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Review

Companions, Captives, Kin: Domination and Affection in the Conceptualising of 'Pets'

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Abstract: This review article reflects on the idea of the pet, or animal companion. It is a response to the tension between the important role animal companions play in the lives of many people and the ways they are ill-treated and discarded. In examining this apparent anomaly, the paper revisits Yi-Fu Tuan's conception of pets as produced through the nexus of domination and affection. For Tuan, there is no anomaly in demonstrating both kindness and cruelty towards pets because, while pets may be objects of affection, they are created through practices of manipulation and control. The paper endorses Tuan's conception of pets as an exercise in domination but argues for a more nuanced conception which allows for the possibility of different kinds of relations. In so doing, it provides an alternative model of human domination which can be seen in the 'making' of pets, drawing on a study of people's relationships and lives with dog companions in the UK. The paper argues for an inclusive concept of pets, involving various species, and which recognises that pet–human relations differ according to the species which are kept. Ultimately, the paper suggests that the terms, concepts and theories we use to understand pets and human relations with them needs to be open to the diversity of species of animal kept and the ways in which this impacts human relations with them. Attention also needs to be paid to the varied kinds of relationship people have with pets based on different kinds of regard for animals. The paper also considers future directions for research, making the case for a critical approach to pet studies.

Keywords: animal companions; anthroparchy; dogs; pets; relational approach; species; Tuan

Citation: Cudworth, E. Companions, Captives, Kin: Domination and Affection in the Conceptualising of 'Pets'. *Pets* **2024**, *1*, 182–200. https://doi.org/10.3390/pets1020014

Academic Editor: Jan S. Suchodolski

Received: 10 July 2024
Revised: 23 August 2024
Accepted: 31 August 2024
Published: 5 September 2024

1. Introduction

Animals in the home kept as companions or 'pets' differ historically and geographically in terms of the species kept and kinds of relations humans have with them. In the West, and elsewhere, countries such as China, for example, these relationships have altered with economic and social change and with modernisation. The general trend indicates that the keeping of animals as pets is increasingly popular and human relations with pets are some of the closest and most humanised across species boundaries [1] (pp. 144–147). As we will see, there are geographical differences in the relative popularity of certain species kept as pets, but cats and dogs are overwhelmingly the most popular animals, and this is a global phenomenon. This paper asks how pets might best be conceptualised and, as a result, whether the term itself is problematic.

The paper takes up sociologist David Blouin's question of the tension between the closeness of relations many people have with pets and the evidence of high levels of abandonment, cruelty and abuse of those animals kept as pets [2] (pp. 856–887). An early contribution to thinking about 'pets' is provided by the geographer Yi Fu Tuan [3], who would regard Blouin's concern as misplaced. For Tuan, what is key to the idea of the pet is that is its produced through the intersection of 'dominance' and 'affection'. This means that cruelty and abuse is part of the process through which animals are made into pets, and an element of their treatment. The harsher aspects of the domination of animals as pets is not separate from kindly or affectionate treatment, but rather domination and affection should be seen as working in tandem.

The word 'pet' is a standard term for animals living with humans in their homes or on their land, in English-speaking countries. A perusal of various dictionary definitions indicates that the origin of the word itself may be from Gaelic (peata, for tame animal or spoilt child), French (petite, for small) or English (petty, for trivial). The noun 'pet' is also reserved for humans (a term of endearment, especially for children) [4], and for favoured things (a 'pet project'). The range of dictionary definitions, therefore, are far wider than the usual understanding in English of an animal companion. As we will see, they are closer to Tuan's understanding of pets, which in addition to animals, might be people (children, women, slaves, entertainers) or things (plants, fountains) or projects (a garden) [3]. Pet is the standard terminology of commercial ventures providing services (such as walking, 'sitting' when 'owners' are absent, grooming, training, transport and veterinary care) and goods (such as equipment, food products, toys), and features heavily in advertising for such goods and services. Henceforth, the paper avoids use of parentheses for the term owners, but it is important to acknowledge that this is a problematic term. Legally, pets are considered property, and thus the term owner is accurate. However, this term also illustrates the power dynamics of the human–pet relation, which will be a recurring theme across the paper.

The overwhelming bulk of research undertaken into people's relations with pets comes from Western countries, particularly the US, and focuses on the most popular pets—dogs and cats. As a review paper, this article reflects the bias of the publications and their pre-occupations, one of which is a likely result of the association of pet-keeping with social change in Western societies [1] (pp. 144–147). It is important to acknowledge the range of animal species kept as human companions however, because species difference can impact on the lives of the animals which are kept and the relationships which humans have with them.

This paper proceeds over four sections. First, it examines what kinds of animals might be kept as pets, and what the idea of a pet means for different species of animal. The purpose of this section is to map the range of animals kept as pets, and to indicate that species differences means that not all animals kept as pets are kept in the same ways, for different species have different kinds of relations with humans. It also considers the various kinds of social relationships people have with pets and how these might be categorised. This opening section paints a picture of diversity in species and relationships, suggesting that a nuanced approach to theorising human–pet relations is necessary. Second, the paper turns to how the practice of keeping pets and the relationships between people and pets can be understood in terms of the nexus between domination and affection by looking at Tuan's formulation. It will be argued that, while Tuan's understanding of pet-keeping as always involving both domination and affection is important, there is a need to differentiate relationships between the kinds of animals kept, and the range of human treatment of those animals. In addressing this, third, the paper offers my own perspective on how we might theorise the role and idea of a 'pet'. This draws on a study of people's relationships and lives with dog companions in the UK, suggesting a more nuanced model of the domination involved in keeping pets. Finally, the paper considers future directions for research on pets and makes the case for a critical approach to pet studies where the quality of the lives of animals takes centre stage.

