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PETS AS NONHUMAN ANIMALS, COMPANION SPECIES AND ROBOTS

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to examine the connection between humans and pets, the companion species, whether the pets in question are organic or robotic. Pets are ineluctable members of Western societies, and the relationship between human and nonhuman animals was achieved a long time ago. It is certain that world population growth will create new needs in societies. Coexistence and concern about pets will acquire expenses only wealthier inhabitants of the planet will be able to bear, leaving the poorer layers with two options: either forgo the long-established need for a life shared with a dog or a cat, or reorient to a life shared with non-organic companion species – robotic pets. This is why it is believed that, with the streaming of capital in the not-that-far-away future, the development of artificial intelligence is about to be directed to the mass production of robotic pets.

Keywords: robotic pets, pets, nonhuman animals, dogs, cats, artificial intelligence

Domesticating animals is a part of the evolutionary process. It is hard to find a human in a Western society that has never owned a pet, or achieved any contact with a pet, on a physical and/or emotional level. Firstly, I want to make a distinction between terms like *pets* and *wild* or *exotic pets*. *Exotic pets* include species like monkeys, elephants, foxes, snakes and other kinds of reptiles. Under the term *pets*, I refer mostly to cats and dogs, which have become almost synonymous with the said term. These are the two species most commonly in co-habitation with humans. Other species, like birds, fish, or rabbits, are widespread but not as popular as dogs and cats. There are numerous cynological and felinological societies around the world.

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A veterinarian's occupation is almost as important as that of a doctor of medicine in Western societies in the 21st century. When did pets become so essential for us? To answer this somewhat rhetorical question, we have to look at the beginnings of the domestication of animals.

In the beginning, food was what drew animals to those people who were able to satisfy one of their primal needs – hunger. At first, people didn't bring wild animals into their habitats, but they manipulated habitat surroundings which influenced animals' movements. The domestication of plants and animals began around 11 500 years ago, in direct correlation with changes happening in the Earth's biosphere. Animal domestication started in the Middle East, central China, and the Andes, and after that, it spread all around the world (Larson and Fuller 2014, 116–117). Looking from the perspective of satisfying hunger, a feeling we are all familiar with, it becomes seemingly clear how certain species became friends. Donna Haraway, in her book *When species meet*, states that dogs are the species most similar to humans. Haraway came to that conclusion after watching, studying and living with dogs for many years. At the beginning of her book, in the Acknowledgments section, she thanks both human and nonhuman animals, and the full quote is:

When Species Meet is an acknowledgment of the lively knottings that tie together the world I inhabit, but here I want to name some of the human and nonhuman animals who are especially entwined in the tissues of this book. All those I call my animal people and their companions must come first—the scholars, artists, friends, sports buddies, and scientists whose work is directly shaped by the critters they love and know. (Haraway 2008, VII)

I will stop here for a moment to explain the term nonhuman animals. Haraway uses this term as a kind of transit state from human to nonhuman, i.e., pets, and commonly dogs. On the other hand, she also wrote an essay called *Manifesto for the cyborgs* where she positions the followers of the fluid epoch as entities close to cyborgs who are living on the social margins – so it is clear that Haraway always insists on the deeper meanings of words. The syntagm 'nonhuman animals' in this day and age could refer to all the people that are not in the system because they don't have a clear identity statement. What I mean by 'identity' considers the materialistic part, and that one not completely material part of it – subjectivity. The age of Enlightenment, that still takes place today as it seems, has a paradox within itself that contains simultaneously the process of enlightening and dehumanization in which race, class, gender, and religion, determine the importance of a human being. That modus continues in the age of capitalism, in which the nonhuman animals would be anybody without a passport, ID card, specific skin color, or material wealth. Haraway draws particular attention to the connection between animals that she uses for displaying the similarities between these two species – human and dog. Haraway names the species who influence each other as companion (Haraway 2003, 11), in contrast to different species that affect humans (the ones that most people don't

imagine when hearing the word *animal*), such as bacteria and insects. Since we all co-exist in the same ecosystem, it is logical that we all have an influence on each other as well as on planet Earth. The epoch that we can perceive as man-made is called the Anthropocene. In the last couple of years, the study of the Anthropocene has drawn much attention. As an example, John Hartigan mentions that there were zero abstracts, papers or panels with titles featuring the word “Anthropocene” in the 2013 annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association (AAA). However, in the next year, 2014, there were 64 papers (Hartigan 2014). Hartigan mentions the work of Haraway and her term companion species, but still decides to use the term *multispecies* although it might decentralize the original meaning of ‘Anthropocene’. Bacteria, viruses, parasites, and microorganisms are responsible for the changes on Earth as well as the humans after whom the epoch was named. The disappearance of the Ozone layer, nitrogen and phosphorus circulation disarrays, ocean acidification, chemicals that cause disorders, deforestation, and global warming are all changes in the ecosystem that affect everyone in it. Certain posthuman theorists are questioning and disapproving of the name of the current epoch.

