idea of politics, the idea prevails that an accurate representation of all members in a society leads to good politics. However, cosmopolitics would argue against this. Representing animals in a traditionally, thus human manner, would imply that the animals are lesser humans which are unable to represent themselves (Hinchcliff et al., 2013; Haraway, 1992). Therefore, cosmopolitical scholars urge humans to experiment with new ways of doing politics. In doing so, the ways humans are currently engaging with non-animal others should be critically re-evaluated. Thus, it is important to find out more about different modes of relating, both in a historical context and our present world.

When trying to achieve this new way of doing politics, it is important to not shy away from the ethical dilemmas that arise when creating new forms of co-habitation (Hinchcliff et al., 2003). These challenges of how to co-exist are also prevalent in human-pigeons co-existence, as became apparent through the examining the shared history between humans and pigeons in Amsterdam. On the one hand, people have expressed legitimate concerns about public health and the damage pigeons can cause to buildings. On the other hand, pigeons have been cherished by many, recognized as shaping the city's character, and even deemed deserving of the same rights and care as their human co-inhabitants of the city. For example, those who repeatedly advocated for the placing of a water fountain (Het Parool, 1957; Het Parool, 1959). While this ambivalence in opinions can cause a lot of disagreement, cosmopolitics argues that society should not shun these debates. Rather, we should accept that reaching a state of non-hierarchical co-habitation is not a harmonious process, rather, it is inherently complex and, at times, highly uncomfortable (McKiernan & Instone, 2015). In view of acknowledging this, the conversation of how to deal with nuisance stemming from pigeons, by, for example, designing spaces in such a way that prevents pigeons from being present there, is to be held. However, this conversation should be held with the pigeons, where they are seen as an equal in status in to their human co-inhabitants of the city and recognize their agency, instead of humans speaking of and for the pigeons.

To enter this dialogue with pigeons, a first step is to take the pigeons seriously. In the text above it has already been concluded that humans are to acknowledge the role that pigeons play in shaping shared spaces. To further effectuate this taking seriously of the feral pigeons, we can turn to two concepts that are being used in multispecies studies. Firstly, humans should “see” and “see-with” animal others. This entails being attentive to non-humans and asking ourselves what they would actually need to flourish (Van Dooren, 2019, p.12). Bringing this attentiveness to pigeons in to practice further enables humans to take them seriously and to respond to the ethical demands that cosmopolitics asks of humans to allows members of all species, including pigeons, to flourish (Van Dooren, 2019, p. 9). Additionally, humans need to practice the “arts of noticing” as described by Tsing (2011) who urges humans to immerse oneself in the life of others to query into what matters to them and what they would need to flourish. When bringing this “seeing”, “seeing-with” and “arts of noticing” into practice humans can, therefore, go beyond the traditional, purely human, perspective of practicing politics. By learning more about how pigeons shape their own worlds, humans can learn to communicate with the pigeons, instead of speaking of and for them.

Taking all of the above in to account, allows a more-than-human society to move into a cosmopolitical future whereby all beings, including pigeons and humans, are being seen as equal and are treated equally in political processes. However, as modes of relating between humans and pigeons vary a lot, it is difficult to pinpoint one such practical and correct way of doing cosmopolitics. While this diversity in modes of relating might seem as an obstacle in establishing a way of doing cosmopolitics, it also allows for the exploration of a multitude of ways of doing politics with pigeons. Drawing on findings in this thesis, this would entail doing more research into pigeon ethology, rather than finding ways to control their presence, to find out more on what pigeons would need to flourish. Additionally, a more detailed look into the past can be taken to see exactly why the citizens of Amsterdam felt as if the pigeons were just as deserving of rights and care as their human co-inhabitants of the city. This might aid in regaining such an attitude towards non-human others in the more-than-human-city. As for now, it is needed to further research exactly what these different modes of relating means for both humans and pigeons and what it is exactly that pigeons need to flourish. In order to do so, a way of communicating with pigeons that enables them to speak for themselves is needed.

6. Discussion

The main aim of all those disciplines that fall under the broader umbrella of multispecies studies, is recognizing the animals' agency. Within this thesis I aimed to research just how pigeons' exercise their agency by looking into how they take part, and have taken part, in shaping the more-than-human city of Amsterdam and what the implications could be for more-than-human cosmopolitics. In the discussion below, I will elaborate on how the theories described in the theoretical framework have aided me in doing. Furthermore, suggestions will be given on how to further approach research into human-pigeons co-existence. Lastly, I will reflect on how this thesis was a continuous process, both from an academic and personal perspective.

6.1. Reflection on the theoretical framework - doing research with non-humans in the more-than-human city

The theoretical framework of my thesis is rooted in multispecies studies, a field that examines the role of animals in shaping shared human-nonhuman worlds. All the disciplines that belong to this category aim to take seriously the role that animals play in shaping the shared world between humans and non-humans. A central notion within this field of study is that humans and non-humans are in this constant state of "becoming-with" (van Dooren, Kirksey & Münster, 2016). Therefore, all living beings take can in principle take equal part constantly evolving with one another and while doing so, co-create the spaces in which we live. The notion that both humans and pigeons take equal part in shaping the city of Amsterdam, was the starting point of my thesis. To explore the present and the past, I drew on theoretical concepts from animal geography and multispecies ethics.

6.1.1. Animal geography

Animal geography seeks to explain how unequal power relations between human and non-humans are shaped, by exploring their origin and current manifestations through analysing both the spatial and social dimensions (Philo & Wilbert, p.4, 2000). As part of doing so, animal spaces and beastly place are introduced as concepts. Animal spaces entail those spaces where animals are allowed to exist according to human classification of the world, whereas beastly places are the places where animals can fully exercise their own 'beastly manners' and fully and freely take part in shaping their environment (Philo & Wilbert, p. 13, 2000). When starting out my research, I wanted to investigate whether the specific city spaces, or even the city as a whole, could be considered as an animal space or a beastly place when looking at pigeons.

