



‘Cause I wuv you!’ Pet dog fashion and emotional consumption

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abstract

Researchers have analysed how pets fuel marketing and consumption and what kind of role emotions play in these areas. Yet there is no research on how commodities are used in negotiating the emotional relationship between humans and pet dogs. This article contributes a new perspective to the discussion on pet consumerism by focusing on the role of emotions. It examines how pet dog commodities define and materialise the ideal emotional bond between the human and the pet dog: how consumption is justified and rationalised by appealing to emotions, how emotions are mobilised in pet markets, and how value is ascribed to the human–pet dog bond through material objects. As a tangible example of affective capitalism, pet dog fashions indicate how the need to establish a relationship between a human and a dog is transformed into material goods and services.

I love and treat my puppies as if they were my own children. I have to admit, I may have spoiled them a little too much. But how can I not? Just look at those sweet lil' faces, they deserve to be treated like my lil' prince and princesses ☺ I love my babies. (Daily Mail Reporter, 2009)

This excerpt is from an on-line article about Paris Hilton. It reports about Hilton's 'Mini Doggie Mansion', a miniature version of her own Beverly Hills mansion, which she has constructed for her lap dogs, the now deceased Tinkerbelle, Marilyn Monroe, Dolce, Prada and two other pooches. The double storey pink chateau, estimated to be worth \$325 000 in a biography about Paris Hilton (Gurvis, 2011: 67), covers about 300 square feet, boasts miniature Philip Starck furniture, heating and air-conditioning, as well as a crystal chandelier and ceiling mouldings. Downstairs it has a living room and in the upstairs bedroom

it has a car-shaped 'Furcedes' bed with luxurious 'Chewy Vuitton' bedding. The dogs also have a closet: it is filled with haute-couture outfits for them, including, for example, a pink angora sweater, 'gaudy pink high-heeled Louis Vuitton dog booties' and other accessories 'that cost probably more than your car' (Hilton and Resin, 2004).

The *Daily Mail* article is one of many articles that have reported on the socialite's conspicuous spending habits on her lap dogs. While Paris Hilton and her fashionably dressed pooches may be among the most followed celebrities in the world of entertainment, they are by no means the only ones. Throughout the 2000s, a growing number of female celebrities have been photographed carrying a fashionably dressed and extravagantly accessorised little lap dog (e.g. Bettany and Daly, 2008: 409). A Google-search 'fashionable celebrity lap dogs' produces almost 1 000 000 hits in 0,8 seconds, and features sites such as 'dog fashion spa', 'Cindy Crawford dressing her dogs' and 'Pugs and Kisses Celebrity Dog Fashion Show'. Celebrities and their fashionably dressed lap dogs are visible in entertainment media but they have also successfully marketed certain dog breeds and luxurious dog fashions to ordinary people: while spending on other areas of life has decreased, spending on pet dogs has steadily increased in the 2000s.¹ This is evident in statistics. In the United States, for example, pet dog consumerism has increased by over 70 % from 2004-2014; from 34 billion dollars to 58 billion dollars (Bettany and Daly, 2008: 409; *APPA National Pet Owners Survey*, 2013/2014: webpage). The same applies to Finland. Spending on pet paraphernalia has increased more than spending on any other area of leisure from 2006-2012 (Nurmela, 2014). At the beginning of 2014, the Finnish journal of economics, *Talouselämä*, reported that in the previous year, the biggest Finnish pet shop chain *Musti ja Mirri* had doubled its profit and grown the popularity of the company's customer loyalty program by 20%. For this reason, the magazine gave the company the title 'gainer of the year' (Talouselämä, 2014).

Researchers have analysed how pets fuel marketing and consumption and what kind of role emotions play in these areas (e.g. Brockman et al., 2008: 397-405; Holbrook, 2008: 546-552; Kennedy and McGarvey, 2008: 424-430; Hsee and Kunreuthner, 2000; 141-159; Aylesworth et al., 1999: 385-391). Yet there is no research on how commodities are used in negotiating the emotional relationship

1 As David Redmalm (2014: 93-94) has pointed out, Tinkerbell's – and other celebrity lap dogs' – fame increased the demand for small laps dogs, especially Chihuahuas. This has resulted in a large amount of abandoned lap dogs, and even created a diagnosis called 'the Paris Hilton syndrome'. The term refers to people who take a lap dog without properly understanding what acquiring a dog means. When the pet turns out not to be only a cute little accessory, but a dog with a will of its own, it is abandoned.

between humans and pet dogs. This article contributes a new perspective to the discussion on pet consumerism by focusing on the role of emotions. I examine how pet dog commodities define and materialise the ideal emotional bond between the human and the pet dog: how consumption is justified and rationalised by appealing to emotions, how emotions are mobilised in pet markets, and how value is ascribed to the human–pet dog bond through material objects. As a tangible example of affective capitalism, pet dog fashions indicate how the need to establish a relationship between a human and a dog is transformed into material goods and services.