Peter Sloterdijk suggests the term *monogeism* “to describe the appropriate cognitive relationship of human beings to this entity – a term that designates, as it were, the minimum contemporary, non-ignorant relationship to Earth’s pre-eminence. At the same time, it forms the basic axiom for a political ontology of nature” (Sloterdijk 2015, 328–329). Sloterdijk states that the planet will be able to endure all the changes, but that those changes will cause certain consequences. Man was affected by them; man is affected by them; man affects them; and whether it will come to the Apocalypse, as Sloterdijk writes, remains to be seen in the future. As we can see, the name of the epoch is not entirely suitable, because in its first perception it excludes the ambiguity of the species and the relationships made before man came into the picture. Likewise, Haraway deems that the term Capitalocene should also be taken into account (Haraway 2015, 259). The ecological changes in question are inherited from capitalism, which requires cheap labor forces, food, natural resources, and energy.

Furthermore, Haraway states that next to the Anthropocene/Capitalocene the term Chthulucene should be considered since it carries endless stories of human and nonhuman lives and it doesn’t forget Science Fiction. The name itself comes from the spider Cthulhu from H. P. Lovecraft’s monster deity which petrified men. “I want this spider renamed, instead, for “chthonic” ones, a litter of the tentacular dreadful without gender. *Pimonachthulhu*, not *Pimonacthulhu*” (Haraway 2015, 267). The current epoch, which the term ‘Anthropocene’ excludes, is precisely the epoch of the Chthulucene or *Chthulucene*. It is an era that is post-gender and deals with speculative fabulation, speculative feminism, scientific fact, and string figures (Haraway 2015, 269).

There is a certain divide between scientists concerning the beginning of the epoch and not just its name. The name Anthropocene suggests that the human species is

the catalyst for the occurring changes on Earth. Some researchers believe that it started with the agricultural revolution; others think it started with the industrial revolution and capitalism (Tønnessen vii–xix, 2016). The pervasion of the organic and the nonorganic, as the relationship between them, takes place in the first and the second case of the epoch's beginning, and this pervasion still occurs today. When Haraway decides to take on the term 'nonhumans' she implies, but also questions whether or not dogs are nonhuman animals, and to what extent.

In the history of domestication, in the relation of man and what the term nonhuman represents, dogs were domesticated first, more than 30 000 years ago, while it is believed that cats were domesticated a bit over 10 000 years ago. Greger Larson and Dorian Q. Fuller collected the data of researchers and drew territorial lines of animals' movement – Commensal Pathway Taxa, Prey Pathway Taxa and Directed Pathway Taxa (Larson and Fuller 2014, 122–127). There are several factors which influenced movement, thus influencing the domestication of animals. Namely, people began using animal products such as meat, milk, and leather, and transported those species that were useful to them. It cannot be claimed with certainty at what point human and nonhuman animals started to coexist almost like family members. Here, I would like to recall again the very end of the Acknowledgements from *When species meet* by Donna Haraway: “How can I acknowledge Cayenne and Roland, the dogs of my heart? This book is for them, even if they might prefer a scratch-and-sniff version, one without endnotes.” (Haraway 2008, X) In *The Companion Species Manifesto* Haraway states that the term companion implies two beings, in syntax and bodily sense. It reminds us that dogs are a part of the stories and folklore of the contemporary as well as the ancient world, and that they were always by man's side as the first domesticated species.

Dogs and cats today have our attention, our time, dedication, and love. We buy special food for our pets; take them to specialized treatments, to kennels, spas, and operational procedures. Cats and dogs are not just pets; if you ask any human animal who lives with pets, you'll get an answer that suggests they mean much more than that. What is *more*? Is the love we sense towards dogs and cats similar to the one we feel towards humans? The human is sometimes blamed for giving too much attention to nonhuman things, even by other people who also live with pets. That is why for these people – and especially women who are single and do not have children – there are terms such as old maid or spinster, which goes hand in hand with the name crazy cat lady (lately, there are more men who are breaking the stereotypes by calling themselves “crazy cat man”). People take care of a dog like they would a family member. When the dog is sick, when it gets cancer, they take it to chemotherapy and hope for a cure. That is how dogs, besides being family members, become patients also. Modern pets get vaccines, get cleansed of parasites and flea, and have their own passports to smoothly travel the world with their human animals. The term nonhuman animal, as I've already mentioned, in the contemporary networked world, can also be used to refer to those who are not people and to those who are

robots, but also to those who do not have legal documents, thus not being part of the system. It seems that, in the countries of so-called developed capitalism, pets enjoy a better position, because they are involved in the monitoring system. Dogs and cats are part of biopolitics; they go through many regulations and interventions that control their biological processes.