2. What Does It Mean for an Animal to Be a 'Pet'?

The majority of the animals kept as companions or 'pets' are domesticated [4]. In the cases of agricultural animals and dogs, the route to domesticating animals would be what Darwin referred to as 'unnatural selection'—that is, through breeding involving human intervention [5]. However, this is not the case for cats, whose evolutionary trajectory is overwhelmingly one of free breeding (natural selection, for Darwin) [6,7]. Certainly, there are different and competing narratives on animal domestication [8]. This distinction between human intervention and the lack of it in the breeding of animals kept as pets suggests that different levels of human manipulation of animal species is involved. As we

will see below, the keeping of non-domesticated (wild or feral) animals as pets, suggests different kinds of possible relationships. The focus of this section is not on how animals became pets, but which animals are kept as companions. In the literature on pets, whether from the natural or human sciences, there is a focus primarily on dogs and cats, the most popular pets, followed by attention to other common pets, such as rabbits. This section suggests, however, that a wider range of creatures are seen as pets and should be acknowledged as such. Following an outline of the range of creatures kept by humans as pets, this section discusses the different kinds of relationships which exist between humans and pets, and how such relations are altered by the specific species which are kept.

2.1. Which Creatures Are Kept as Pets?

The keeping of animals as pets is a social and cultural phenomenon, but also a practice in which dominant and changing ideas about the legitimacy of pet ownership are often codified in law. In the UK, almost any animal may be kept as a pet unless the species or type of animal is on a banned list. This is known as a 'negative list' system, as opposed to a 'positive list' that specifies which animals may be kept as pets. Dogs are globally the most common companion animal, but not all dogs may be kept as pets in some countries as a result of legal restrictions. The UK, for example, has introduced bans on the keeping of certain dogs considered to be a potential threat and inappropriate as an animal companion. The Dangerous Dogs Act of 1991 legitimates the killing of certain 'types' of banned dogs—American pit bull terriers and three kinds of mixed mastiff breeds [9]. Particularly concerning is that dogs are assessed by non-specialists and solely by appearance rather than behaviour, the latter being something one would think should be of greater concern in terms of danger to the public. Therefore, as the UK Government website states: "Whether your dog is a banned type depends on what it looks like, rather than its breed or name" [10]. If judged to have "sufficient breed characteristics", dogs of these types must be destroyed [11] (p. 11), unless they are on the Index of Exempted Dogs and follow strict conditions, such as wearing a muzzle in public places [12]. While the legislation has done nothing to reverse an apparent trend in attacks on humans by dogs in the UK [13], it has resulted in the seizure, incarceration and killing of large numbers of dogs [14]. This has led to UK animal welfare charities, such as the RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) and The Dogs Trust, to campaign for the amendment or repeal of 'dangerous dog' legislation and a change in the perception of breeds perceived as 'dangerous' [14]. Changes to the legislation added another kind of dog to the list in 2024, so that it is now a criminal offence to own or possess an XL bully dog unless the animal has a Certificate of Exemption. As XL bullies are crossbreeds, the UK Government has created its own specifications for the breed, which includes the size of their head and muzzle, their build, and the height and length of their body [15]. The lack of certainty around defining this banned dog and the haste with which the ban was introduced has caused distress for owners and difficulties for the police, veterinarians and dog rescue organisations [16,17]. Such changes in UK law, with certain kinds of dogs transitioning from being tolerated as an animal companion to being codified as 'dangerous', is an illustration of the precarious status of pets in societies where perceptions of human interest, rather than animal welfare, predominate. This will be considered in the discussion of human domination, later in the paper.

Given that this banned list is of common pets, such as dogs, it is surprising to note that, in 2021, a survey of dangerous animal private licencing in Great Britain revealed approximately 4000 'dangerous' animals kept as pets. These creatures included lions, tigers, leopards, pumas and other wild cats, primates (particularly lemurs), venomous snakes and lizards, crocodilians, wolves and elephants [18]. Licensing is based on the estimation of risk to the human public, and the law is concerned with preventing animals escaping and with restricting their movement [18]. Significant issues of animal welfare are raised, however, with the keeping of such animals as pets by private owners. As we will see, the pettification of wild and perhaps 'dangerous' animals would not surprise Tuan. For him, anything (a

human being, an animal, a plant, an inanimate object) can become a pet; what is important is the kinds of social relationship through which pets are produced and the idea that, in keeping pets, owners are demonstrating their power to shape, possess and objectify [3]. If keeping pets is a means of demonstrating power, then possessing a 'dangerous' formerly wild or captive bred animal as a pet might be attractive for those with the status and wealth that might enable them to do this.

Very few of the 'dangerous' animals described as pets above are kept as such compared to the numbers of animal species conventionally kept as companions. In the UK for example, it is estimated that 62% of households have pets [19]. This is associated with significant levels of household expenditure. In 2018, across Europe, annual sales of 'pet food' was 21 billion Euros, with pet-related products and services accounting for a further 18.5 billion [20] (p. 5). The numbers of animals kept, and the different species which are kept, have bearing on the kinds of relationships possible with pets. They also suggest the possibility of different kinds of relationships with creature of the same species.

Cats and dogs have been described as "prototypic exemplars" of animals kept as companions [21] (p. 270) and are the most popular both in the UK and internationally. The dog is globally most popular, with 12.5 million dogs in 33% of UK households [22,23]. Figures for dog ownership are higher in some European countries (Poland 43%, Portugal 39%, Romania 45%) and the Americas (Argentina 66%, Brazil 44%) [24,25]. Across Europe, there are an estimated 93 million dogs kept as companions [26] (p. 4). Second most popular globally is the domestic cat, of which 370 million are estimated to be pets [27], with a larger population of 480 million free roaming [28]. Cats and feral dogs in some countries (Australia, India, for example) can function highly effectively living without human support, being significant predators negatively affecting wild populations of some birds, small mammals and, in the case of dogs, animals kept as 'livestock' [29].

Kept as pets, but often ignored in the literature or underestimated in population, are fishes. There are very large populations of ornamental fishes kept, for example, in Australia (estimated 33.9 million), the UK (estimated 40–50 million) and in the US (estimated 151.1 million) [30], with the ornamental aquaculture industry in the US alone estimated at 20 billion USD [31]. There are an estimated 60 million horses, including wild and domesticated populations [32], and 50 million donkeys, most of the latter being working animals in Asia, Africa and South America [33]. While horses are predominantly kept as companion and leisure animals in countries such as the UK, the keeping of donkeys as pets is relatively rare and their population is in decline [34]. In the decreasing hierarchy of popularity, other small mammals are routinely kept as pets [34]. There are an estimated 14 million pet rabbits globally [35], and these are more popular in the UK (a population of an estimated 8,000,000 [36]), than guinea pigs and hamsters [34]. The different behaviours and needs of these species, and the ways in which they live (for example, in some cases outside of the home) will be addressed later in the paper (with respect to horses) in relation to how possible relations with prey animals differ to those with predators, such as dogs and cats.