The wider theoretical framework of this article is posthumanism. I use it to explain how pet dogs have been included in the history of humans and how consumer culture is built on and how it capitalises on this inclusion. I find posthumanist theory particularly useful for this task, because it helps to explicate how pet consumerism and pet commodities materialise a change in humanity's status. I contend that pet commodities and services display how emotions not only fuel capitalism, but how they also transform the pet, the human and the market itself. An important frame of reference in this sense is *emotional capitalism*. Eva Illouz (2007: 5) has used it to describe capitalism as a culture where emotional and economic discourses and practices shape each other. This is noticeable in the human–pet discourse, for example, in the language of emotional attachment and humanisation, and in the pet commodities themselves.

The article is structured as follows: I first outline the posthumanist theoretical framework. Second, I trace the cultural history of the pet dog as a 'love machine'; as a source and mediator of positive emotions. Third, I discuss how the emotional bond between dogs and humans has been intertwined with capitalism from the beginning and how it materialises in pet fashions in contemporary culture. In doing so, I use detailed examples of marketing approaches by a British (*Love My Dog*) and a Finnish (*Musti ja Mirri*) company to demonstrate how emotions are utilised in the language of marketing and how they are rationalised and transformed into commodities. In the final section, I discuss how pet consumerism and pet fashions deconstruct the dichotomy between humans and animals and how affective capitalism capitalises on this deconstruction.

Framing pet dogs and humans: Posthumanism

Paris Hilton regularly states in interviews that she 'spoils' her pet dogs because they are her 'babies'. In her biography, Hilton claims that 'Tink doesn't even like

other dogs – she acts just like a human!’ (Hilton, 2006: 166). Pet shops, on the other hand, market dog fashions by appealing to the customer’s sentiments by claiming to offer tools for ‘caring’, ‘loving’ and promoting the dog’s overall ‘well-being’. The focus on positive feelings and the promotion of a warm affectionate bond between the human and the pet dog constructs an ideal view of pet ownership. It also opens up a viewpoint to the wider theoretical framework of this article: posthumanist theory that re-conceptualises the relationship between humans and non-human animals (e.g. Haraway, 2003; 2008; Derrida, 2008; Wolfe, 2003; 2009) and acknowledges non-human animals as an integral part of human history, experience, and, in the framework of this article, consumerism.

Posthumanism is an umbrella term for studies that re-configure the relationship between humans and non-humans, humans and technology, and humans and the environment (Hassan, 1977: 201-217). Posthumanist approaches aim to challenge classical humanist anthropocentrism and its dichotomies – such as human / animal and nature / culture – the uniqueness of ‘the human’ as the crown of the creation, and the position of the human as an autonomous, rational being in contrast to irrational, instinctual ‘animals’ (Wolfe, 2009). In this article, posthumanism is understood as a set of questions and as a tool for dealing with those questions, when ‘the human’ is not the only autonomous, rational being who knows or consumes.

Of course, a discourse on pet dogs is not the same as a discourse on animals. Animals and pets are conceptualised contradictorily, and they occupy different social positions and conceptual categories. Some argue that pets are *privileged animals*: that they are favoured, remain close to humans and occupy a hierarchically higher status than other non-human animals (Thomas, 1983: 100-120). Others see pets as *degraded animals*: while an ‘animal’ is conceptualised as wild and self-sufficient, the ‘pet’ lacks these qualities (Fudge, 2008). A pet is literally a *tamed animal* – it is by definition *not* an animal. A pet’s animality has been removed through domestication and breeding (Fudge, 2008; Haraway 2003; 2008). Still, a pet it is not a human either. It is a grey area or a category in-between humans and animals. A pet is an *ambiguous category* as it crosses and challenges the categorical boundaries between ‘human’ and ‘animal’ (Leach, 1966: 45). But it is also ambiguous because it invites us to see the continuity of these categories instead of their opposition.² As I see it, the human and the animal merge in the pet: the pet is a mediating category between the human and the animal. The ambiguity of the pet materialises in pet commodities, and concretely so in pet clothes. They are situated in the in-between space of the

2 David Redmalm (2014, 93-109) underlines the ambiguousness of the Chihuahua and defines it as ‘a holy anomaly’.

human-animal continuum that brings together human and animals traits. This is why I propose that pet fashions are an instance of *posthumanist fashion*. But how are they linked to emotions and to emotional capitalism?

The making of the pet dog: Well-dressed love machines

One essential feature of a pet lies in its assumed and desired capacity of raising strong (positive) emotions in humans. The ideal of the 'unnecessary dog', 'toy breed', and 'the lady's lap dog', i.e. a dog that does not have any other function than to accompany and please the human, has a long cultural and emotional history. Already in the Middle Ages and at the beginning of Modernity, the lap dog was connected to positive affects and bodily sensuality. It was defined as the essential ingredient for constructing the identity of the erotic and fashionable noble woman (Thomas, 1983: 107-108).