Dogs and cats are laborers. Cats have hunted mice and small pests and protected man's property since ancient times. Dogs guard sheep, work in rescue forces, police and military, help blind and visually impaired people (Haraway 2008, 45–67). They have salary – shelter and food – both measured by owners' affluence. Wealthier pet owners can afford better care, more adequate treatments, and better quality foods, and can completely forget the former work-like functions of their pets. Likewise, they are “adapted partners in the naturecultures of lively capital” (Haraway 2008, 62). Lastly, next to the numerous veterinarian stations and pet shops, there are pet cemeteries. It all brings profit, just like with people. Birth, life, illness, death. Class differences are evident even in this collision of relationships because wealthier people more often choose to buy a specific breed of dog or cat. The ones with limited resources, however, tend to adopt “common” dogs and cats, strays. There are many animal shelters dependent on donations and state subventions, in which volunteers are usually employed and the animals don't bring any profit.

On the other hand, there are numerous breeders, who support themselves through their business, people who get back the money they invested when certain breeds are sold. Pedigree cats and dogs are packaged into the best possible capitalist product. This product can, and indeed must, be refined with organic and nonorganic substances. Given the fact that the gap between organic and nonorganic is bridged every day, and that the number of cyborgs among people is on the rise, it becomes evident that the model is being applied to other companion species as well. Prosthetics are being put on dogs and cats when they lose limbs as a consequence of illness or trauma. As is the case with people, pets can also use insulin pumps. Artificial intelligence is already changing lives of human and nonhuman forms. It is predicted that in the future AI will provide extension of life longevity for humans as well as their pets. Dogs and cats can also be cyborgs and move between the natural and synthetic. Nevertheless, they are created through biological reproduction, a natural process. Some animals, such as cows – which humans have gained many benefits from – are not always created ‘naturally’. Artificial insemination of cows and horses is very widespread. The birth of the future pet is also manipulated through intentional pairing, in order to produce a new species or preserve the pedigree.

The life of Dolly the sheep represents the continuation of biology through technology. Dolly the sheep, the first cloned mammal in history, was created on June 5, 1996, and she lived until 2003. Her birth, as seen by theoretician Sarah Franklin, introduces new rules – “just as capital is changing, so the new biology does not guarantee the same syntax it used to guarantee for other domains: what does it mean when genealogy can be remade through technique? What happens when the means

of reproduction themselves can be owned under a patent? What is Dolly's proper gender, or sex, if instead of being born she was made?" (Franklin 2003, 103). It should be emphasized that Dolly was formed from the cell of a female sheep and that she has identical DNA to the sheep she was created from. Likewise, the process of reproduction is not ensured by nature, but by technology. She was created in Scotland, in the Roslin Institute. This kind of creation is a kind of branding, a patenting of the new product: "the brands and trademarks connecting products to their parent company stand in for shared substance, forming the basis of kin-relatedness as a familiar form of propriety-by-descent" (Franklin 2003, 104). From that position, the creation of Dolly reminds us of the process of creating any nonorganic product. Dolly was not a cyborg, and she wasn't a robot – Dolly was a seemingly regular sheep that was designed. *Born created*. Born as a sheep with predetermined sex and gender, she set new challenges for scientists in the advancement of stem cell preservation. Animal rights activists believe that this way of creating new animals is harmful to them, as well as the surrogate mother. Playing the role of 'Creator' is an issue even when a breeder intentionally crosses breeds in order to produce a unique kind of an animal.

One of the most unique breeds of nonhuman animals, created by the human hand, is the breed of *robotic pets*. They are made to have as vivid a resemblance as possible to organic pets in terms of their looks and behavior. They are not masculine or feminine, and they have another type of identity which is outside of the gender binary divide. Like the gender-free cyborg imagined by Donna Haraway in 1985, which leaves behind heteronormative frames. The main feature of cyborgs is their fluidity and their mobility among humans, animals, machines, the organic, and the nonorganic. The cyborg is a creature of social reality and a creature of fiction (Haravej, 2002, 309). The cyborg moves the boundaries between organic and nonorganic and opens the way towards the posthuman. The posthuman is a human being, and the cyborg is an organism with both biological and technological constituents. Gender, age, and race are not of importance to robotic pets. What is important is that they remind one of something that was organic, and that can at the same time be read as a myth of their creation.