Snakes, lizards, turtles and other reptiles and a range of birds, including agricultural animals (such as chickens, ducks and geese) or wild-captured or bred 'exotics' (such as members of the parrot family) are kept as pets in the UK. Other 'exotics' include non-native species, such as llamas and alpacas, and other animals mainly used in agriculture for food, fur and labour (such as pigs, sheep and donkeys) are also kept as pets, along with insects, such as spiders and Indian stick insects [37]. In countries such as New Zealand, some wild animals which are not indigenous are considered imports of colonialism and to be 'invasive' and defined as 'pests', subjected to officially endorsed trapping and poisoning [38]. These include animals commonly kept as pets in other countries (ferrets and rats) and others, such as possums, demonised as "one of the greatest threats" to the "natural environment" according to New Zealand's Department of Conservation [38].

In sum, there is a range of different species kept as pets and their popularity varies geographically. This raises questions about the conditions in which some animals might

be kept (the caging of rabbits or guinea pigs, for example), and whether their species-specific natural behaviour and other needs (diet, for example) can be accommodated. The latter is a particular concern in the keeping of 'exotic' creatures as pets. Akin to the keeping of 'dangerous' exotic animals, such as tigers, the issue of demonstrating power and control through ownership of such creatures presents itself. The keeping of an apparently tame "ferocious" animal, according to Tuan, is the "most vainglorious" of elite human aspirations [3] (p. 85). Certainly, there are different ways in which the same species are kept by humans, which differ cross-culturally and have changed over time, and these are also shaped by the values and beliefs of individual human households.

2.2. What Does It Mean to Be a Pet?

The meaning of 'pets' and the practice of pet keeping is culturally and socially constituted. Sociologists and historians have seen the development of pet keeping from the late 18th century as associated with social and economic modernisation in the West, particularly the spread of humanitarian ideas and practices, such as ideas about animal rights and welfare [39], and the advance of urbanisation and expansion of the middle classes [40]. Latterly, a rise in pet keeping has been associated with ontological insecurity in postmodern and 'risk' societies [41]. This conception of historical change and cultural difference, as we will later see, does not feature in Tuan's account, which links the keeping of people and animals as pets in Imperial Rome, Imperial Russia and contemporary China, for example [3]. Unlike Tuan, historian Keith Thomas provides a relational definition of the pet, asserting that there are three criteria that differentiate relations with pets from those with other animals: that pets share human homes, are given names, and that the individual animals kept as pets are not eaten [4,42]. Yet this is a narrow definition, which does not accommodate all the kinds of animals which are understood to be pets.

Some animals kept as pets are not kept within the home—certainly larger animals and those historically used in agriculture or other labour, such as sheep, horses and chickens, may be kept in a sperate dwelling to humans and away from the site of home. Some of the animals kept in larger numbers (birds, such as doves) or which are elusive (fishes) may not be named individuals. Many of the species of animals kept as pets are also animals which are eaten—fishes, rabbits and horses, for example. Certain Asian cultures are associated with the eating of dog meat, and 30 million dogs, some of which are abandoned pets, are killed across Asia for meat each year [43]. In China, however, most people have never eaten dog meat and, since the turn of the 21st century, Chinese authorities regionally and centrally are increasingly arguing for the eating of dogs to be a banned practice [44]. In pressurising countries such as China to implement bans, Western nations have sought to close 'loopholes' in their animal welfare legislation, which permit the eating of pet dogs and cats. This was undertaken by the US in 2018, following the lead of countries such as Austria, Germany and Hong Kong, while only being first debated in the UK in 2019 [45] (p. 3). What it means for an animal to be a pet is therefore shaped by historical, geographical and cultural location and the way such location impacts on law and established practices.

The meaning of 'pets' also differs according to the species kept, and the kind of relationality which this affords. Dogs and cats kept as companions are usually kept in homes and are 'owned', with owners often having a legal duty of (minimal) care. In the UK, both dogs and cats must legally be micro-chipped for identification purposes and dogs can be reported and/or taken to the pound if found wandering without an owner in a public space [46]. Cats are rather different, in that many of those kept as companions are allowed to roam free, and many people living with cats see outdoor access as key to cat wellbeing. Dogs in a country such as the UK are no longer able to free-roam and, however well treated and much loved, are essentially, 'captive' animals [47] (pp. 26–28). This can be mitigated by exercise and different experiences dogs gain by walking outside the home and, in particular, by being allowed off-leash and to socialise with other dogs; yet significant numbers of people living with dogs do not walk them. More than half of dog owners in New South Wales and a quarter of those in Perth did not walk their dogs at all [48,49]. A US study in

Tennessee found that only 36% of owners walked dogs [50], while the Kennel Club found one in five dog owners not to be walking daily with their dogs in the UK [51]. In relation to herd animals, such as sheep, equids and camelids, humans may keep animals in solitary enclosures that have significant impacts on their welfare. Similarly, small mammals, such as guinea pigs and rabbits, and birds are often caged for most of every day, and often live without conspecifics [36]. Human power is ultimately writ large into the lives of animals kept as pets. For example, with respect to dogs, humans most usually decide the when, where and what regarding dog walking, socialising, toileting and eating.

2.2.1. Different Types of Human–Pet Relation

Human households exemplify different kinds of animal companion–human relations. Living with animals, such as dogs, sometimes involves the sharing of household space in close proximity and often, intimacy [52]. This varies, however, and Gary Varner suggests there are three models of incorporation based on the use of space in the home. First, there are households having a relatively high level of inclusion, where human participants understand pets such as dogs and cats as 'domestic partners'. Second, there are households with restrictions on the use of space by animals within the home, where they are understood to be 'companion animals'; and finally, there are 'mere pets' who are excluded from home space (for example, dogs chained in yards or caged) [53]. In her research on people's relationships with dogs in Australia, Emma Power found that some people saw their relationships with dogs as parental—with dogs requiring care in ways similar to children. However, she also found that others saw dogs as fundamentally different to humans and as requiring different forms of care, while many organised their domestic relations in ways which took account of the agency of dogs in making a home [54]. David Blouin's research with dog owners from the US Midwest led him to develop a typology of owners' orientations toward pets: "dominionistic", "humanistic", or "protectionistic". Those with a dominionistic orientation have relatively low regard for their pets, valuing them primarily for the uses they provide, such as protection. Those with a humanistic orientation elevate their pets to the status of surrogate humans and value their pets mainly for the affective benefits they enjoy. Those with protectionist orientation have high regard for both pets and for other animals more widely, understanding pets to be valuable companions and as creatures with their own interests [55]. Blouin suggests that particular orientations help us understand the often ambiguous and contradictory relationships people have with both pets specifically and other animals more generally.