In the 19th century, the habit of keeping lap dogs had trickled down from the upper to the middle classes. This process also thoroughly sentimentalised the dog. The pet dog was defined as an important symbol of ideal love and a love-fulfilled family life. The pet dog was linked with a new sensibility, a modern secular ethic of kindness to animals. Pet keeping was justified as a means to teach compassion towards others and to children (Grier, 2006: 24; Smith, 2012: 24), which also granted the pet dog a position as a sentient being entitled to care and devotion.

Caring for the pet dog and caring for children went hand in hand: both were civilised through education. The newly established industries of child and pet pedagogies produced educational books on how to raise children and puppies to become decent adult beings by controlling their sexuality, behaviour, and obedience. In other words, through education, children became decent middle-class humans and dogs became human-like pets. The aim of pedagogy was to remove the animal-like features in the child's and in the pet's behaviour, and to replace them with signs of humanness. To be more precise, the aim was to attribute signs of middle-class propriety to the child and the dog (Kete, 1994: 82). The process also transformed the child and the pet dog into sources and mediators of positive emotions of love, loyalty, and care within the family. By the early 20th century, the child had become 'economically useless and emotionally priceless' (Zelizer, 1985) and the family pet dog a 'love machine': an affective end in itself (Kete, 1994: 46, 48-55).

The first scientific steps towards understanding the emotional relationship between people and pets were taken by Charles Darwin in 1872 in *The expression*

of the emotions in man and animal. While René Descartes had argued that nonhuman animals are machines, devoid of mind and consciousness, and hence lacking in sentience, Darwin proposed that emotional expressions serve an important communicative function in the welfare of any species, including dogs. More recently, scholars have recognised that companion animals such as pet dogs share in-depth emotional relationships with humans (Sanders and Arluke, 1993), and that the ways in which humans and their canine companions interact are very similar (e.g. Müller et al., 2014: 601-605).

The civilising process of the dog and the recognition of an emotional relationship between humans and dogs have been thoroughly intertwined with capitalism from the beginning. Already in the 1860s, dog biscuits were marketed to pet dog owners, and fashionable outfits were sold in separate pet fashion stores in Paris. Pet foods and clothing became important tools in 'embourgeoisising the beast' (Kete 1994: 84). They also became important tools in constructing, communicating, and negotiating the emotional bond between the pet and the human.

Pet-human relationship: A total consumer experience

Pet consumption is a popularised and commercialised version of the findings made by biologists and animal studies scholars about emotions and their function. The pet market builds on and fortifies the idea that a certain amount of commodities and services are required in order to be a caring pet owner. Relating with pets has become a total consumer experience, providing such ordinary amenities as veterinary care, and more advanced services such as doggy day care, dog hotels with Skyping possibilities, spas, gyms, funeral services, fashionable clothes, and specialised diets (e.g. Coote, 2012; Winter and Harris, 2013; Grimm, 2014). Many of these human-like services for dogs are beginning to be a norm.

Pet dogs have also become important targets of marketing. Pet marketing experts constantly use the language of care in normalising and rationalising the use of commodities and services. They construct the pet dog as an individual and as a family member who has the right to consume and whose wellbeing is dependent on commodities. This is strengthened by statistics: over 92 % of American pet owners say that they see their pets as family members and as providers of love, companionship, company, and affection (*APPA National Pet Owners Survey, 2013/2014*: webpage). The relationship and the love pets provide are nurtured with commodities.

Marketers who increasingly address consumers through pets have also recognised these characteristics. Advertisements that associate a brand with dogs are known to favourably influence consumers' attitudes towards the brand (Lancendorfer et al., 2008: 384-391). Currently, so-called *neuromarketing* and *sensory marketing* increasingly use different kinds of brain-tracking tools in determining why consumers prefer some advertisements and products over others, and how they respond to marketing cognitively and affectively (e.g. Georges et al., 2014; Hultén et al., 2009). Researchers have been able to indicate that the human brain activates more when there is a dog in an advertisement than when there is an inanimate doll in it, for example (Looser et al., 2013: 799-805). The use of dogs in advertising thus follows ideas set forth by Vance Packard (1977/1957) already in the late-1950s: advertisers use psychological methods to tap into the unconscious desires of consumers in order to persuade them to buy products.

Current marketing trends utilise the idea of the dog as a 'love machine' effectively. Although the mechanical quality of the pet as a 'love machine' may invoke negative Cartesian interpretations about animals as machines, this was not the intention when the term was launched at the turn of the 20th century. The metaphor was connected to positive expectations about a better future that the newly industrialised society represented. In this discourse, the mechanical quality of the pet symbolised the ways in which new technological advancements, humans, and nature worked together to produce a better future. In contemporary marketing, the idea of creating a better future has shifted. The aim is now to find increasingly effective ways to convince consumers that buying into the world of dog commodities and services guarantees a better relationship with the dog.