The relationship between humans and pets is fortified, and people tend to demonstrate tendencies towards living with pets more often. We are bound with pets through our emotions which awaken a sense of pleasantness, a secretion of the hormone of happiness which is ever so needed today. With the increase of working hours and the turmoils of capital, I would like to stop for a moment to illustrate one example. Let us imagine a person who gets up early, leaves for work and comes home after 10 or 12 hours spent there. That person doesn't have time for socializing, relationships, or long holidays, because they already spend enough time working. As they do not want, do not think about, or, lastly, don't even have time to consider "creating a family", such a person may choose a life with a pet. The labor market is cruel, capitalism is a tough survival sport, and many people may not even feel able

to sustain relationships with other companion species. For those who have even longer working hours, pets such as dogs and cats represent an even more distant option than, for example, fish. Still, cats give additional benefits. They are more independent than dogs, they do not require walks, and satisfy their needs in the house. Here I exclude longhaired and sphynx cats, which demand a little bit more attention regarding hygiene maintenance. A dog, “man’s best friend”, as it is called, relies on humans more, and therefore I believe that soon it will also be exclusive to persons who spend less than 12 hours at work a day. In that framework, a person who spends that much time working will not have too many options regarding having a pet. The choice will be narrowed from dogs and cats to goldfish and small reptiles. Furthermore, a person can choose either a life without pets, or maybe a life with some robotic pets. Technology advances in order to satisfy man’s needs; now we have robotic pets on the market to help our organic dogs feel comfortable when we’re not around. The creators represent it as “MIA the robot that plays with your pet”: “MIA will reduce your pet’s anxiety level, while increasing its level of exercise, and making its day more fun! MIA is even equipped with a dry-food dispenser! Your best friend will no longer spend all day on the couch waiting for you to come back home.” (Kolony Robotic 2017)

World population growth will bring about changes and create new needs in a society viewed through the prism of capital. Wealthier people will not only buy special kinds of pets – I assume they will also, be able to choose the exact pet they want in the near future. It is not certain that the poorer layers of society will be able to afford organic pets. Of course, even today there are wealthy people who do not buy special breeds of dogs and cats. They adopt. But in time to come, there will be people who would rather buy robots. That motivation stems from a certain awareness of problems of class inequality, but I’m not utterly optimistic that it will come to represent a more significant percentage of attitudes.

Robot pets are already our reality. Scientist Jean-Loup Rault says that pets are pretty usual in Western cultures, but that they are only beginning to gain popularity in Asian cultures: “it is difficult to imagine how more than half of the 9.6 billion people of 2050 could still keep pets. Efforts to develop cities designed to be green and pet-friendly are ongoing. However, a more realistic future is that pets may become a luxury possession for people who can afford to sustain their cost and fulfill their needs in terms of space, social, and mental needs according to possibly higher ethical standards raised by future societies” (Rault 2015). The advantages of robotic pets include the fact that they do not require attention and, as is already accentuated in the epoch of the streaming of capital – they are cheaper. Likewise, these pets are hypoallergenic and recommended for people who have reactions to animal hair.

Toys can be viewed as the first robotic pets. Almost 20 years ago, the toy Tamagotchi was popular. It was made in Japan, and children around the globe had it. Designed as a handheld digital pet, this device had three buttons that managed, respectfully, feeding, playing and cleaning. Tamagotchi went through several phases

of growing up, just like any organic pet. This toy was used to teach children how to be responsible and empathic, and how to love. It was different from a regular stuffed bear or battery doll because it craved attention. If its needs weren't satisfied, it would die, but with the vast difference that it could live again just by reactivating the device.

The next, significantly larger, robotic pet was AIBO dog. A group of scientists researched children's reactions to AIBO dog, which was created by SONY in 1998. They questioned three areas – biological, mental, and social – which were viewed in the interaction of humans and companion animals. They concluded that children treat AIBO dog the same way they would handle any live dog. Moreover, when they were asked about deficiencies, they would answer that the dog needed more hair so it could be softer and more “lifelike.” Grown-ups were a bit more aware that the AIBO dog was a robot, but they too enjoyed its company (Melson 2009).