Key reasons given by UK dog owners for living with dogs include that "they make me happy" (51%), "for love and affection" (47%) and companionship (35%) [56]. The presence of both dogs and cats in the home questions human-exclusive notions of family and kin [57,58]. Particularly in US studies, research participants understand themselves to be in a parenting role with their cats and dogs, referring to themselves as parents, or 'Moms' and animals as 'children' or 'fur babies' [59–61], and with different parenting styles [62]. Others claim that pets are surrogate humans in the context of the family and that their presence is changing the contemporary form of family in the US [63]. These studies reflect the parental and humanistic orientations identified by Power and Blouin, above. The anthropomorphic presumption of pets as replacements for relations with humans also seems to increasingly gain in traction in popular opinion [64].

The idea that pets are 'family' is, however, contested in research findings. For example, family bondedness studies of people living with cats and dogs give ambiguous results [65]. People have been found to resist the idea that pets are a substitute for family members, particularly children [66,67], reflecting an orientation more akin to Blouin's protectionist attitudes, and seeing animals as agential creatures within the home—domestic partners, as Varner puts it. In my own work, I have found that people close to cats and dogs struggle to describe the qualities of their relationships and have concluded that kin, rather than family, might be a more appropriate term for companion animals within human homes who are better seen as partners or companions than 'pets' [67].

In sum, the literature on the different patterns of relations people have with pets (overwhelmingly cats and dogs) suggests a variety of relationships with animals of the same species. While some pet owners do see their relationship as an exercise of domination (for example, through restricting the movement of their pets or their use of space, or through training regimes) others adopt more inclusive practices. For other owners, pets are integrated more fully into the life of the human household and may take an active role in making and shaping the home. For Varner, Blouin and Power, these latter kinds of relationships do not mean there is species equality, but that there are significant qualitative differences in the power relationships to which animal companions are subjected, depending on the attitudes and beliefs of owners.

2.2.2. The Dark Side of Pet Keeping

While there is certainly evidence of close bonds between people and pets, there are also relations involving exploitation, abuse (including domestic violence and abuse) and cruelty. These perhaps reflect dominionistic orientations towards animals seen as 'mere pets' in Varner's typology. However, I consider that a further category is needed to capture those who are neglectful and positively abusive to the animals they keep. There are a number of examples of this, on which this section will focus: commercial exploitation in the pet breeding industry, neglect and abandonment of pets, killing, and abuse in the context of domestic violence. The exploitative basis on which pet-keeping is most usually founded features in Tuan's concept of the creation of the pet through manipulation, and my own conception of oppressive domination, as will be discussed in the following section. It is important to note, however, that, in considering the types of human–pet relation discussed in the previous section, violence and abuse rarely features as a category of relationship and are more likely to be seen as marginal or deviant practices.

The large-scale commercial breeding of companion animals relies on sophisticated marketing to boost demand, maximises profits through highly intensive and often cruel methods, and oversupplies animals for the pet trade to the extent that "animal shelters are forced to destroy millions of unwanted pets each year" [68] (pp. 238–253). The treatment of some breeding animals mirrors the treatment of intensively farmed animals and is similarly dependent on gendered manipulation of animals' fertility and sexuality [1]. The breeding of animals for particular 'desirable traits' has been criticised as damaging for animal welfare. This applies particularly to dogs, given the extent of human intervention since the mid-nineteenth century. Breeding dogs was a Victorian British invention, emerging around 1860. Prior to this, dogs were bred mainly for function (collies for herding, greyhounds for hunting with speed), but from the 1860s dogs were increasingly bred for 'form', appearance, becoming standardised and uniform through conformation to a 'breed standard' policed and reproduced through the institution of the dog show [69] (pp. 76–79). Debates on dog breeding were preoccupied by the relative importance of 'breed' (the standardization of physical characteristics), and 'blood' (the inheritance of characteristics, similar to the idea of genetics today). Notions of breed purity and pedigree breeding narratives have been constituted through strongly classed and racialised discourse [69], something which continues to this day [70] (pp. 91–95). Breed standards have altered over time in ways which often increase the deleterious effects of breed confirmation [69] (p. 223). As a result, animal welfare organisations have criticised breed standards in contemporary dog shows for encouraging the breeding of dogs with congenital defects which disable them, shorten their life span and make them prone to illness and disease [71].

The numbers of dogs and cats routinely abandoned to shelters or the street are huge. For example, there are an estimated 664,000 dogs entering UK animal shelters each year, many of which will be euthanised [72]. Dogs, in particular, may be deemed to have 'behavioural problems' and are routinely killed by veterinarians at the request of their owners [73]. This is deeply concerning, given that dog behaviour, which is often read as aggressive or vicious, is increasingly understood as an expression of anxiety and fear. In addition, such behaviour and the often lethal consequences of it, are driven by human

expectations of how dogs should behave in a world designed for humans [74,75]. Certain breeds of dogs are also additionally subject to risk due to racist and classist discrimination against dogs of a particular 'type' and the humans who own them [76–79].

All animal companions, in countries where they have property status in law, are vulnerable to being killed. Companion animals may be given a lethal dose of barbiturates by a veterinarian when their owner decides it is in the best interests of a suffering animal, or, and unfortunately often, when an animal is no longer wanted or judged capable of living the life of a pet [1] (p. 151). Certainly, there are different motivations for this. There are veterinarians and owners of companion animals working hard to minimise pain, maximise quality of life and to secure as good a death as is possible for an animal (for a thought-provoking discussion, see [80]). Despite this, people can purchase all kinds of creatures as pets very easily and abandon them with few difficulties, discarding those no longer attractive or useful or who are ailing or aging. So common is the practice of people euthanising ill and aging cats and dogs so that they are not an inconvenience over the holidays, that there is a term for it amongst veterinarians in the UK—the 'Christmas cull'.