Love fashion, love dogs! Or, on normalising pet dog consumerism

One area of consumerism where dogs have long been visible as marketers of desirable lifestyles and commodities is fashion. Humanising pets and constructing the emotional bond between dogs and humans has been part of fashion industry marketing since the early days. Dog clothing was and still is marketed to consumers as protection against the cold. Contemporary and historical accounts of dog clothing suggest, however, that most outfits were much more than protection (Kete, 1994: 84-85). Dogs have hardly ever worn underwear, shirts, handkerchiefs, dressing gowns, silk jackets, or rubber boots merely because they need protection. Rather, these and other unnecessary garments have been part of the project of humanising the pet dog. Garments and their marketing have produced the clothed dog as the middle-class family

member, blurred the difference between dogs and humans, and strengthened the emotional bond between the pet and humans.

Fashion media rationalised dog clothing as common sense and the glamorous fashion magazine *Vogue* associated certain dog breeds with certain fashions and luxurious life-styles. The magazine argued, for example, that a dog is an important ingredient in communicating the dog owner's fashion sense.³ In the 1920s, stylish terriers and greyhounds were agents in constructing the idea of the modern, independent and fashionable 'new woman', but as the century progressed, and ideas about desirable femininity changed, smaller dogs became increasingly popular. In the 1950s fashion images, for example, the decorative qualities of small lap dogs such as pugs, poodles, Pekinese and other Asian breeds, represented the idea of feminine sensuousness, luxuriousness and stylish living (Franklin, 1999: 88). *Vogue* also published several dog fashion advertisements and articles over the course of the 20th century with titles such as 'Love fashion, love her dog' (Watt, 2009), equating love for the dog with love for fashionable commodities.

Vogue also normalised the new inter-species family ideal by publishing sentimental articles and photographs of contemporary fashionable celebrities accompanying by their equally fashionable dogs. These stories regularly celebrate the emotional bond and the closeness between the human and the dog, which is visualised by dressing the human and the dog in matching outfits. Simultaneously, these articles and the accompanied images also enhance the pet owner's star status and desirability. Contemporary celebrity pet dogs are thus part of a longer historical continuum. The pet dog's decorative qualities and cuteness accentuate the celebrity's feminine sensuousness, luxuriousness and stylish living. The dog also enhances the celebrity's desirability and supports a reading of her image as soft and humane while also accentuating her conspicuous consumption habits. Together the celebrity and the dog normalise the practice of dressing one's dog and make it into an emotional endeavour. Dogs and celebrities are thus important marketers and ambassadors of style, fashion, dog breeds and the assumedly unique emotional relationship between humans and pet dogs.

3 Dog breeding, which had become increasingly popular since the late-19th century, was primarily determined by fashion rather than function (Ghirlanda et al., 2013). The bred and fashionably dressed decorative pet dog showcased the idea of human's godlike capability to mould nature. Breeding dogs and fashioning them was paralleled with creating new species that pleased the human.

Objectification or humanisation?

All this makes a good case for seeing dog fashions as an extreme example of the objectification of non-human animals for commercial purposes. Fancy clothes and dog accessories hide a harsh reality where pet dogs are easily abandoned because they fail to fulfil the idealised bond and present unwanted behaviour: hyperactivity, unwanted chewing, aggressiveness, or separation anxiety (e.g. Patronek et al., 1996: 572-581; Mondelli et al., 2004: 253-266).

Indeed, pet clothes may be seen as evidence of how pets fulfil human intentions, needs and fantasies, and how pets are always constructed for (and by) the human. It is easy to see the clothed pet dog as an extreme example of the 'tamed animal'. A fashioned pet dog is a creature that is not, by definition and in appearance, an animal. It is therefore no wonder that Donna Haraway (2008: 52) has claimed that the whole commodity culture targeting pet dogs has transformed the dog into a valuable commodity that solely serves the purposes of the capitalist market system. Haraway fears that providing pets with human-like services and things may result in forgetting the 'doggish needs' of the pet dog. It is true that a pet's human-like status rests on a paradox. Making pets more human-like by providing them with commodities and services familiar from the human world objectifies them. This, in turn, may make the dog as easily disposable as any other commodity – a matter which is supported by the gloomy statistics of abandoned, sheltered and killed pets (e.g. Fudge, 2008: 107-109).

However, the posthumanist perspective on pet dog commodities provides a thought provoking and perhaps a more positive viewpoint to dog consumerism. As I see it, pet dog commodities such as fashionable clothes are central tools through which humans communicate with, relate to, and negotiate with the pet. They are tools that help humans understand the pet, care for it, and, ultimately, recognise that pets and humans may not be as different as the Western humanist thought has thus far suggested. Dog fashions challenge the traditional hierarchical superiority of the human and highlight the nebulousness and porosity of the categories 'human' and 'animal'. Dog clothes accentuate the dog's petness, not its animality. By doing so they also construct it as a creature that needs to be cared for. The pet clothes make the pet visible in a new way. It is no longer just a silent creature that follows the human, but a being that does similar things as the human: dresses up and consumes. Living with humans in a consumerist culture transforms the pet dog like it has changed the human. The act of dressing the dog and buying into the pet commodity culture also transforms the relationship between the pet and the human. In materialist culture, clothing the pet shows dedication: a desire to make the pet feel at home.

