

‘PLEASE TELL ME WHEN YOU ARE IN PAIN’:
A (HEARTBREAKING) STORY OF CARE, CONNECTION AND FEMALE CANINE
COMPANIONSHIP

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ABSTRACT

We are lacking of critical research on animal-human relations and cross-species companionship in the field of organization studies. Arguably, we are not thinking adequately about animal kinship, our organized relations with animals, or interspecies communication within our field. This exploratory paper aims at reflecting upon the affective and embodied qualities of canine-human relations. In this paper, we will address the topic of canine bitches, female canine companionship and our experiences of caring for and writing together with our beloved dogs. Specifically, we ask what the underdeveloped area of canine-human companionship could potentially offer and teach the field of organization studies.

In this paper, we share an autoethnographic story of one companionship between one of the authors and her dog, who are living through borderlines between life and death, mourning and joy, and selfishness and surrendering. We find this as a way to develop questions around trans-species communication, human-animal companionship as well as silenced embodiments, struggles and ethical questions in a ‘shameful’ research area. Moreover, this paper argues that

the largely undertheorized area of dog-human companionship could raise important feminist concerns about silenced topics within our field, such as caring, touching, shame and mourning, and thus contribute to ways of developing and considering the same. Finally, this paper offers a critical reflection of the potentials and limitations of alternative research that recognizes our gendered, organized relations with animals in the field of organization studies.

Keywords: companionship, feminist dog-writing, bitch, heartbreak, ethics, death, autoethnography.

INTRODUCTION

‘To be one is always to *become with many*’ (Haraway, 2007: 4)

‘There is too much humanism in organizational studies’ Sayers (2016: 1) recently wrote, and we totally agree. As the above quote argues, living with human-animal companionships is at the very heart of moving from the stereotypes of lone “authoritative” human individuals towards more relational understanding of the life-worlds and (inter)actions in organizations (cf. McHugh, 2012). Thus, what happens, if we choose to move away from dominantly *human* considerations of organization towards potentially more open-minded, unknown and radically *inclusive* approaches? Recently, a number of researchers (see e.g., O’Doherty, 2016; Sayers, 2016; Tallberg, 2014) have discussed the dominant neglect of looking into our organized relations with other living non-human agents, and the ways in which animals actively construct, shape and participate in organization in a variety of different ways. Importantly, we are lacking of responsible and critical research on animal-human relations and cross-species companionship in the field of organization studies, to which this paper aims at giving novel insights. Specifically, this paper responds to the recent ‘call of the animal’ in the organisational academy (see Sayers, 2016), a call that aims to ‘voice’, see and acknowledge the plethora of different animals and animal agency within our field.

What happens, if we as researchers, pet keepers and feminist dog-writers include the dogs of our heart and our affective relations with them in the study of *organization*? What, if anything, could we learn from the daily interactions, affective ties and personal bonds between our pets and us petkeepers? In this paper, we inquire into the largely undertheorized area of female canine companionship. We seek inspiration from feminist dog-writing methodology (e.g. McHugh, 2012) as a way to raise important questions around ridiculed, ‘shameful’ and feminized research topics, vulnerability, trans-species communication, silenced embodiment, gendered relations and affective companionship within our scholarly community. Building

upon insights from the interdisciplinary fields of critical animal studies and feminist dog writing in specific, this paper takes seriously the affective and intense experiences of living and interacting with canines.

‘Dogs lead us into a world that is sometimes kind and gentle but that can be frightening, frustrating, and confusing, too’, Knapp (1998: 7) writes. ‘The dog is said to embody the virtues of trust, faithfulness, empathy, and loyalty’ Kuzniar (2006: 6) continues. The faithful, melancholic and thus often *idealized* dog has been a largely popular subject of representation in popular literature and academia, too. This paper reflects upon our relations with actual ‘flesh-and-blood’ dogs, not representations of dogs. Inspired by feminist dog writing methodology (e.g., Haraway, 2003, 2007; McHugh, 2012), this paper argues that dog-human relations and female canine companionship could tell us something valuable about the complexities of experiencing attachment in *organization*, including often overlooked topics such as shame, touch, care, intimacy, compassion and mourning (see also Haraway, 2007; Kuzniar, 2006). The inclusion of feminist dog writing and female canine companionship opens up intriguing and important questions about gendered performativity, ‘uncontrollable’ and monstrous embodiment (e.g., McHugh, 2012), as well as ethics and care in organizational life more broadly.