A further element of the vulnerability of animal companions concerns their being caught up in forms of human violence. Companion animals may be subject to domestic violence and abuse and may be mutilated, executed or otherwise harmed [81], while threats to harm or kill animal companions are found to be used as threats against women and children [82]. This impacts both human and animal survivors of abuse, both psychologically and practically [83,84]. Estimates by animal welfare charities in Britain and the United States indicate that numbers of companion animals mistreated (in organised fights, by drowning, stabbing, burning or by neglect) is statistically significant and seems to be on the increase in times of economic hardship [85]. Ethnographic studies have also revealed high levels of anxiety amongst dog owners about a popular culture of machismo in which bull-breed dogs were implicated as weapons or trophies [67].

Different kinds of relationships are possible with animals kept as pets, therefore. While some owners may have high levels of 'animal capital'—that is, they may be informed about and able to meet the care and welfare needs of the animals they live with—others do not [86]. This section has mapped some of the more positive ways in which pets are incorporated into human households but has also shown the dark underbelly of pet ownership. This brings us to the question of how to conceptualise and theorise relationships with animal companions and, in considering the more and less positive elements of this relationship, Yi Fu-Tuan's ideas on the 'making' of pets are a useful starting point.

3. Dominance, Affection and the 'Making' of Pets

As we have seen in the previous section, companion animals and their owners co-exist on a spectrum of relationships, which may or may not involve closeness, intimacy, care, companionship and love. There is also evidence of human domination of pets in violent and abusive treatment of animals, which has psychological and physical impact on the animals kept. Much of the work on pets, apart from the animal welfare literature, tends to avoid issues of pet abuse or see this as deviant practice. In *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets*, the Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, suggests however, that power and domination are key to understanding the pet relation. Tuan observes that affection (care, 'love', kindly treatment, favouritism) is often apparent in social relationships [3]. This does not mean, however, that affection is the opposite of dominance; rather it is dominance's anodyne—it is dominance with a "human face". As he puts it: "Dominance may be cruel and exploitative, with no hint of affection in it. What it produces is the victim. On the other hand, dominance may be combined with affection, and what it produces is the pet" [3] (pp. 1–2).

The turning of people, animals and things into pets must, for Tuan, be understood as an exercise of power, as he puts it; this does involve violence, but this violence is often not seen as such:

> [. . .] the ways that animal and humans—as pets and playthings—have been made to suffer dignities and humiliation, rather than physical pain, the curtailment of

> life and death. And yet, there must have been pain in submitting to the excess of training and disciplining; and as for the curtailment of life and death [...] how great is the temptation of the powerful to reduce their pets (plants, animals, humans) to simulacra of lifeless objects and mechanical toys—to the sort of frozen perfection only the inanimate can obtain.
>
> ([3], p. 4)

For Tuan, pets can be defined in terms of a power relationship of usage, where owners are users and those who become pets are used. Key to the relationship is that the user conceptualises the pet as something which pleases or enhances the owner. This section first outlines Tuan's analysis of the making of pets and then provides an illustrative example of how pets are 'made' through a discussion of the 'species story' of dogs.

3.1. Pets as Objects of Human Pleasure

The pet, for Tuan, is the use of someone, or something, not for practical utility, but for the "ends of pleasure, adornment and prestige" [3] (p. 2). Beings and things are rendered pets by being favourably treated, indulged and used as playthings. Power is endemic in the process of making pets. By having this definition, Tuan considerably broadens how we think about what a pet can be and raises some uncomfortable ideas about the creation and meaning of pets. For Tuan, pets can be animals, but they can also be humans, plants or inanimate objects. What is crucial to the concept of the pet is inequality, and this is sometimes obscured because affection "mitigates domination, making it softer, more acceptable" [3] (p. 5). Beings and things, whether a garden of topiary or a potted plant such as a bonsai tree, a child, woman, slave or a 'fool', become pets through control and intervention by powerful humans. This is a challenging and uncomfortable inversion of common-sense understandings of the pet—rather than thinking of dogs or cats as part of the family, because they are dependents and similar to children, is something else at work? Is it that children are pets rather than pets being like children, for example.

When it comes to animals kept as companions, Tuan considers that pets are the product of the development of sentimentality, which accompanies nineteenth-century social transitions accompanying urbanisation [3] (p. 112). This social history of the development of pets has been one that, as we have earlier seen, is supported by historians and sociologists [39,41]. Tuan highlights the disposability and replaceability of pets, the ambiguity of species (with discussion of dogs being regarded as sources of meat in some cultures), and the violent control of neutering and breeding, wherein animals such as fishes have been manipulated into colourful ornaments for the home [3] (pp. 88–99). Manageability and control, Tuan argues, have been the key drivers for genetic manipulation; while in other cases, juvenile appearance has also been a consideration (in the case of Pekinese dogs, for example, [3] pp. 105–106).

While Tuan admits that humans may show affection and care towards animals kept as pets, this is organised around human interest. While 'affection mitigates domination', for Tuan "affection itself is only possible in relationships of inequality" [3] (p. 5). The pet is a 'diminished being' because it serves the 'vanity' of its owner. It is a personal belonging, and in the case of an animal, one "with charm that one can take delight in, play with and set aside, as one wishes" [3] (pp. 139–140). The value of Tuan's work is that it highlights the violence involved in making living beings and things into pets. Yet there is an arrogance in the certainly of the text and the presentation of examples which admits no ambiguity, with no differences in the kinds of relationship described. For Tuan, all relationships are composed of this intersection between domination and affection and are ultimately seen to be of the same quality—whether this is the sexual abuse of a human slave in Imperial Rome, a Pekinese dog bred for apparently attractive physical deformities such as bulging eyes, or a miniaturised tree with stunted roots. There is also surprisingly little examination of the difference of kind in the creatures and things which are made into pets, and their sociohistorical context, as discussed earlier in this paper. The different orientations of those who live with pets is also absent from Tuan's account. Ultimately, this means that there is

limited nuance in his conception of the pet because he does not attend to the differences in relationships between people and the animals they keep.