Humanisation may be at the heart of dressing the dog, but it does not have to mean anthropocentrism. Humanisation means recognising the pet and its needs and acknowledging it as a full member of the household. The pet clothes materialise the posthuman idea according to which humans and pet dogs are inextricably entangled with each other. The human no longer is at the centre of the action calling the shots. Pet clothes de-centralise the idea of what it means to be human – and definitely, what it means to be a pet dog.

Posthumanist analysis of pet clothing accentuates the mutuality of the human–dog relationship. A good point of reference is Donna Haraway’s (2008) idea of humans and dogs as *companion species*. Companionship means friendship and all the feelings that go with it. Companionship also means that humans and dogs produce each other. Mutuality and companionship materialise in garments. Even though their fabrics, colours, patterns, styles and functions follow largely those of human clothes, the designs, cuts and fits follow the contours and body shape of the dog. The human and the animal intersect in the garments. This poses questions about the very structures of humanness, dogness and their shared identities as parents, children, and families. (Figures 1–2)

The garments are also *love objects* (Moran and O’Brien, 2014), shaped by the feelings constructed between the dog and the human. Dog-things embed the emotional potency of inter-species feelings. They are symbols and active participants in mediating the human–pet dog relationship. In this sense, they are parade examples of *emotional capitalism*: how the fashion industry mobilises the ideal emotional relationship constructed between the human and the pet, and gives it materialised and commodified form.



Figure 1. Dog clothing challenges the categorical boundaries of human–animal. Fashionable winter clothing for dogs, Tokyo, Japan, 2014. Photograph: Annamari Vänskä.



Figure 2. The erected mannequin dolls and a Peanut-outfit underline the dog's humanness. Tokyo, Japan 2014. Photograph: Annamari Vänskä.

Figures 1–2: While the styles, colours, and materials of dog fashions, often modelled on human mannequin dolls, underline the ‘humanness’ of the clothes (figure 1), the cuts, fits and designs of the clothes construct the garments as dog clothes (figure 2). Photographs: Annamari Vänskä.

‘7 tips for a happy dog’ – Or, the emotional language of pet consumerism

Emotional capitalism does not only materialise in dog clothes. The entire pet market is consumed by emotional and passionate language. It is the glue that binds humans, pet dogs and commodities together through persuasion. As Paris Hilton puts it, she indulges her doggies because she finds them *sweet*, *loves them*, and because they *deserve the best*. This kind of reasoning is not uncommon to

ordinary dog companies either. They also invite the consumer into the world of dog fashions by using affective and emotional language.

One example thereof is an English dog fashion brand *Love My Dog*. The affectionate relationship is already present in the name of the company and its founding narrative. *Love My Dog* was established in 2003 by the designer Lilly Shahravesh to cater for 'people who want to give their dogs the very best'. The kind of love the company talks about is entirely materialistic: on offer is everything from dog coats and hand-knitted sweaters made of pure new wool to 'dog beds and dog toys in original design in gorgeous fabrics...hand-cut and pinned, individually stitched and hand-finished' (LoveMyDog, 2015: webpage). The 'very best' thus refers to high-quality materials and to a production process, in which every little detail from the selection of fabrics to design and the individually hand-finished outcome has been thoroughly weighed. The message of the company is that it conceptualises the dog as an individual, as a persona with its own right who we, the humans, should cherish and respect. The personal and the affectionate touch materialise in the well-designed and hand-finished dog clothes. Individual garments and the presence of the loving human handiwork become semiotic-material symbols of love, care and affection. They also become the building blocks in constructing and strengthening the emotional bond that ties the human and the pet dog seamlessly together.

To support its brand value as a caring company, *Love My Dog* has also published a manual for dog owners: *7 top tips for a happy dog* (Shahravesh, 2012). According to it, one can recognise a 'happy dog' by looking at its 'body language'. A happy dog stands up straight with bright and shining eyes, and looks the human in the eye. A happy dog wags or sways its tail with 'gently parted lips – as if it were smiling'. The manual also cleverly intertwines happiness with its products that are defined as tools that keep the dog happy and content. These 'top tips' include, for example, giving the dog a specific toy if it suffers from separation anxiety; sprinkling 'a few drops of lavender oil onto a handkerchief and popping it in a cloth bag near his bed'; giving the dog a 'gentle massage' on returning home; creating a 'private territory and sanctuary' where the dog can relax; teaching the dog who is the pack-leader ('a happy dog knows its place') and dressing it 'for success', i.e. in weather-appropriate coats and 'wool or cashmere sweaters' that the company provides (Shahravesh, 2012: 1-9).

The peculiarity of the advice is that it sounds strikingly similar to the advice women's magazines conventionally provide on 'how to please your man'. Only here the pampered and pleased individual is the dog. In this scenario, the human becomes the servant of the dog. It is the human's duty to make the dog feel calm and relaxed, to make it a happy dog. This kind of dedication to making the pet

relaxed is in many ways shocking, but it is also a logical outcome when humans and companion animals are not seen as opposites but as creatures whose needs and wants overlap. It is also the outcome of the insistence on seeing humanity in companion animals, which contains the idea of equality between species.