Historically, cities are often approached as something, that ideally is purely human. Animals were often seen as 'the other' and their beastly presence was not welcome in the city (Philo, 1998). However, more recent research challenges this perspective and sees the city as being more-than-human, which is constituted not only by humans, but also by non-humans (Gibbs, 2024). Based on this shift in thinking on cities, I expected to see a difference in my results from the newspaper analysis and the observations I did in Amsterdam. Looking at the historical newspaper articles, I was surprised to find that pigeons were initially welcomed by the city's human inhabitants before later being framed as pests by some. This notion of seeing pigeons as a pest in the city is consistent with what Philo (1998) describes about the city as a space that ought to be free of beastly presence. However, it was unexpected to see how pigeons were once viewed as deserving of the same care and rights as humans. Whether this is due to their small numbers and, therefore, still being somewhat 'controllable' by humans, or a genuine love for all those beings living in the city as felt by the humans of Amsterdam at the time, is

hard to establish on the basis of these sources. The way that Philo (1998) describes the historical city as something supposed to be free of beastly presence and how the pigeons came to be seen as a pest, shows parallels with how academic literature concerning pigeons is shaped. As found while researching academic literature, feral pigeons are severely understudied and those that have studied the pigeon focus mostly on population control, rather than understanding feral pigeons on their own terms (Capoccia, Boyle & Darnell, 2018). The public perception of feral pigeons in Amsterdam started shifting around the 1970s and seeing pigeons as a pest consolidated itself in the 1980s. It was also around this period that the papers *Ecological studies of the feral pigeon Columba livia var. I. Population, breeding biology and methods of control* (Murton, Thearle and Thompson 1972) and *Ecological Studies of the Feral Pigeon Columba livia var. II* (Murton, Coombs & Thearle, 1972), which were used in the literature review, appeared. While these studies offer valuable insights into the behaviour of feral pigeons, these are also focussed at designing the best measures to control pigeons presence and, in that sense, frame them as a pest. Therefore, the pest-frame prevailed in both everyday life and the academic world and likely contributed to seeing the city as something that ought to be free of (too much) feral pigeons. The framing of pigeons says something about the way humans order the world in their minds, making research into this frame very fitting to animal geography. This pest-frame also was prevalent in my observations when a parent told their child, who wanted to feed the pigeons, to stay away from the pigeons, as they are dirty and carry disease. However, it must be noted that not all despised the feral pigeons in Amsterdam, as became apparent during the historical analysis and my observations. For example, human inhabitants of the city made it hard for the city's pest control to carry out their work and opinions on how to live with pigeons were highly diverse, leading to intense debate (Het Parool, 1987). This shows that not all believed that the city should always be free of animals which take part in shaping their environment. While this idea that a city is a more-than-human endeavour has recently been accepted in academic literature (Gibbs, 2024), and newspaper articles are beginning to show an interest in feral pigeons (Arnoldussen, 2013), this attitude towards feral pigeons is not new to all humans in the city. The distinction that has been created between the past, when cities were seen as something ought to be free of beastly places, and the present, which recognizes the city as being more-than-human, might not be all that black and white. Rather, when looking at pigeons, human ideas of where pigeons are allowed to exist in the city or not are highly diverse, both historically and currently. This shows that the feral pigeon occupies a special place within the city, where ideas on where and to what extent they are allowed to take part in shaping the more-than-human city are extremely ambiguous, both in the past and the present day. While these ideas on pigeons might have changed over time, some things remain constant. For example, there are parallels to be seen between the pictures used in the newspaper analysis and the pictures I took during the observations. It was especially the way that children relate to pigeons by playing with them, that was seen both in the past and in the present. This can be seen on pictures 15, 21 and 22 in the present day and on pictures 1, 3 and 6 in the past.

Whether a location can be seen as an animal space or a beastly place is also not that black and white when relating these concepts to feral pigeons in Amsterdam. Looking back at my observations, it is not always so clear whether or not pigeons were allowed to fully show their 'beastly manners' or whether they were following the rules imposed by their place in humans orderings of the world. For some places this was evident, especially for the main entrance hall of the Central Station. Through the use of spikes to avert pigeons presence, it was made clear that pigeons were not allowed to be there. For other places, this was not so clear. It was mostly hard to judge whether pigeons were fully able to follow their own ways and freely

take part in constituting the city spaces or they were constrained in doing so, making a location an animal space. Take the Dam square for example. On the one hand, the pigeons play a defining role in constituting the image of, and life on, this square. They occupied this space in large numbers and took up positions in close proximity to humans, whether they liked this or not, which would make it possible to label Dam square as a beastly place. On the other hand, some buildings on the square had spikes placed on them, that made it clear that pigeons were, quite literally, not allowed to be at this very specific spot or to only be so under strict definitions of appropriate presence, which could classify Dam square under an animal space. This shows, that even within a distance of a few meters, very different ways of co-existing with pigeons, or, maybe wanting to co-exist, can exist alongside each other making it hard to assess whether a location can be categorized as an animal space or a beastly place.

The difficulty in determining whether a location can be labelled as an animal space or beastly place does not imply that animal geography has not aided in discovering more on human-pigeon co-existence in Amsterdam. Rather, this difficulty on just how to assess a certain location, shows the ambiguity that surrounds the feral pigeons, making it very interesting to continue researching (with) them. Additionally, as Campbell (2007) highlighted already, the use of animal geography in human-avian relations in the city is especially relevant. Pigeons actively claim space in the city, often in large numbers, and human responses to their presence vary widely across different locations and social contexts. It is exactly these dynamic interactions animal geography can aid in researching through examining both the spatial and social dimension of human-pigeon co-existence. Researching human-pigeon relations in an animal geography fashion has contributed to this field of science by showing that, especially in the more-than-human city the concepts of animal spaces and beastly places are a valuable way of approaching such spaces, however, it shows that it is not always possible to pinpoint what exactly a place can be defined as. Especially when taking pigeons as the object of study, which are so intertwined in human history and everyday life, it is hard to distinguish who are actually “making the rules”, humans or pigeons, of a city space. Therefore, concerning pigeons in the more-than-human-city, these terms can be approached more as a continuum, rather than something being either an animal space or a beastly place.

6.1.2. Multispecies ethics

Next to animal geography, a large part of my thesis was shaped by drawing on concepts from multispecies ethics. This approach was mostly inspired by Van Dooren (2012) and his book in which he looks at how humans and crows live together and create the shared world. In doing so, he expanded on two concepts which I have also explained in the theoretical framework, worlding and storying. Here I will reflect on how these concepts have helped me in understanding human-pigeon co-existence.