3.2. The Making of the Pet: The Example of the 'Species Story' of the Dog

Relationships between humans and dogs are often seen as the closest between pets and people. For Tuan, the dog is "the pet par excellence" because its long association with humans has resulted in such extensive human modification to the variety of the species and to the control of dog behaviour [3] (p. 102). The array of books on dog training offers different insights into peoples' relationships with dog companions than those often captured in academic studies and is illustrative of the human domination of these animals as pets. For some, human domination is writ large into the dog relationship, because animal's lives are limited and precarious due to the expectations people have about dogs and their appropriate behaviour as pets. Patricia McConnell writes that who "dogs are and how they behave are partly defined by who we humans are and how we ourselves behave. Domestic dogs by definition share their lives with another species: us" [87] (xvii). 'Miscommunication' between people and dogs emerges from a lack of understanding of species difference (that dogs are canids and humans are primates) and associated species-specific behavioural cues. Others have described this as a 'culture clash', which operates profoundly to the disadvantage of dogs [74]. The estimates of the high numbers (72 to 85%) of dogs with 'behavioural problems' suggest a significant problem with our relationships with dog companions [88]. As Donna Haraway suggests, being a dog is a difficult job, requiring significant emotional and behavioural control [89] (p. 38). Marc Bekoff and Jessica Pierce consider that it is important to acknowledge that dogs are not naturally adapted to live with humans. Rather, in becoming a companion for humans, dogs are required to surrender many of the freedoms and pleasures of being a dog, and to significantly curb their instincts [90]. The making of 'the dog' as a pet is a process of control and manipulation, something Tuan would very much understand as a violent process and certainly one reflecting human power.

The texts on dog behaviour and training all refer to what Mariam Motamedi-Fraser [91] (p. 2) calls the "dogs species story". She goes further than the critical approach of Bekoff and Pierce in arguing that the story of dogs in the language of science is a story of belonging to humans. The story of the dog is that they are the original domesticates, and the specification of dogs as a species is connected to household association—canis (dog, from the Latin) familiaris (familiar—for friend or family) see [91] (pp. 62–90). In being taxonomically defined by their relationship with humans, dogs are understood as genetically hard-wired to 'be' with us. This, for Motamedi-Fraser, is the story science tells of dogs, and it becomes "the story of all dogs". Individual dogs bear the consequences of this humancentric narrative. For example, she describes so-called problem behaviours in dogs as "objections to their living conditions", which arise from the naturalising of the dog–human bond [91] (p. 5). As she argues, this story of "the bond" places unreasonable and potentially highly oppressive burdens on dogs, who are subjected to ongoing and enforced socialisation in order that the ideal of the bond be both realised and attained (2024, pp. 36–38). This matters greatly, as the scientific story of how a dog is understood to have become a dog contributes to defining "what a dog is expected to feel today; how a dog is expected to behave today; what treatment of dogs is justified today" [91] (p. 2).

Others resist this humancentric story. Pierce and Bekoff experiment in speculative biology by imagining what they call a "posthuman world", in a literal sense as a world after human beings are no longer existent [47] (p. 3), rather than the sense in which it is used in critical social science [92]. They argue that dogs are likely to survive and thrive without humans, questioning the notion that the purpose of being a dog is to be a companion for humans; rather, dogs should be able to express their "dogness" [47] (pp. 13–15). While Pierce and Bekoff question the species story of dogs, Motamedi-Fraser objects to the idea of species itself, arguing that thinking with the concept of species erases the individual animal and fixes all dogs within a humancentric story of the bond with humans. I consider that we

can retain species as a conceptual category, however, without accepting a particular animals' 'species story'. Biological referents of species can be useful in specifying inappropriate uses and abuses of animal companions by humans and to think about particular species' needs and what might be most appropriate for them.

A dog's species story for Pierce, Bekoff and Motamedi-Fraser is one which naturalises the pet relation and functions as a form of behavioural control for dogs (and often their owners). Dogs have to be continually socialised in order to achieve the ideal of the bond, and some dogs will inevitably fail to accept this and to confirm to human ideals about their behaviour and relationships with owners. As we saw for Tuan, domination is interweaved with affection in the making of pets; but all kinds of creatures and things are reduced to the same pet relation. For Motamedi-Fraser, a specific form of domination through the species story of pet dogs compels bonding. The precise form of domination will be different for other creatures kept as pets. In thinking through the social formations of species relations, I developed an alternative conception of domination to that advocated by Tuan, using the concept of anthroparchy to attempt to capture the kinds of relations humans have with animals, including those who are companions or pets. This is broader than Motamedi-Fraser's focus on a single species-story but also more specific and able to consider differences than Tuan's formulation of domination and affection. It also allows for more positive relations and the contesting of the domination of animals.

4. Revisiting Domination and Affection—Anthroparchal Relations and Animal Companions

Anthroparchy literally means human domination. In previous work on ecofeminist theory, I argued that humans are entangled in complex systemic relations of domination with non-human animals [93] and that this can, at least in part, be used to understand the relationships humans have with animals kept as companions [1,67].

4.1. Human Domination and 'Pets'

Anthroparchy describes a system of social relations through which domesticated nonhuman animals are dominated through forms of social organisation [1] (p. 141). I conceive it as a relational social system, a complex and relatively stable set of relationships in which the nonhuman living world is dominated through formations of social organisation which privilege the human [93] (pp. 63–71). Anthroparchy involves different forms and practices of power: oppression, exploitation and marginalisation. I have used these terms to indicate distinct degrees (extents) and levels (amounts) at which social domination operates in the different formations it assumes.