By turning to feminist dog writing for inspiration, and by focusing on one personal, autoethnographic story from our lives together with our four-legged friends, our aim with this paper is twofold. First, we explore how using autoethnographic stories and experiences of sometimes complicated, often intense and ‘heartbreaking’ dog-human companionship could contribute to the development of empathetic, ethical and affect-intense approaches to organization. Second, we ask what insights from feminist dog writing methodology could offer the field of organization studies more broadly. As such, this paper might come across as marginal to our scholarly community, especially as dogs are largely considered as unworthy of our scholarly reflection. Nevertheless, and exactly for this reason, we wish to go against this view and critically reflect upon the subtle, gendered, affective and sensory-driven relations between our dogs and us as pet keepers, researchers and feminist dog-writers.

Thus, our paper makes a methodological contribution by illustrating how feminist dog writing as an affective, embodied and relational activity (see Haraway, 2007; Thoresen and Öhlén, 2015) can lead to the production of rich, personal and *alternative* research material and interpretations in the field of organization studies. Therefore, we argue that building research

topics based on a researcher's personal experiences of living and working together with her four-legged friends can lead to affective and even 'heartbreaking' reflections and analytical findings that may be insightful for our research field and community (see Whiteman, 2010). At the same time, 'voicing' our beloved bitches and our emphatic relations with them appears hugely problematic and difficult for so many reasons. How can we – in a responsible and clever manner – voice someone of a different species who cannot directly speak to us? How can we relate to the dog's muteness and otherness without being naïve or sentimental? How can we even approach something so complicated as interspecies communication? In this paper, we wish to discuss the many methodological challenges arising from our approach, too.

This paper is structured as follows. The first part of the paper focuses on opening up the emerging theoretical discussions of animals in organisation studies and dog-human companionship in specific. Here, we wish to discuss our approach to dog-human companionship and dog-human relations, as well as the confusing ways in which we try to voice our complex relations with our dogs. In the methodology section, we approach the feminist dog-writing methodology, as well as discuss doing research that breaks one's heart. The second part digs deeper into the complex and 'painful' story about companionship of one of us authors together with the dog called 'Kerttu', by doing so, opens up a space for organizational researchers to reflect upon the future possibilities to explore organized dog-human-relations, and companionship with animals further. This paper concludes by a discussion of what our personal narratives could tell about organization, and what feminist dog-writing could offer the field of organization studies more broadly.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

On dogs in the popular and academic literature

'Whom and what do we touch when we touch' our dogs (Haraway, 2007, 5)?

Dogs have been subject to much academic and popular writing. The variety of the topics around the dogs and their owners demonstrates how the animal-human relations holds a lot of potential for research among organisational scholars as well. Dogs introduce us to rituals, wilderness, experiences of attachment, 'wildness and nurturance and trust and joy', Knapp (1998: 6) suggests. Dogs and their relationships with humans have been researched actively by some social scholars as well (e.g. Brooks et al., 2012; Jackson-Grossblat et al., 2016; Knight and Edwards, 2008; Maharaj and Haney, 2015; McCarthy, 2015; Wood et al., 2005). In their article,

Jackson-Grossblat et al., 2016 explore the therapeutic experiences of dog owners who interacted with their dogs in empathetic ways. The positive effects of pets for humans in a wider community, studied under the concept of 'social capital', that exceeds the limits of individual pet ownership has been touched upon Wood et al. (2005). In line with these two studies mentioned above, the role of companion animals in long-term condition management has been studied by Brooks et al. (2012) and the significance of dog ownership by Knight and Edwards (2008) and Maharaj et al. (2015).

Furthermore, there has been scientific discussions on whether dogs resemble their owners (e.g., Payne and Jaffe, 2005; Roy and Christenfeld, 2004; 2005). These studies suggest that when people choose their dog, they seek one that resembles them at least somehow, and with a purebred this selection and 'true match' is said to be easier to do. Moreover, the study of Redmalm (2015) explores the popularity of the Chihuahua breed as 'a holy anomaly' which is used in rituals and myths 'to alleviate the tension-filled binary oppositions and stereotypes' in Western world. Also Knapp (1998) discusses dogs as shamans. In this paper, we try to move away from an understanding of the dog as a holy animal. Finally, in his article, McCarthy (2015) studies the dog legislation of dangerous dogs in England and Wales.

Dogs remain 'a safe object of chitchat but not of scholarly reflection' Kuzniar (2006, 2) writes. Why do we find dogs, our closest companions animals worthy of being 'voiced' in the field of organization studies, then? 'To imagine blurring the distinctions between human and beast is to enter into the territory of shame', Kuzniar (2006: 9) continues. Indeed, we acknowledge the dangers, career-wise, of engaging with the topic of dogs. Meanwhile, Sage et al. (2016: 2) notice that animals might constitute 'human capacities to organize', and as dog owners and dog keepers, we continuously find our dogs triggering us to act and organize in a variety of different ways. Meanwhile, our dogs bring us joys, feelings of security, calmness and evoke feelings of mutual respect. According to Kuzniar (2006: p.), especially women find their dogs vital servants in restoring 'moments of centeredness and equilibrium to the wounded, melancholic self'. Dogs remain a popular yet morally suspect, 'fluffy' or trivialized scholarly topic, and academics largely despise 'the sentimental projections of human emotion onto the pet' (ibid, 2006: 2). How can we meditate on our affective relations to the animals that we care for and are entirely dependent on our care, resisting anthropomorphization and sentimentality (e.g., Knapp, 1998; Kuzniar, 2006)?