The first of these concepts is worlding, this refers to how both humans and non-humans create their own distinct worlds. These worlds in turn shape the reality in which this particular being exists, and by combining all these different distinct worlds, the shared reality emerges through means of interacting and creating relationships with others (Van Dooren, 2019, p. 8). While it was not directly the aim of my thesis to research how individual pigeons and humans world themselves, it were the relationships through which a common reality is shaped, that were studied. These relationships that, therefore form the common reality, shape the common space of existence, in this case the more-than-human city of Amsterdam. By tracing the evolving relationships between humans and pigeons, both in the newspaper analysis and my

observations, I explored how this common space of existence is shaped as a continuous process. Acknowledging that it is not only humans that take part in shaping these spaces, but also pigeons, is to recognize their agency (Haraway, 1997). This perspective moves beyond merely considering what pigeons need to survive. Rather, it asks what they actually do and how they actively shape their surroundings. This is especially relevant when challenging the notion that pigeons are just beggars. Pigeons are not mere recipients of how humans world, but actually actively influence the common space of existence. This prevailed itself through, seemingly simple, interactions, such as cyclists getting out of their way for pigeons or people leaving a location because they do not want to be around the pigeons. Acknowledging the fact that pigeons world themselves and therefore, recognizing pigeons' agency in shaping the common space of existence (read: the more-than-human city of Amsterdam) goes against seeing pigeons as beggars and shows that is not only humans who decide what human-pigeons co-existence looks like. Rather, it shows that pigeons also actively take part in this.

The second concept that I explored in multispecies ethics is storying. As defined by van Dooren and Rose (2012), a story entails: "a story is that which emerges out of an ability to engage with happenings in the world as sequential and meaningful events". In this sense, pigeons partake in storying by putting together events and reacting accordingly, thereby creating meaning.

A key aspect of storying, particularly relevant to my thesis, is that it understands a place as more than just a geographical location. Rather, it is made up of several layers of physical, but also symbolic structures. Therefore, the histories that exist at a certain place contribute to how this place is understood and also how it is storied. A place is both impacted by stories that exist about it and at the same time affects the stories being formed about the place itself (Haraway, 1997). In that sense, a place should be seen as a narrative, stories are continuously being formed and rewritten by both humans and non-humans. When approaching storying a place as such, this thesis can be seen as an attempt to show how both humans and pigeons have storied, and are storying the city of Amsterdam. By looking at the history of their relations, an insight was given on how their shared histories and stories have impacted the city of Amsterdam. During my observations, I applied the concept of ecological storytelling, which describes how non-experts understand relationships between beings and their environment (Pitas, 2022). This was especially relevant when looking at the way in which children engage in forms of play with the pigeons and, therefore actively take part in storying that particular place, together with pigeons. By taking part in these interactions, memories are being made, which in turn contribute to the story of that space. This relating to pigeons by means of play is something that has been happening for a long time, as can be seen in the parallels between the historical pictures used in the newspaper analysis and the ones that I took myself during the observations. The site where I was able to see most clearly how that place was storied, was Dam square. This place kept reappearing in the newspaper analysis, so a lot is known about the shared history between humans and pigeons of this particular place. Additionally, by briefly speaking to The Pigeon Man and seeing what he does, more became known on how he specifically takes part in storying Dam square and does so very much together with the pigeons. As described by Sheppard (1996) animals possess an ability to place events in a meaningful sequence, and by doing so story places. As The Pigeon Man shared, pigeons recognize him and approach him and sit on his shoulders or arms. The pigeons, therefore, clearly recognize him and see his arrival on the square on the as a meaningful event that is followed up by them approaching him. This shows that pigeons' are able to form meaningful connections between such events and in that way co-story Dam square. Research supports this, showing that pigeons

recognize and remember individual humans, particularly regular feeders (Weber, Haag & Durrer, 1994). Seeing, and acknowledging, that pigeons actively take part in storying places, recognizes their agency (Plumwood, 2005).

Reflecting on the concepts of worlding and storying, both offer valuable insights into human-pigeon co-existence. However, how pigeons and/or humans world themselves individually has not been studied in this thesis. Rather, it is the common space of existence that that emerges through their interaction, that turned out to be the main object of this particular study. Still, individual and distinct ways worlding of pigeons is something worth researching in the future, to better understand what a pigeons would need to flourish. Storying proved to be more relevant in this thesis. Storying delves into the common space of existence and wants to see how this storying is being carried out by both humans and non-humans. Combining both the histories that exist on human-pigeon relations and the results from my direct observations of these relations, provides a first step in revealing how Amsterdam is storied as a multispecies endeavour. However, while this thesis offer a first exploration into how the city of Amsterdam is storied by the humans and pigeons, more thorough research is needed to tell the full story. This could entail doing more specific research in to a particular city space and having an even closer and more detailed look at the history of human-pigeon relations through means of, for example, literature, art and policy analysis. Additionally, interviews can be conducted with experts, such as a city-ecologist or those working with the municipality to control pigeon populations to get more insights into exactly why pigeons population are controlled and how they do this. In addition to this, people on the streets could be asked questions on how they experience the presence of pigeons there, both visitors and people who live in Amsterdam. Although I have not chosen to do interviews in this thesis, to perform an exploratory study into how pigeons and humans share and story Amsterdam, in which they both had equal influence, performing interviews with humans can still provide valuable insights into how storying the more-than-human city is a multispecies endeavour.

6.1.3. Cosmopolitics

As I have already thoroughly reflected on how cosmopolitical theory fits with the findings of my thesis, this part will be relatively short. Overall, cosmopolitics offers a valuable framework for moving toward a more non-hierarchical society that allows all beings to flourish equally, while deepening our understanding of specific modes of relating. This thesis has explored how humans and pigeons currently relate to each other. However, the big question remains, how to actually do politics with pigeons?

Looking back, the main conclusion was that society needs a way to speak with the pigeons, instead of speaking of and for pigeons. This in order to address the ethical dilemmas that arise when moving towards these non-hierarchical modes of co-habitation. This poses humans with the question: how to communicate with pigeons in order to move away from traditional, human-centred ways of doing politics? How to exactly move forward in finding such a way of communicating with pigeons, I do not know and I believe that answering this question could be a thesis on its own. However, in making inquiries into how to communicate with pigeons, it is important to look at how pigeons and humans are already communicating with one another. For example, pigeons claim their space, whether humans like this or not. To some extent, they 'own' spaces such as Dam square. This taking up space can be seen as a political act on its own and, therefore, as a way of communicating that pigeons are there to stay. But also, humans must ask themselves, do pigeons even want to communicate with them? As seen in especially the

Vondelpark, pigeons went about their way and did not interfere with humans' business, nor did humans directly interfere in pigeons' business. Do pigeons in situations like these even want to engage with humans to potentially 'improve' their situation? Moving forward, one thing is certain, the process will be messy, uncomfortable, and comes with risks for both humans and pigeons. Yet, in a truly cosmopolitical fashion, this discomfort must be embraced as part of the journey.