The idea of equality is of course a problem when thinking about fashionable commodities that are not within every pet owner's reach. *Love My Dog* is not an exception – it is a high-end retailer of dog commodities. This is reflected in the price: A dog carrier bag, for example costs £ 220. However, the marketing language of *Love My Dog* is similar to the language that mainstream and more affordable companies use. The Finnish pet store chain *Musti ja Mirri*, for example, also markets its products by appealing to emotions and rationalising the wellbeing of dogs. *Musti ja Mirri* was established in 1988, and in the mid-1990s, it began expanding. In the new millennium, it franchised its business operations and it is now the largest chain of pet shops in Scandinavia. The company specialises in pet foods and accessories for dogs and other pets – like *Love My Dog*, it does not sell pets. *Musti ja Mirri* has many 'how-to' videos for pet owners on YouTube. The videos market food and clothing but they masquerade as educational videos where a 'dog expert' explains why the goods discussed are necessary for the dog. Some of the videos provide advice on what to feed the dog, others explain how and why to dress it. The videos centre on care and rationalise it by intertwining it with commodities.

For example, dressing a Boxer in a winter coat is justified by referring to the dog's short fur. In the video, the dog expert Annika explains:

It is a misconception that a large dog would not freeze. Especially, if we talk about shorthaired dogs that are not bred for Finnish weather conditions...It is very important that we, humans, take care of our dog that cannot tell us whether they are freezing or not. A coat is mandatory under -5° Celsius for any dog...and when the weather is -15° Celsius or lower, the paws should definitely be protected with, for example, rubber boots like these. (Musti ja Mirri, 2014: webpage)

Both *Love My Dog* and *Musti ja Mirri* exemplify how taking care of the pet dog is commercialised, and how the inter-species companionship is constructed as affectionate and caring through commodities. The examples also indicate how the emotional tie is measured in cash, how the pet market rests on appealing to the pet owner's affectionate relationship, and how the market is instrumental in commodifying it. The pet commodities and the various marketing strategies tap into emotions and create, circulate and imprint an ideal narrative with a message: the more we spend money on our dogs, the more we love and care for them. This kind of 'dog-talk' reveals something essential about the logic of pet

consumption specifically, but perhaps also about consumption more generally. Consuming is emoting.

Pet fashions as emotional consumption

Isn't it a fabulous feeling to see your dog looking happy and full of life? As dog owners ourselves here at LoveMyDog we thought it would be great to share some of the special ways that we make our dogs feel contented...Your dog is part of the family, and a happy dog makes for a happy home. Over the years...we've discovered some easy ways to help your dog feel contented and loved. (Shahravesh, 2012: 1)

As dog owners know, a happy dog makes a happy home, and, as the quote above indicates, the pet dog consumer culture is happy to wrap love, commodities, and a happy home together.

The idea of meshing emotions with commodities is by no means new, but pet fashion and its marketing language explicate how consumption builds on, creates, and materialises emotions. Pet consumerism is largely about happy emotions and their materialisation. My thought here follows ideas about emotions and capitalism put forth by Eva Illouz (1997, 2007), who calls the contemporary phase of capitalism as *emotional capitalism*. Illouz points out that what Marx (1990/1867) and his followers have defined as the a-emotionality of capitalism actually refers to negative emotions: anxiety, indifference, and guilt (2007: 2). She emphasises that emotions are not outside the capitalist logic as has been assumed. On the contrary, emotions are deeply ingrained in the language of economics. The making of capitalism went hand in hand with the making of an intensely specialised emotional culture and emotions became an indispensable part of economic conduct.

This is very tangible in the pet fashion industry, as I have shown above. It builds on the assumed and real emotions of pet owners, transforms them into commodities and services, and suggests that emoting is dependent on both. The whole industry builds on and capitalises on ideas about romantic love and the family – themes that Illouz positions at the core of consumerism. In her book *Consuming the romantic utopia* (1997), she argues that commodities have played a central role in the constitution of 'romantic love' between humans. Illouz demonstrates how, since the early-20th century, industries began promoting commodity-centred definitions of romance in furthering their own economic interests.

The key to the rise of romantic love lies in two major changes: in the social change from rigid class-based societies into more flexible, modern, individualist,

and capitalist societies in the aftermath of the French revolution, and in the decrease of human mortality (Illouz, 1997: 25-26). Some researchers (Hunt and Jacob, 2001) have even argued that the French revolution stirred an *affective revolution*, releasing 'a kind of seismic affective energy', which changed the political order of Europe and the ways in which humans conversed with each other. The demise of the feudal society facilitated the rise of 'affective individualism': a less authoritarian and a more companionate relationship between men, women, and children (Hunt and Jacob, 2001: 496-497). Developments in medicine made human life less precarious, and, in effect, stabilised emotional bonds between people and family members.