In this model, human relations with other animal species are constituted by and through social institutions and processes, and these can be seen as sets of relations of power and domination. I have suggested five sets of relations which form an anthroparchal social order: production relations, domestication, political institutions and practices of governance, systemic violence and cultures of exclusive humanism [1]. The term anthroparchy should not be taken to imply that all humans engage in exploitative and oppressive practices all of the time. Rather, species is constituted by and through, in collaboration with, human hierarchies—ideas of animality and 'nature' are entangled in the constitution of race, gender, class and other human differences. This is very different to Tuan's model of domination, where very different practices are seen to have the same core characteristics. By contrast, anthroparchal social systems are characterised by different kinds of social relations and different degrees of domination

With regard to animal companions, structures of oppressive power can be seen in the violent practices of aspects of veterinary industries. The latter would include, for example, the euthanasia of animal companions for reasons other than alleviation of suffering due to illness or injury, or laboratory testing for veterinary pharmaceuticals [1] (p. 151). Pets are usually part of anthroparchal structures of reproduction—the product of the breeding industries and subject to its nexus of violence, with forced reproduction, intensive production

and separation of mothers and young. As commodities, animal companions can be traded, often internationally, and passed from one household to another, or abandoned, if they are lucky, to shelters. Pets are also caught up with forms of human violence both in the home (for example in situations of domestic violence and abuse, pets are likely to be victims of violence) and outside (for example, gang-related violence involving dogs or conflict and forced displacement). The household is a site in which anthroparchal relations intersect with other systemic relations, of patriarchy, capitalism and other relational systems of social domination. Within the home, animal companions are commodities, most often legal property [1] (p. 143). However, as we saw earlier, households are characterised by different kinds of relations with animal companions, and there are households where animals are able to exercise agency and shape the life of the home [54]. The Western household is a key site of consumption, where the bodies of domesticated animals not considered as pets may be variously stored, prepared and consumed as food by both human occupants and companion cats, dogs and others [94]. Notwithstanding this context of human privilege, with its restrictions, exclusions and exploitative and oppressive practices, some animals kept as companions, such as dogs and cats, are able to bring their own selves into relationships with humans [86], and genuine possibilities exist for companionate exchange [67].

While I accept Tuan's understanding of the 'pet' as a social construction that is shaped by human power, as a being subject to domination, in practice this does not describe all the kinds of relations between people and pets that are possible. It is also a highly humancentric account, for nonhuman animals are able to influence both their lives and their relationships in some situations. Tuan does not allow pets to be anything other than things humans have manipulated to fulfil a need or desire but, in the world of everyday relating between people and pets, other relations and practices are found.

4.2. Moving beyond Domination?

In a human-dominant public world, the relatively privatised site of home, for example, might be a site of resistance where the eating of animals might be rejected [94], where relations of care and conviviality might enable the relative flourishing of humans and animal companions, and where practices are negotiated and human boundaries challenged [67]. The long "history of inter-species communication" means that, while we cannot know, we can certainly imagine what a dog or cat, for example, might be feeling or experiencing [95] (p. 202). While I understand pets to be caught in relationships of domination, unlike Tuan I also think there are other relationships and possibilities. In trying to capture this, in recent work I have used Foucault's notion of heterotopia to describe this.

In his well-known essay of other spaces, Michel Foucault introduces the concept of heterotopia as a different way of thinking about space. Foucault's own examples are of institutions (hospitals, prisons) which are sites of domination (for patients and prisoners). Within these sites of domination there are, however, spaces suggesting other possibilities. By contrast to the "fundamentally unreal" or fantastical space of perfection—utopia—heterotopic spaces are real spaces, relational spaces and "a sort of mixed joint experience" which reveal paradoxes and contradictions [96] (p. 24). Living with pets can be usefully conceived as an area of interlinked contradictory experiential spaces. Heterotopia implies difference and challenges in the kind of space in which we may feel at home. While humans hold the power in relationships with animal companions, they also come together with animals with whom they are familiar on a daily basis, in various degrees of spatial, physical and emotional intimacy.

In my own work on people's relationships with companion dogs, I found close relationships between people and the dogs they lived with, sometimes along with other animal companions (cats primarily, but also horses, guinea pigs, sheep, parrots, chickens and ducks). My UK study in London and Leicestershire in the midlands of England was limited to those households where animals were companions or domestic partners (in Varner's terminology) and where people tended to have a high regard for the animals in their care (as Blouin would put it). I found dogs to be in emotionally proximate relationships, to be

cared for and also, in many cases, seen to be in relationships of reciprocal care [97]. There were tensions, however, with dog owners expressing anxiety over the need to juggle the demands of paid work with ensuring dogs were not left alone for long periods, and about the time spent in caring for dogs, particularly walking [67]. I found the lives of humans and dog companions to be characterised by intimacy and care, and tension between this and relations of power and control. The idea of these relationships as contradictory and heterotopic is useful, however, in teasing out the complicated and nuanced kinds of relations people have with animal companions and can apply more broadly beyond relations with dog companions. It also allows for a more complex and nuanced understanding of the kinds of relations that are possible despite conditions of domination for animals kept as pets.

In suggesting that relationships with animal companions are framed by anthroparchy—human domination—I am not suggesting that this means that relationships with animals as companions must necessarily be abandoned. For Irvine, recognising the selfhood of other creatures and the value of animal lives means that we cannot breed animals such as cats and dogs and keep them for our pleasure [86]. For Motamedi-Fraser, uncomfortable questions are raised by understanding the oppressive qualities of 'the bond' which is constituted as the human–dog relation [91]. While I understand this concern for the lives of animals, I consider that liberating animals, in the sense of withdrawing from them and abolishing all use of nonhuman animals, as some have advocated [98], is impossible and illusory. If more positive relations in heterotopic spaces are also possible with some species, as my research has found with regard to dogs, this is also undesirable. This said, I consider that radical change in the ways we live with and treat companion animals is necessary and overdue. There are important questions to be asked about how companion animals are bred, whether they should be property in law, whether certain species can be kept as companions at all, and if so, in what circumstances (see for example, [99]). Answers to these questions will also inform an improved understanding of how violence and abuse of animal companions, including abandonment and unnecessary euthanasia, might be more effectively tackled.

5. Future Directions for Research

This paper has found that there are difficulties with the concept of the 'pet' in that it recalls infantilisation and relations of human power over other animals. It matters, as Haraway says, "what we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with" [100] (p. 12). If words matter, is alternative terminology more appropriate than 'pet'? Haraway has used the term 'companion species' to describe the networks of relationships which emerge over time bringing animals such as dogs into close proximity—spatially and emotionally—with humans [89,101]. A reservation with this concept is that any species (a staple food vegetable or grain) could be a companion species in Haraway's sense of co-evolved intra-dependency.