Considering cosmopolitical theory in a broad sense, researching human-pigeon co-existence shows that, even within the seemingly mundane everyday interactions in the eyes of humans, political actions can be found. Most people do not think twice about just how much space pigeons are actually taking up on, for example, a biking lane at the Museumplein. However, this claiming space of is a highly political act that often goes unnoticed. Therefore, when researching ways in ways non-humans are already practicing politics, it is necessary to closely look at what is already happening and to not only search for ways on how to do politics with non-humans. For that reason, being curious about these everyday interactions between humans and pigeons in the more-than-human city are an essential part in shaping a cosmopolitical future.

The fact that these political acts from pigeons in everyday interactions often go unnoticed by humans, also shows the epistemic injustice that exists between humans and pigeons (and maybe also other non-humans). While these encounters, such as getting out of the way for a pigeon, might not seem noteworthy to a human, it could mean something entirely different (and a lot more?) to a pigeon. These interactions are mostly analysed through human accounts of a particular experience, rather than taking the pigeons' perspective into account as well. However, as a lot of what is known about feral pigeon ethology is based on how to control their populations, rather than understanding what a feral pigeons wants, needs and could do in the world, humans really know very little about pigeons. And, therefore, humans do not know, how a pigeon might experience and interpret such an encounter with a human. Yet, by acknowledging the political power pigeons hold through, for example, taking up space, a first step can be made to query into how pigeons understand and shape their worlds. Recognizing pigeons as political beings and seeing that they too can assign meaning to a particular event, allows for humans to recognize pigeons agency and take them seriously from a political point of view.

6.1.4. Concluding remarks

Although the three theories I have used, have their distinct ways of doing research of, and with, non-humans, they all have a similar goal of recognizing the agency an animal holds in human-animal relations. Each theory aims to take non-human others seriously and explore how they interact with and shape shared spaces alongside humans. Cosmopolitics emphasize how crucial non-humans are in shaping the shared worlds we all inhabit (Stengers, 2005; Haraway, 2008), this can be linked directly to the common space of existence that is talked about when thinking of how different individuals world. Storying seeks to understand how both humans and non-humans take part in storying these common spaces of existence. In turn, animal geography explains how humans and non-humans occupy and co-shape these spaces and what the relations are between humans and non-humans. By sharing the same goal, but all with distinct methods of researching, all of these theories have, to some extent, proved to be useful in shaping my thesis on human-pigeon co-existence in Amsterdam, which aimed to show how both pigeons and humans take part in co-constituting the more-than-human city.

6.2. How to move forward in researching human-pigeon co-existence?

In the theoretical framework, multispecies studies was described as a field of study that studies the web of entanglement between humans and non-humans (van Dooren, Kirksey & Münster, 2016). This web acknowledges that humans and non-humans are bound continuously evolving bonds, with new bond forming all the time. A central aim in this thesis was to query into what these different ways of relating between pigeons and humans look like. During this process, these bonds turned out to be much more diverse than I could ever have imagined them to be. Beyond being surprised by how warmly pigeons were welcomed in Amsterdam and seeing how they are still protected and cared for by some, it was during my observations that I truly recognized the variety of ways humans and pigeons relate to each other. The secret feeding of pigeons at the Central Station and the way the homeless person seemed to relate to the pigeons on Dam square were the observations that mostly stuck with me. Both these instances show that there is so much more be found out about just how human and pigeons co-inhabit the city of Amsterdam and what specific modes of relating exist. Homeless people can be seen as the marginalized people in a city and, quite often, pigeons are also seen as marginalized inhabitants of the city. Does this marginalization, and maybe also ‘othering’, of both these beings form some type of bond between the two? Furthermore, what mode of relating to pigeons makes people risk receiving fines for feeding them? Does the care for pigeons run so deeply that they are willing to take the risk? These less expected and “hidden” ways of relating to pigeons shows that this thesis is just the tip of the iceberg when researching human-pigeon co-existence and makes it that there is still a lot to discover on how humans and pigeons live together in the city.

6.3. Thesis as ever evolving, both academically and personally

Multispecies studies promote an open, curiosity-driven approach to research, one that embraces unpredictability and welcomes interference. Starting out with my thesis, I wanted to adopt this mindset. While I developed a detailed methodology to guide my research, I remained flexible in how I approached each research question, allowing the findings from one stage to shape the direction of the next.

At the start of my thesis and after doing some preliminary research on how feral pigeons have been studied and what ideas exist on them in human societies, it became quite clear that some humans approach pigeons as being pests. Therefore, I expected to find signs of the pest-frame throughout my thesis, especially when looking at the history of humans and pigeons and current day co-existence. However, I did not expect to encounter it so quickly when I was working on the first research question on the behaviour of feral pigeons in cities. As became apparent, a lot of what has been written on feral pigeons is aimed at designing measures for population control and not on what feral pigeons exactly are. This made it harder than anticipated to find pieces that just described the behaviour of feral pigeons themselves.

In addition to this early encounter with the pest-frame, the article that approached pigeons as beggars had quite an impact on how I further approached my thesis. It wasn't necessarily the study's findings that caught my attention, but rather the terminology of “beggar” that got me questioning. For the remainder of my thesis, this therefore became a theme that I wanted to keep exploring. While this might not have caused changes to my methodology, it did impact how I would eventually analyse my results. This is most apparent in the part on cosmopolitics, where I have expanded further on seeing pigeons as beggars.