Animals as our companions in the field of organisation studies

Animals are present and *active* in the daily lives of organizations and therefore, deserve our scholarly attention, too. It is surprising how animals are deliberately silenced among organisational scholars even if they are not voiceless at all (Sayers, 2016). ‘Much of the critical academic study of our organized relations with animals is found in sociology and geography, and particularly science studies (Callon, 1986; Haraway, 2003)’, Labatut et al. (2014, 1) point out. Despite certain more recent studies on animals in organization (see for example O’Doherty, 2015; Sayers, 2016; Tallberg, 2014) and the emerging interest in the interdisciplinary fields of human animal studies (HAS) (see e.g., Wilkie, 2015), critical animal studies (e.g., REF) as well as feminist dog-writing (e.g., Haraway, 2003, 2007; McHugh, 2012) to which we attach this paper, we find surprisingly few empirical investigations or theoretical reflections of animal participation in organization. This denial of the sensing, feeling and active animal as a subject with *agency* (see Haraway, 2007) is perhaps surprising, especially considering how ‘the popular culture industry capitalizes on this need to come closer’ to the animal (Kuzniar, 2006: 3). Put differently, animals have been treated as capitalist commodities or objects of desire, but rarely in more ethically grounded terms.

In the more recent years, the emergence of Human-Animal Studies (HAS) has brought animals to the social sciences. Broadly speaking, this interdisciplinary field reminds us of the ‘entangled nature of interspecies interfaces, networks and encounters’ (Wilkie, 2015: 323). Although animals have remained in the shadow in organisational theory (Sayers, 2016: 2), some organisational and social scholar have taken them and the study of relational human-animal boundary work to the very focus of their studies (e.g., Baran et al., 2012; Cudworth, 2015; Sage et al., 2016). In an article, Cudworth (2015) explores the various forms through which animals are subjected to the practices of violence and killing. In a similar fashion, Baran et al., (2012) have studied the ‘dirty work’ of animal-shelter workers who conduct animal euthanasia, ‘a stigmatized task with both a moral and physical taint (owing to its proximity to death)’ (ibid, 2012: 607). It is thus a combination of physical, technical and emotional acts which put the employee ‘in direct contact with death’ (Baran et al., 2012: 607). Also Tallberg (2014) has studied rescue dogs, and thus touched upon the topic of dirty work.

In this paper, we consider human-canine companionship an intriguing, underdeveloped and utterly confusing area for us to further meditate on the ethical, embodied and philosophical relations between the self and the animal Other (see also Kuzniar, 2006), entangled human and

non-human agency in organization, as well as silenced, 'othered' and beastly/monstrous forms of gendered embodiment. Here, we write as about our experiences of female canine companionship with our female dogs. The 'bitch' as a noun and verb is a powerful and gendered notion in itself (McHugh, 2012) that deserves further critical consideration in our field. We will return to this notion as we proceed with the paper. In this paper, we work from the assumption that human agency is always co-constructed (e.g., Satama and Huopainen, 2016) together with and in relation to many other living and breathing non-human agents on this planet (e.g., Cudworth, 2015: 1). In other words, human embodiment and other 'multiple materialities' (Dale and Latham, 2014: 166) always relationally shape organization.

How do we approach the broad notion of companionship, then? To Haraway (2007), companionship represents a form of lived co-presence of trust and acceptance, an experience of gifting and multiple joining, in which buddies, companions or mates of different species participate. In dog-human relationality, then, Haraway considers both parts to be real flesh-and-blood social subjects, not representations. In this paper, we join the group of writers 'who refuse to categorize the female-canine experience as either sentimental or, quite the opposite, sexually illicit' (Kuzniar, 2006: 100). Rather, we work from the assumption that 'passion, intensity and tacit knowledge' (ibid, 2006: 100) as well as insecurities, struggles and uncertainty play a part in this relation, negotiated from moment-to-moment.