The pet consumer culture clearly follows this pattern. It taps into the emergence of breeding as a science and a tool for configuring the dog's bodily shape and character to fit human needs. The pet consumer culture was also integral to the formation of the modern middle-class nuclear family in the 19th century. In the 20th century, it also played an important role in the demise of the traditional (monogamous, heterosexual) family structure and in the reduced number of childbirths in the West. In fact, some argued in the 1960s that pets substituted 'real' i.e. human relationships and affected a decline in married life and the (human) family (Serpell, 1986). Interestingly, the critique coincided with great social upheavals and the revolution of social norms: second-wave feminism, gay liberation movement, sexual liberation, the pill, drug and popular culture. They changed the pet dog's function. It was no longer only linked to the middle-class nuclear family, but it was also seen as a symbol of new social relationships outside the traditional heterosexual family unit. It was also suggested that the pet dog resulted from the loss of communal life, anonymisation in the urban environment, from changed relationships between humans, and from increasing insecurity. In a changing social environment, pets are seen to provide comfort and to commit to long-term relationships with humans. Their love is defined as permanent and as unconditional, unlike the commitment and love of humans (Franklin, 1999: 84-85)⁴. In many cases, the lap dog is the new baby (Vänskä, 2014: 263-272): the change in the family structure has also changed the ways in which humans communicate with other species and who they see as being part of their immediate family.

4 Donna Haraway (2003: 33-35) disagrees. She argues that the common understanding of a dog's capacity for 'unconditional love' is a misconception that is abusive to both dogs and humans since both have a vast range of ways of relating to each other. She points out that the relationship involves aims to inhabit an inter-subjective world and to meet the other. Sometimes this relationship may earn the name of love. Further, Haraway (2003: 38) argues that dog's life as a pet is a demanding duty. The human may abandon the dog if it fails to deliver the fantasy of 'unconditional love'.

In capitalism, these ideas of the babyfied dog or the posthuman baby receive imaginary materialisations: doggie prams and dog diapers (Figures 3–4). The dog also affects larger purchases. In 2014, one of the main attractions of the annual Finnish housing fair was ‘HauHaus’, a house where the floor design, material choices and garden design were dictated by the dog’s needs (HauHaus, 2014: webpage; Paljakka, 2014). HauHaus is a concrete example of how acknowledging the dog as a full member of the household leads to the transformation of the home to suit the pet dog.

The pet dog challenges conventional humanist assumptions about families, parenting, and childhood. It also redefines the understanding of the consumer. The human is no longer the only consumer in the pet–human relationship, even though she or he may make the monetary transaction. The pet dog and the human are constructed as a unit that co-consumes and that has mutual consumer experiences. The human consumes in order to take the pet dog and its needs into account and the pet dog experiences, for good or for worse, the pleasures and pains of the commodities and services purchased for it.

Pet consumerism is also part of a new kind of consumer ethic described by Colin Campbell (1987: 8, 25). He argues that the ideology of Romanticism in the 19th century facilitated the emergence of the new, highly emotional, modern middle-class consumer. This new type of a consumer was not solely driven by reason, or by the so-called protestant ethic or asceticism. Romantic consumerism was – and it still is, perhaps more now than ever before – a hedonistic activity, legitimated by the search for pleasure and the need to experience imaginary gratification in material form (Campbell, 1987: 99-201). This is clearly an important underlying ideology and a driving force in pet consumerism as well.



Figure 3. A doggie sofa for Christmas? Tokyo, Japan 2014. Photograph: Annamari Vänskä.



Figure 4. In a dog beauty salon. After trimming which takes 3–4 hours, a portrait of the new look is taken. Tokyo, Japan 2014. Photograph: Annamari Vänskä.

To summarise: if the emergence of consumer culture promoted romance and sex that made the (heterosexual) domestic family in the 19th century, the contemporary pet dog consumer culture deconstructs the family and its anthropocentrism. It also challenges the idea of emotion as a human-centred concept and promotes inter-species love by widening and altering the modern concepts of ‘family’, ‘parenting’, the ‘child’ and the ‘home’. Pet dog fashions construct dogs as co-consuming love machines and as eternal children who never grow out of their original innocence. Pet dogs function as the promise that the human – the adult in the pet dog relationship – can reach out to this nostalgic, ever-lost original state of natural being, which is common to all inhabitants of this planet. Pet consumerism highlights the nature-culture continuum and capitalises on it. It also helps to shift the focus to thinking about the post-naturalistic order of the world and inter-species relations. In this world, pet dog fashions are not only posthuman commodities; they are also post-romantic commodities that materialise the promise of fulfilling and permanent inter-species love. This makes dog clothing ‘positional goods’, appreciated precisely for their emotional value (Frank and Cook, 1995). It also makes pet keeping essentially an emotional culture.