Another event that would shape my attitude towards researching human-pigeon co-existence, was the interview I conducted with G.C. Heemskerk. When starting my thesis, I had intended to interview an artist, as art is often seen as a means to break away from human-centred

research methods in multispecies studies. However, when I initially planned the interview early in my thesis process, I wasn't entirely sure what I wanted to ask her. As the date of the interview approached, my struggles with certain aspects of my research became clearer, especially my struggle in navigating the fine line between making inferences about pigeons' lives as a human researcher and unintentionally slipping into anthropomorphism. This concern mostly prevailed itself when thinking on how to approach my observations of human-pigeons interactions. During the interview we talked about this and she told me how she has experienced working with pigeons. I experienced this interview as being extremely valuable in my thesis process. Not only did help me in a practical way when shaping my observation guide, it also made me more confident in continuing to my research and to not worry so much about possibly being too anthropomorphic.

This thesis has not only been an academic journey, but also a personal one. Starting out, I barely knew anything about pigeons. While I did appreciate their presence in the city and believed that they should be cared for in some capacity, I did not really have anything meaningful to say about them. Therefore, going into this thesis, I really had no idea what I would find. This openness allowed me to start my research unbiased, but this also caused it to be a personal journey between me and the pigeons filled with many different discoveries. Over time, I began to see more and more just how crucial pigeons are in shaping live in the city, alongside humans and now I truly see why multispecies scholars urge people to take animals' (pigeons, in this case) agency seriously in co-constituting the city. It was mainly through my observations that I realized that there is so much to be found out about the ways in which humans and pigeons co-exist and just how unexpected this can be. When observing human-pigeon interactions, there was (literally) something new to be seen around every corner. Another thing that surprised me, was that just how much you can see when you sit down for just an hour and look at the world unfolding right in front of you. By looking at humans and/or pigeons, you automatically notice so much more. Although not all might be relevant to what you are directly observing, it still is just as worthy in itself and you remain open to anyone and anything. It is exactly this curiosity driven approach that kept me going while writing this thesis. So next to developing academic skills, this thesis has taught me to always stay curious and it also altered my outlook on the city, especially when considering feral pigeons. It is now more clearer than ever that the city is filled with liveliness and truly is a more-than-human endeavour that continuously presents new things to be curious about.

6.4. Positionality statement and research limitations

Going into this research, I did not know a lot about feral pigeons yet. However, I did enter my thesis process believing that all animals are deserving of rights and care, no less than humans are deserving of that. While I do realise that people can experience nuisance from pigeons and some have genuine concerns for their personal health, my initial position on animal rights might have biased the way that I view these perceived negative effects from pigeons. I tried to limit this as much as I can by realising that co-existence involves all parties, not only those who are very willing to live alongside pigeons, but it also includes those who would rather not have them around. Seeing that in cosmopolitics it is a crucial step to not shy away from the debates that might arise from this divergence in belief on how to live with animals in the city, helped me realise that it also normal to have different opinions. I have tried to not let my personal views on how to co-exist with animals have an effect on this research, by also highlighting ways in which pigeons cause problems for people, such as causing damage to buildings (as became apparent in the newspaper analysis). Looking back on this thesis, my

belief that animals are always to be treated with respect and dignity did not change, however, I have learned that I should remain open to how others might differ from this and should always be open to enter a dialogue to overcome differences when possible.

As human-pigeons co-existence turned out to be much more complex and widespread than I had anticipated, the sources and methods that I have used are not able to cover the whole of human-pigeon co-existence in the city. This is the biggest limitation in this study. Even though I am not sure whether it is even possible to uncover all the ways in which humans and pigeons live alongside each other in the city, the use of a broader range of sources could have aided in providing a more complete overview of co-existence. For example, analysing policy documents and other political processes such as statements from political actors could have helped with finding out more about the public opinion. Moreover, expert interviews could have been conducted to broaden the knowledge on feral pigeons themselves. However, as co-existence is such a complex and big topic to research and this is 'only' a masters thesis, I believe that I have done the best I can to offer an exploration into human-pigeon co-existence in the more-than-human city.

7. Conclusion

In this thesis I set out to uncover the ways in which humans and pigeons co-exist in the city of Amsterdam. I did so using theories that can all be classified under multispecies studies. Drawing on these new approaches in multispecies studies that aim to recognize the agency of animals in studying human-animal relations, this thesis explored ways of taking pigeons seriously in shaping life in Amsterdam. Despite attempts to limit their presence in the city, their existence has prevailed itself as being crucial in shaping the more-than-human city of Amsterdam.

In order to answer the main research questions *How do humans and pigeons co-exist in the city and what insights does this provide for the potentials of more-than-human (cosmo)politics?* multiple sub-research questions were formed to dissect how exactly humans and pigeons co-exist in Amsterdam and how their combined findings shape an answer to the main question.

To start, a literature review examined the behaviour of feral pigeons in cities, revealing that much of the existing knowledge is socially constructed. A lot of what has been written on feral pigeons focusses on ways to best control their population, rather than looking at the ecological and behavioural aspects of the pigeons themselves. Furthermore, during this literature review, it became apparent that feral pigeons are often seen as beggars in the human-built city. This seeing pigeons as beggars ended up being a central theme in analysing the further results of this thesis.

Second, a newspaper analysis of articles that appeared in *Het Parool* from the 1950s to the present day explored how human-pigeon co-existence has evolved. Initially, pigeons were welcomed and cherished as fellow city inhabitants. When the pigeons first arrived in the city around the 1950s human citizens of Amsterdam were happy to see them arrive, having pigeons in their city would mean that the overall image of the city could be as sophisticated as cities such as Paris and Venice. Next to seeing pigeons as a symbol of status, they were often used as a symbol of peace and victory, especially when remembering the second World War which had just ended in the previous decade. As part of welcoming the pigeons, many humans called for the municipality to take care of the newly arrived birds. However, as time went on, more came to see the pigeon as a pest, something that should not be in the human-made city. Their growing numbers meant more perceived nuisance stemming from pigeons and people began developing genuine concerns for their own health. In recent years, however, newspaper articles began to show a genuine interest in pigeons and started to recognize pigeons (again) as an essential part of Amsterdam city life. While the dominant perception on pigeons might have changed over time, throughout the researched period there is one thing that remained constant, the ambiguity that surrounds the feral pigeons. The ideas that exist on them and how they are used as symbols are constantly evolving, showing that ways in which humans and pigeons relate to one another is in this constant state of changing.

After having performed the newspaper analysis which revealed that the ways humans and pigeons have related to each other is dynamic, rather than static, I performed observations at different city spaces in Amsterdam to see what types of interactions occur between them. This was done at, Central Station, Dam Square, het Spui, Museumplein and Vondelpark. It was during these observations that I uncovered that in the present day, the ways in which humans and pigeons interact with each other are still far from fixed, differences occurred per location, but also per person and per pigeon. All these different forms of interaction show that

complexity of modes of co-existence, which can range from seeing pigeons as disgusting, caring for them, befriending them or engaging in some form of play with them.