Somewhat more tangible and similar to organic pets with hair, robotic pets were also made to give older people a sense of connection and closeness. Besides the fact that they emulated pets, robotic pets also imitated the link that has been achieved between people and pets, that is, humans and nonhumans. This feeling which nonorganic pets “introduce” strongly manipulates people. In 2003 in Japan, at the Intelligent System Research Institute (AIST) the PARO seal was created for animal-assisted therapy, with a goal to help older people who have dementia. The seal is soft and white; its legs and head move, and it makes sounds like a real seal. Across the Internet, videos of elders petting PARO can be found. This robotic seal is intended to help older people in nursing homes. As it says on the company's website, “[b]y interaction with people, PARO responds as if it is alive, moving its head and legs, making sounds, and showing your preferred behavior.” (PAROrobots 2014) The price of this therapeutic seal is perhaps the weakest link in the reception of PARO.¹ On another continent, the United States, Hasbro,² one of the world's largest toy manufacturers, created robotic pets – cats and dogs. Hasbro was working with Brown University, and together they created Joy for All. It is interesting that Joy for All, robotic cats and dogs, have another name – companion pets. Their basic purpose is, as is the case with the tender white seal, to act as company and provide comfort for older people and those with dementia. Even today across numerous kennels there is a rule that cats and dogs mustn't be given to older people who could not take care of them properly. For pets who run on batteries, however, age is not a category which could prevent a person from signing a contract regarding pet ownership. I visited the Joy for All webpage once again to buy a cat and found information that left me pleasantly surprised. The cat that does not age and does not require food or litter cleaning is very affordable.³ It also “feels and sounds like real cats. But they're so much more than soft fur, soothing purrs and pleasant meows”

1 The pricing currently varies between 4 000 pounds and 5 000 dollars.

2 Hasbro are also known for their Furby, a hamster or owl-like creature, in short, a gremlin. Furby was banned during one period in Maryland, because it was able to record, thus presenting a threat to national security (BBC 1999).

3 At the time of writing this paper, the robotic cat was priced at only 99,99\$.

(Joy for All 2018). Hasbro invites us to recall our previous experiences and promises us a feeling identical to the one experienced in the company of an organic cat. The company slogan is *no vet bills, just love*. Haraway surely cannot use this kind of motto for her nonhuman animals.

There is no illness, no sterilization, chipping, vaccination, bathing, combing, or feeding. It is enough to get a charger and a few batteries, and the pet is alive – safe and sound. The only fear, as with all other machines, is the possible breakage that could lead to complete shutdown, or, so to speak, the end of the robotic pet's life. The question which is imposed is: whether and to what extent can we bond with something that isn't organic, and how would its death affect us? Let's recall the lives of a boy and a toy bear from Spielberg's movie *Artificial Intelligence* (2001), and the moment in which the robotic bear says to the robotic boy "I am not a toy." That same bear that speaks in the movie can now be ordered from Amazon. Today there are dozens of different kinds of robotic pets on the market, and that number is set to grow daily.

As we can see, the borders between organic and nonorganic are blurred more and more every day, and soon more robots will resemble humans. When mentioning the robotic species, we always have a parallel fear of them taking over the world; fear that machines will rule one day and that AI life forms will achieve supremacy over the organic. Robotic and nonhuman animals have their similarities and differences, but it remains to wait and see who will eventually take the lead in creating the new interrelationships between all these companion species.

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Pets as nonhuman animals, companion species and robots (Summary)

Pets are a part of everyday life in Western culture. This paper maps out already established relationship between humans and pets using a sort of pluralistic approach. It deals with the theme of domestication of animals by looking at its beginnings. I rely on works of Dona Haraway and merge the terms she suggests (like nonhuman and human animals, companion species, cyborgs), in order to question in to what extent they intertwine. The terms are important because of the very designation of pets as nonhuman animals, by which Dona Haraway primarily means dogs. Likewise, I look into the epoch of anthropocene and the authors who deal with this question. Here, I single out several different names with which today's epoch is described, and which do not exclude the life we do not classify under that term, like viruses and bacteria, responsible for many changes to date.

It is certain that world population growth will create new needs in societies. Coexistence and concern about pets will acquire expenses only wealthier inhabitants of the planet will be able to bear, leaving the poorer layers with two options: either forgo the long-established need for a life shared with a dog or a cat, or reorient to a life shared with non-organic companion species – robotic pets. This is why it is believed that, with the streaming of capital in the not-that-far-away future, the development of artificial intelligence is about to be directed to the mass production of robotic pets.

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Scientific polemics