Pet consumerism and affective capitalism

But how do pet dog commodities and the marketing language connect to affective capitalism? First, by explaining how emotions are distributed between humans and dogs through material objects and second, by drawing attention to the ways in which the emotional attachment between humans and pet dogs is constructed in marketing speak. Pet commodity culture indicates that emotions

do not reside in commodities, pets or humans, and that emotions are merely expressed. Feelings are produced as material effects, as commodities. As Sarah Ahmed (2004: 120-121) writes, 'feelings appear in objects, or indeed *as* objects'. They are also constituted in and through language, which explains the necessity of these objects for pet owners. Emotions do things. They are powerful performative tools. Pet commodities and the language that defines them are materialised instances of emotions and include the promise of a future happy life.

The fashionable value-added pet dog is central to the history and presence of emotional capitalism. Pet dog commodities are an instance of emotional capitalism in that they transform the emotional and the intimate relationship between the pet dog and the human into an object that can be evaluated, quantified, and measured in economic terms. Following Illouz (2007), pet dog commodities and their marketing language open up a space for analysing the deeply emotional nature of pet consumerism and how feelings are mobilised in emotional capitalism. The human-pet dyad is defined simultaneously as emotional and economic, which means that they define and shape each other. This dual process exemplifies emotional capitalism.

The commodified emotions and dog fashions explain how pets and humans are linked together by capitalism. They undo the categories of human and dog and show, very concretely, how dogs and humans form a continuum and are, thus, not opposites. They also show that humans and dogs share emotions, and suggest that emotionality is not limited to the human. Pet commodity marketers capitalise on the posthumanist idea that humans and dogs are inseparable. Pets and humans are linked in many ways, and under the rules of contemporary global capitalism, they are glued together and transformed into co-consumers by appealing to emotions. Emotions are the driving force of capitalism, but they are also tools that verbalise, rationalise, commodify, and commercialise the intermediate space between humans and pet dogs.

The pet dog commodity culture also draws attention to how fashion deconstructs and reassembles the categories of the human and the pet. Pet clothes are but the latest consumerist example indicating how the human has always co-evolved, co-existed, and collaborated with non-human animals, especially with dogs. They are also tangible reminders of how the human is characterised precisely by this indistinction from the dog (see also Haraway 2003). If pet dogs can open up a space for analysing and undoing the anthropocentric order of humanism, then the co-consuming pet dog opens up a space for analysing and undoing the anthropocentric order of capitalism. It shows their similarity: how both with their emotional bonds are cleverly produced in the well-oiled machinery of the

capitalist system. Their agency is also similarly limited to choosing from a predetermined set of commodities and services that have already been ascribed with value, meaning, and emotion.

Should we then conclude that emotional capitalism has finally deconstructed the dichotomy between human and non-human animals? Does the agency-possessing and co-consuming pedigree pet represent a posthumanist happy ending? Indeed, pet dog commodity culture prompts us to see dogs as creatures that possess human qualities.⁵ Personification, which the fashionable pet clothes so well materialise, is one way to overcome the hierarchy between humans and pets. They transform the pet into a fully-fledged family member with an equal right to consume and to lead a happy life. It remains to be seen whether the continuous expansion of the pet market ultimately remodels the pet dog as the new *consumer citizen*.

Of course, the image of a pet dog liberated by capitalism is an ironic fantasy – one that the capitalist system forcefully promotes by appealing to emotions. The truth is much messier; we are faced with new dichotomies and hierarchies that demand critical attention. Nicole Shukin (2009) addresses questions about the complex, historical entanglements of ‘animal’ and ‘capital’ and the current anthropocentric order of capitalism with the phrase *animal capital*. According to Shukin, Marxist and post-Marxist accounts of capitalism have largely ignored the multiple ways in which non-human animals relate to capitalist biopower. Shukin points out how modern capitalist societies are literally and symbolically built on animals: on animals as usable flesh and materiality in the meat and fashion industries, and on animals as cultural signs or representations in the marketing of commodities.

The pet commodity business clearly capitalises on animals. But rather than using pet dogs as usable flesh and materiality, it constructs the dog as a capitalist animal. The pampered pedigree pooch embodies the triumph of capitalism: it does not only embody the fantasy of nature as controllable and malleable by the human hand, but also the fantasy of a liberated new consumer, a model posthuman citizen who enjoys its postromantic relationships with humans. The co-consuming pet dog thus also opens up a space for a critique of animal hierarchies. The pet dog, which is conceptually not an animal, is superior to wild and farm animals. The pet is a privileged animal, favoured due to its similarity to humans. The pet’s removed animality is materialised in pet dog fashions and the

5 Personification of the dog is not only a recent development. David Grimm (2014: 179-227) charts the history of the pet dog’s personhood and argues that the first signs of dog’s subjectivity are to be found in trials against animals in the Middle Ages when it was common to take any (domestic) animal to court for its ‘bad deeds’.

clothed pet resembles the human – much like the pigs in Georg Orwell’s novel *Animal farm* (1972/1945). The fashioned pet dog summarises Orwell’s idea that ‘all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others’ and encourages further research that gives tools for undoing the unjust dichotomies between pets and other animals.

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