Lastly, I returned to my findings from the previous research questions to reflect on what insights they provide for more-than-human cosmopolitics. Cosmopolitics aims to move towards a non-hierarchical society, for both humans and non-humans, that is grounded in an ethics of conviviality, while taking seriously the role that non-human others play in shaping city life. Connecting my findings to cosmopolitics was mostly done by looking at different modes of relating and critically re-evaluating the idea that pigeons are beggars, while also examining and attempting to interpret the pigeon's and the human's behaviour to analyse the ways in which they interact, showing that in reality this is much more complex than is often assumed. In order to truly move towards a cosmopolitical future, it is necessary that humans move beyond traditional ways of doing politics and thereby avoid speaking of and for pigeons and find ways to speak with pigeons. It also involves embracing the ethical dilemmas that arise, such as acknowledging the nuisances pigeons create, and accepting that achieving non-hierarchical co-existence is a complex, often uncomfortable process. This way of doing cosmopolitics mostly concerns itself with being curious about, what in the eyes of humans, seem as simple, everyday encounters with pigeons. Examining these interactions and trying to understand how these pigeons might experience this and what (political) message they convey to humans allows for a better understanding of the pigeons. In doing so, humans can gain insights in these encounters through the eyes of pigeons and will hopefully aid in discovering how exactly pigeons world and story themselves.

Concluding, researching human-pigeon co-existence serves as a gateway to uncover the web of entanglement that multispecies studies aims to research. Seeing all the different modes of relating that exist between humans and pigeons, and realising that there probably is much more to uncover than what is presented in this thesis, shows that there is so much more to find out about how all those that live in the city co-exist with one another.

Recent years have shown more appreciation for pigeons and attempts to take them seriously when looking at how they shape city-life have been made, I hope that these developments will continue to take place. Furthermore, employing cosmopolitics to move towards this future can prove to be extremely useful in moving towards a shared world where all beings have the opportunity to flourish. Taking all of this into account, the main message I wish to convey with this thesis, is to stay curious for all that is out there, especially when looking at the many human-animal entanglements that shape our shared world.

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Appendix 1: Notes from the interview with G.C. Heemskerck

1. *Waarom wil je kunst maken mét dieren? En hoe ben je hiermee begonnen?*

Studieachtergrond in de filosofie, altijd al veel bezig geweest met dierenethiek. Sowieso altijd al erg betrokken met het lot van dieren en mens-dierrelaties. Persoonlijke ontologie om voor alle levende wezens te zorgen.

2. *Kan je een korte beschrijving geven van het doel van deze expositie en wat je hebt gedaan in voorbereiding hiervan?*

Bewustzijn creëren over het lot van stadskuiven, er is veel leed door onder andere stringfoots en slecht dieet. Advocating voor een zo duifvriendelijke mogelijke manier van het omgaan met duiven. Besef aanwakkeren dat stadskuiven helemaal geen wilde dieren zijn.

3. *Waarom heb je ervoor gekozen om het met/over duiven te doen?*

Pure noodzaak, het gaat zo slecht met ze dus er moet wel iets voor ze gedaan worden.

1. *Je geeft aan dat je in werk met duiven, ook vanuit de duif wilt kijken. Hoe doe je dat?*

Het is vooral van belang om de dichotomie tussen mens-dier te verwerpen. Net als andere dichotomieën zoals natuur-cultuur et cetera zijn deze gewelddadig en moeten verworpen worden → werk van Derrida.

2. *Heeft dit zich ontwikkelt over tijd?*

Heeft er eigenlijk altijd al wel zo over gedacht, je leert natuurlijk wel steeds meer

3. *Wat zou je, in het kort, mij aanraden in het benaderen van het observeren van duiven en mensen?*

Mensen en duiven zijn niet wezenlijk verschillend, ze nemen deel aan dezelfde samenleving die ze allebei vormen. Mensen en duiven kunnen daarnaast allebei kunst creëren en hebben dezelfde behoeftes. Ze vertonen dus sterke gelijkenissen → mensen en duiven moeten daarom ook niet als zodanig anders worden benaderd in observaties. Net zoals dat je mensen als individu moet benaderen, moet je dat bij duiven ook doen.

De angst voor antropomorfisme kom je eigenlijk nergens mee. Je moet het eigenlijk zien als een vorm van sympathie en oprechte interesse in niet-menselijke anderen (werk van Ullrich).

Appendix 2: Questions from the interview with G.C. Heemskerck

Korte introductie over mijzelf, mijn thesis en het doel van dit interview:

Mijn naam is Joselien en ik ben momenteel bezig met het schrijven van scriptie over mens-duif co-existentie in Amsterdam. Ik kijk naar verschillende vormen van co-existentie die zich hebben voortgedaan in de geschiedenis, om specifiek te zijn vanaf 1950. Daarnaast wil ik gaan kijken naar hoe deze co-existentie er vandaag de dag uitziet en hoe dit eventueel verschilt per plaat in de stad. In een later stadium van mijn thesis wil ik ook kijken naar wat de politieke implicaties zouden zijn als mensen duiven écht serieus zouden nemen.

Het doel van dit interview is vooral om hulp te krijgen met hoe ik het observeren van mens-duif interacties moet benaderen. Ik zit zelf een beetje met de angst met dat ik als menselijke onderzoeker, te veel naar duiven kijk met een menselijke blik en daardoor afdoe aan hoe duiven zélf de interactie ervaren. Aangezien jij je in jouw werk bezighoudt met duiven en ook actief kunst met hen wil creëren, vroeg ik mij af of jij mij hierbij zou kunnen helpen.

Interview vragen:

4. Waarom wil je kunst maken mét dieren? En hoe ben je hiermee begonnen?
5. Kan je een korte beschrijving geven van het doel van deze expositie en wat je hebt gedaan in voorbereiding hiervan?
6. Waarom heb je ervoor gekozen om het met/over duiven te doen?
7. Je geeft aan dat je in werk met duiven, ook vanuit de duif wilt kijken. Hoe doe je dat?
8. Heeft dit zich ontwikkeld over tijd?
9. Wat zou je, in het kort, mij aanraden in het benaderen van het observeren van duiven en mensen?