The term companion animal has been preferred over 'pet' by many organisations in the animal welfare movement and those working in human–animal studies in the humanities and social sciences. For example, in the first volume of *The Journal of Animal Ethics*, the editors encouraged

> [. . .] authors to use "companion animals" rather than "pets." Despite its prevalence, "pets" is surely a derogatory term with respect to both the animals concerned and their human caregivers. Again, the word "owners", though technically correct in law, harks back to a previous age when animals were regarded as just that: property, machines or things to use without moral constraint. Likewise, "he" or "she" should be utilized in relation to individual animals rather than "it".
>
> ([102], p. viii)

This has provoked debate, with some considering that 'pet' is more inclusive, as not all animals (fishes, for example) can be companions, but can still be understood as pets [103]. Scholars in critical strands of animal studies are most likely to reverse the words, preferring

'animal companion' rather than 'companion animal', as the latter suggests animals are defined as companions, rather than being in a companionate relationship. Scholars seeing ownership as inappropriate for animal companions have chosen terms such as caretaker or guardian over 'owner' for the humans in these relationships ([102] (p. vii), [21]). While in my own work I prefer to use 'animal companions', I also use the term 'owners' for those humans who keep animal companions, as this reflects the power dynamics and the legal status of animals.

Like Haraway, I consider that words matter. Perhaps, however, rather than specify which terms should and should not be used, it is most important to use words critically, and to attempt to capture different kinds of relationality. For example, the terms 'mere pets', 'companion animals' and 'domestic partners' in Varner's typology have distinct meanings and are able to capture different elements of people's relationships and to keep power relationships in mind [53,55]. Critical reflection on words and concepts is crucial for our research, and feeds into reflection on the use of theory in work in the social sciences and beyond.

Work in the social sciences has mostly examined peoples' relationships with dogs and cats. Few studies examine other species kept as pets, although there is work on horses [104,105] and rabbits [106]. For some working in the behavioural sciences, the preoccupation with dogs and cats is not a question of bias, but of accuracy. Pongrácz and Dobos, for example, argue that, from an ethological perspective, only dogs and cats should be defined as companion animals. This is because they provide hedonistic value through rewarding interactions with their owners, because relationships of companionship benefit both parties, and because they are the only species which would remain with their owners of their own free will if they were not confined [107]. Pongrácz and Dobos eschew criteria "from the human sciences", such as attachment or emotional closeness, and thereby end up with a very narrow definition, which does not reflect the range of relations people have with a variety of species. Rather, what would be of benefit for research on animal companions is to move beyond a narrow focus on cats and dogs. It would greatly expand our understanding of the variety of relations possible if scholarship were to look more concertedly at relations with animals which are less like humans and less open to anthropomorphism.

For example, horses think very differently to humans and live outside human homes, so these are human–animal relationships in which "the line between human and animal is not quite so blurred", as it might be with dogs or cats [104] (p. 444). Susan Keaveney is clear that her research participants saw their horses as companions or pets for just those very reasons Pongrácz and Dobos dismiss—emotional closeness and bonding. Horses are radically different to humans due to their size and potential danger to humans, and their sensory difference as a prey animal rather than a predator. This means that human–horse relations are different to those with household companions—human trust is more difficult to earn and mutual trust and respect are essential for an effective relationship [104] (pp. 448–449). What are the differences in relationship between animals kept inside as opposed to outside the home, or between predators, such as humans and dogs or cats, and non-predators, such as horses or rabbits? These would be informative avenues for future scholarship to explore.

The 'pet studies' of the future might also be critical: concerned to always centre animal welfare and to be mindful of human power and the status of animals as captives. I would like to see more openness to the challenge of understanding relationships between humans and those creatures which are less similar to us, in the hope that greater understanding will positively impact both the quality of the relationship and the lives of animals. For Haraway is right to suggest that:

> Just who is at home must be permanently in question. The recognition that one cannot know the other or the self, but must ask in respect for all of time who and what are emerging in relationship is key.
>
> ([89], p. 50)

A focus on relations, their quality, their appropriateness, is a necessary counter to the reductionism of Tuan's formulation in *Dominance and Affection,* wherein all kinds of creatures kept as pets are seen to be subject to the same kinds of relations. While in my own work on people's relationships with dog companions I have argued that positive relations might be seen as those of kin, this would not be a good fit for some of the creatures kept as pets, even when they are well-kept and respected. As this paper has argued, different species and different kinds of relations must be taken into account for accurate, nuanced and careful scholarship on human/animal companion relationships, care and treatment. Research critically evaluating the appropriateness of relationships with and care and treatment of specific species will be key.

6. Conclusions

This paper has argued for a comprehensive understanding of 'pets', which takes account of the variety of creatures kept by humans. Existing scholarship has tended to focus on a narrow range of species and has been preoccupied with human relations with dogs and cats. However, broadening the kinds of species included in pet scholarship will impact the kind of relationships people have. It will certainly raise questions as to whether all animals kept as pets can enter into relations we might call companionship, and whether this should be attempted.

A lack of attention to the differences in the animals kept as pets, and in the range of possible relationships between humans and animal companions, is the weakness in Tuan's formulation of domination and affection—all creatures are reduced to the same status, and the same relationship model. While I have concurred that the human–pet relation should broadly be understood in terms of social domination, and I have used the idea of an anthroparchal system of relations to capture this, there are different degrees and extents to which animals kept as pets are subject to relations of domination. This varies between species and in terms of the different kinds of relationships possible between humans and the pets that they keep. This paper has argued that it is vital to understand our living world as co-constituted, alongside a critique of oppressive power. While the species story of dogs was illustrative of Tuan's idea of pet making, it captures just one element of human relations with animal companions.

As scholars, we need to critically reflect on the captive status of many animals kept as companions and on appropriate responses and responsibilities to them which are informed by that reflection. Animal companions may be deeply disadvantaged in a humancentric world, or human dominated, anthroparchal society, but their dependency on humans does not necessarily make them slaves kept for human entertainment or company or an outlet for affection in the way that Tuan suggests, even if they are, essentially, captive. Sunaura Taylor, along with other feminist influenced writers, has critiqued this conception of dependency. We are all intra-dependent and able and less able at different times and situational contexts in our lives [108]. Our relationships with animal companions might be positively developed through an appreciation of such intra-dependency. The hope to which this paper points is that the appreciation of species difference and diversity, and further attempts to understand human–animal engagements as relational, will enable careful, nuanced but also reflective and critical scholarship on 'pets'.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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