Appendix 3: Observation guide for observing human-pigeon interaction

OBSERVATION GUIDE HUMAN-PIGEON ENCOUNTERS

Overall impression of the place

- Number of people/pigeons
 - o Overall busy or not?

Pigeons

- What are they doing?

Humans

- What are they doing?

Pigeons + humans

- Is there an interaction?
- If yes:
 - o Proximity between human and pigeon
 - Who decides?
 - o Duration of interaction?
 - o Nature of interaction?
 - Feeding/being fed
 - Taking pictures/pictures getting taken
 - Etc.....
 - o Initiated by pigeon or human?
 - o Do the pigeons or humans seem to be in control of the situation?
- Reaction from humans
 - o Staying or leaving?
 - o If staying, what do they do?
 - Fear?
 - Joy?
 - Etc.....
- Reaction from pigeons
 - o Staying or leaving?

Appendix 4: notes from observations of human-pigeon interactions

Centraal Station (28-01)

Buiten ij-zijde: 12:00-12:45

- zat op bankje en heb ook rondgelopen
- Wel veel mensen
- Slecht weer
- Nog niet echt veel duiven
- Mensen en duiven doen hier echt eigen ding
- Duiven zitten gewoon op dak te chillen ondanks dat hier ook mensen zitten te eten

Binnen: 13:00 - 13:35

- duif gespot maar die waggelt vooral rond op zichzelf
- duif zoekt contact maar mens (met eten) jaagt weg. Duif kwam wel echt heel dichtbij mens voeten. Duif waggelt daarna even langs anderen op bankje maar gaat daarna weer weg zonder weer contact te zoeken
- Twee duiven vliegen hier gewoon rond
- In ijspassage zitten geen duiven ; de centrum ingang ook niet

Buiten centrumzijde: 14:10-15:10

- Duiven lijken mensen hier niet actief op te zoeken
- Mensen schenken ze ook niet echt aandacht, lijken meer gefocust op bagage dragen, de weg vinden, kijken naar gebouw etc
- Zelfde groepje van 3 duiven liep wel 5 minuten achter de schoonmaker aan
- Duiven gaan niet eens bedelen bij mensen naast mij die broodje eten, de mensen schenken ze ook geen aandacht. Pas nadat die mensen weggingen kwamen duiven kijken voor kruimels (binnen 1 min weer weg)
- Aantal duiven is steeds veranderend op specifieke plek
- Duiven komen soms wel even bij mij kijken
- Iemand voerde duiven. Ze stook snel hand in tas, gooide zaadjes op de grond, liep direct weer weg
- Zit dus nu wel een groep duiven maar sommige mensen lopen echt dwars door die groep heen
- Ik snap niet waarom maar 3 minuten daarna schrokken ze ofs en vlogen ze ineens allemaal weg

- Proberen zelfde duif in de gaten te houden maar gaat moeilijk door hoeveelheid mensen vooral
- Duiven en mensen lijken nog steeds niet echt om elkaar te geven
- Viel ergens wat eten op de grond en meteen veel duiven, ze letten dus wel echt op
- Bij trams lijken wat meer duiven te zitten
- Iemand kijkt soms wel eens op als ze zitten te wachten op tram en er loopt een duif voorbij maar verder niks

Op perron: 15:10-15:25

- eigenlijk hetzelfde, mensen en duiven doen allebei hun ding

Museumplein (29-01)

Onder poort bij rijksmuseum: 11:15-11:35

- veel schoolreisjes
- Een duif gespot die mij niet per se aandacht schenkt toen ik op meter afstand ervandaan ging staan, houdt wel 1 meter afstand zelf ook. Eet kruimels. Bleef wel 5 minuten op die plek en daarna kwam ie zelfs weer terug. Na 10 minuten nog steeds hier en er komt er eentje bij. Ik kwam dichterbij maar geen kick vanuit duif. Ze waren nog steeds aan het eten. Duif 2 weg na 5 minuten, duif 1 is nog gaande maar gaat naar de andere kant van de straat. Ik zie nu dat het de verzamelplaats voor scholen is dus waarschijnlijk ligt er ook wel veel te eten nog. Er komt nog een duif en duif 2 is ook weer terug. Ze geven nog steeds geen aandacht aan mensen
- Mensen schenken geen aandacht aan deze ene duif in eerste instantie. Toen kwam er een klas van kinderen van ong 8/9 jaar oud die vonden het wel echt een leuk ding om te zien. Mensen zijn op doortocht door deze tunnel en schenken vooral aandacht aan de architectuur en stress dat ze hun museumkaartje niet kunnen vinden
- Een vrouw kijkt lachend naar de duiven terwijl ze langsloopt
- Een duif vindt stukje brood oid en er komen er meer en eten ze dat middenop fietspad en geven echt geen niks om fietsers, fietsers moeten voor ze aan de kant
- Naderhand blijven ze allemaal beetje rondscharrelen, kijken nog steeds niet op of om voor mensen
- Op wat schoolkinderen na kijken mensen ook niet echt om
- Pas als er een hele drukke groep kinderen verzamelt bij het verzamelpunt gaan de duiven weg, zodra die kinderen wegwaren kwamen de duiven weer terug op dezelfde plek

Middenin plein bij schaatsbaan en eettentjes: 11:40-12:10

- Regen
- Lopen paar duiven rond bij de eettentjes

- Eentje loopt beetje rondjes op terras waar een tafeltje bezet is maar zonder succes, die mensen kijken niet echt. Die mensen zijn weg en duif springt op hun tafel, komt er nog eentje bij
- Er gaan weer nieuwe mensen zitten en twee duiven lopen weer rondjes tot ze een plastic zakje op de grond vinden met kruimels
- Kind rent speels op duiven af, duiven wijken ff maar lijken niet echt onder de indruk
- Er staat groepje jongens te eten, duiven omcirkelen de groep, jongens jagen ze weg, werkt averechts en er komen eigenlijk alleen maar meer duiven en veel meeuwen. Jongens lijken nu te spelen met de duiven, rennen lachend achter ze aan en proberen ze te vangen. Voeren ze nu ook en er komen meer kinderen kijken. Paar meiden beginnen te gillen als ze gaan vliegen en rennen weg. Kinderen lopen weer door maar duiven blijven nog ff hangen
- Toeristen maken foto's van de duiven
- Naarmate er meer mensen op terras zitten. Ook meer duiven, iemand maakt foto van duif die heel dichtbij komt
- Duiven zoeken etensresten op terras
- Kind wil eten gooien maar mag niet van ouders
- Rondom schaatsbaan lijkt ieder zijn eigen weg te gaan

Ingang musea: 12:10-12:35

- mensen zijn hier echt met zichzelf en hun telefoon bezig
- Paar duiven maar ook niet echt wat
- Schenken elkaar ook niet echt aandacht
- Veel mensen komen en gaan

Voor bij grasveld en albert heijn: 13:20- 14:00

- slecht weer dus mensen gaan hier ook niet echt zitten om te lunchen
- Duiven komen hier wel echt op je af
- Duiven komen heel dichtbij twee etende mensen maar ze vinden het wel grappig, op een gegeven moment waren het er wel erg veel dus ze schrokken wel
- Mensen lijken over het algemeen de meeuwen hier enger te vinden dan de duiven
- Een man besloot broodstukje op de grond te gooien en er kwamen heel veel duiven en hij vond het grappig maar zijn gezelschap niet
- Hier is veel meer interactie, duiven dwingen dat ook wel af
- Kinderen op bankje gillen de hele tijd als er vogels lang ze heen vliegen

- Kinderen maken er wel een beetje een spelletje van door ze te voeren, zo veel mogelijk te verzamelen en ze dan weg te jagen zodat ze wegvliegen naar de mensen die het eng vinden
- Dit spelletje trekt ook weer andere kinderen aan
- Mensen die zitten te eten op bankje schoppen duiven echt weg maar ze blijven komen. Die mensen lijken wel echt bangig voor alle vogels en gaan daarna ook maar gewoon ergens anders eten
- Er lopen er ook wel echt veel rond bij ingang supermarkt

Vondelpark (29-01)

14:00-15:30

- Vrij weinig duiven
- Ze doen hier echt hun eigen ding. Net zoals de andere vogels hier beetje in het gras pikken. Komen wel dichterbij dan andere vogels maar lopen ook gewoon weer langs je en gaan verder
- Mensen kijken ook niet echt op of om
- Parende duiven!!! Dus ze hebben nu even geen tijd voor mensen
- Lijkt meer interactie te zijn tussen duiven en honden dan tussen duiven en mensen

De Dam (31-01)

Voor paleis: 12:45-13:30

- echt een hoop gaande hier: protest, vuurspuwer (?), duiven voerder, veel mensen en veel duiven
- Veel lawaai ook
- Friet-etende mensen gooien frietje naar duiven, komen meteen echt veel op af. De mensen vinden het wel een mooi tafereel en blijven voeren
- Lijkt meer competitie te zijn bij duiven onderling als er ergens eten is
- Mensen lijken er ook veel minder van onder de indruk dat de duiven zo dichtbij komen
- Heel veel foto's en toeristen
- Een man die de duiven voert en voer uitdeelt aan anderen
- Minder andere soorten vogels
- Mensen halen vuilniszakken leeg op zoek naar statiegeld en daar komt ook veel afval (potentieel eten voor duiven) bij vrij
- Wederom zijn het vooral kinderen die het heel leuk vinden

- Een kind vindt ze wel eng en moeder schopt de duiven weg terwijl ze frietje eten op de bank
- Een zwerver (?) praat tegen duiven in taal die ik niet ken maar de duiven komen wel allemaal bij hem
- Mensen lopen wel om voor de grote groep duiven
- Nog een protest begonnen op plein tegen organ harvesting ??
- Kind wil voeren maar mag niet van moeder. Kind voert duif maar die zwerver komt zeggen dat het niet goed is voor de duif en hij moet stoppen daarmee dus dat kind moet daarmee stoppen van de moeder en daardoor krijgt dat kind echt een woedeaanval
- Duiven houden wel echt goed in de gaten of er eten valt
- Duiven lijken meer een toeristische attractie ipv het paleis oid
- Die ene zwerver is echt wel beetje agressief in het beschermen van de duiven en lijkt nu ook echt erg gefrustreerd weg te lopen omdat mensen frietjes etc blijven voeren

Kant van monument: 13:30-14:00

- Weer spelende kinderen met duiven
- Wel minder duiven hier
- Iemand laat wat frietjes vallen, heel snel beel duiven maar toen kwamen er 2 grote zeemeeuwen die de duiven verjoegen/bang (?) maakte
- Ineens vliegt die hele groep weg
- Op monument zelf zitten wel paar duiven te chillen
- Weer parende duiven
- Aan deze kant is er vrij weinig interactie over en weer
- Twee jongens proberen aandacht van duif te krijgen en filmen het
- Terras trekt ook niet per se veel duiven
- Grote meeuwen lijken we de overhand te hebben
- Weer flinke pogingen tot paren

Weer langs Dam aan de kant van paleis +/- 17:30

- Die man die duiven aan het voeren was sprak mij aan want hij zag mij kijken en gaf mij ook voer voor duiven
- Ik heb de duiven gevoerd, best leuk
- Kort gesprek met die man; hij staat er echt dag en nacht, herkent bijna alle duiven en geeft ze ook namen, hij vangt ook gewonde/zieke duiven op, voert de duiven zoveel om te zorgen dat ze geen friet oid gaan eten, geeft zelf ook wel aan dat de duiven hier ook gewoon entertainment zijn voor de mensen

Spui (31-01)

15:15-16:15

- eerste oogopslag echt geen duiven
- Er is een marktje met boeken/prenten/etc
- Na 15 minuten komen er twee bij bankje waar mensen zitten te eten
- Vinden al een gevallen frietbakje dus schenken de mensen verder geen aandacht. Vice versa ook niet
- Dat frietbakje trekt later wel wat meer duiven aan
- Duiven gaan hier wel aan de kant voor mensen die op de stoep lopen
- Na half uur echt nog geen benoemenswaardige interactie. Zitten er nu stuk of 5
- Zelfs mensen die gaan eten trekken de aandacht niet van duiven
- Bij de terrassen zitten er ook geen
- Vuilniszakken die iemand meeneemt met statiegeldflesjes trekken wel wat aandacht
- Op marktje ook niks
- Vliegen meer duiven over dan dat ze hier landen op de grond
- Bij viskraam ook niet echt duiven