In this paper, we attach companionship to discussions of aesthetic leadership. There is a power dimension involved in this relationship. To begin with, we view all leadership as aesthetic leadership, simply because our senses and embodiment always already shape and constitute our subjective understandings of leadership. Aesthetics is a complex yet valuable term, widely discussed among organizational scholars (e.g., Hancock, 2005; Ropo and Sauer, 2008; Strati 1992). Aesthetics can be widely understood as the epistemological approach focused on sensory-based knowledge, which is based on felt experiences and involves perception, imagination, intuition (Ewenstein and Whyte, 2007; Ropo and Sauer, 2008). In this paper, we view aesthetics and embodiment as concepts that complement each other. In our view, aesthetics involves senses, emotion and memory, while embodiment is about felt meanings in and through the body. Taken together, these two concepts form an epistemological perspective that highlights the experiential ways of knowing present in canine human companionship. Therefore, aesthetics involves bodily gestures, experiences and sensations, and thus, would not exist without the body, whereas the body receives and transmits aesthetic experiences,

emotions, sensations and gestures. As Ropo and Sauer (2008: 567) write, 'leadership is socially and *bodily constructed through senses*'. Here, we look at companionship as the aesthetic relationship between dogs and the dog-owners as built on fundamentally embodied and fine-grained details of interaction.

The sensory-based, embodied view on leadership-related research topics has gained growing attention during the past decades. In line with Koivunen and Wennes (2011: 56) we view aesthetic leadership as 'a relational activity between participants, artefacts and objects' that furthermore, 'attempts to describe the subjective felt meanings as experienced by leaders and followers' (Hansen et al., 2007: 552). As such, aesthetic leadership is a valuable concept for interpreting and understanding social life and dog-human relations in particular. The aesthetics of leadership is based on three dimensions: relational activities, aesthetic judgement and embodiment (Koivunen and Wennes, 2011: 56). Aesthetic leadership has been attached to the phenomena of relational (e.g., Fairhurst and Grant, 2010; Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien, 2012) and embodied leadership¹ (e.g., Bathurst and Cain, 2013; Ladkin, 2008; Ladkin and Taylor, 2010; Ropo et al., 2013; Sinclair, 2005). The embodiment of leadership is thus about 'symbolic meanings, inherent power issues and felt experiences' (Ropo et al., 2013: 379) which all affect the ways of how we approach and perceive the social world as embodied beings. Furthermore, some organizational scholars (e.g., Culiffe and Eriksen, 2011; Crevani, 2015; Raelin, 2014) have explored the relational nature of leadership practice. The collective approach to leadership argues that 'the self is as much a product of interactions with others as it is a self-defined unit' (Raelin, 2014: 19). We highlight the negotiable and collaborative nature of human-dog companionship and view this on-goingly negotiated practice as a dynamic and complex, deriving from joint (inter)actions of humans and non-humans.

Bitches, bitching and dog keeping as a gendered practice

'How can one respond personally to the simultaneity of love and rage surrounding "bitch" (meaning all of the theoretical along with lived relations of gender, sex, and species that this term entails?)' (McHugh, 2012: 617)

We notice that artists and writers have for long written about dogs, and these writings reveal gendered patterns, such as stereotypical images of pity and ridicule. This paper has been informed by the writings of Donna Haraway (e.g., 2003, 2007), and her companion species

¹ Embodied leadership refers to ontology of relational constructionism and aesthetic epistemology of sensuous such as affects, emotions, intuition and all other bodily sensations (see Ropo et al., 2013: 378).

manifesto. This manifesto develops ideas about academic writing as a relational endeavour based on companionship, care and connection rather than authority, competition and "the survival of the fittest" (see also McHugh, 2012). The word 'bitch' is in itself interesting and powerful: it animalizes, denigrates and genders female forms and female embodiment in literature and language. At the same time, 'embodied "bitches" become a powerful conceptual site for poststructuralist and feminist philosophy' McHugh (2012, 617) argues. In this paper, we want to elaborate on these ideas further. As a noun, "bitch" actually 'renders monstrous ideas about the performance of femininity', McHugh (2012: 618) suggests. As a verb, then, "bitching" equals critiquing and complaining, and thus holds the potential to become a powerful tool for change.

McHugh (2012) suggests that female writers writing about sharing their lives with canine bitches render visible intimacies, joys and compassion, insecurities, and feelings of embarrassment and exhibitionism. Specifically, Kuzniar (2006) demonstrates how women's writings about living with dogs tend to differ from macho narratives that involve successful men, hunters, and their loyal dogs. For instance, Vladimir Putin is largely portrayed with his black Lab, and stories tell that he used the dog to scare Angela Merkel in one of their meetings. Moreover, the popular *Lassie* is an adventurous story about socialization and a maturing boy (Kuzniar, 2006).

Women, then, writing about dogs are somewhat seen as weird, incapable of negotiating human relationships, and finding (human) love. 'The primary targets of abuse across cultures, continents, and centuries remain childless and post-menopausal women with pet dogs', writes McHugh (2012: 618). What McHugh (2012) calls 'traditional writing about women with pet dogs' illustrate the presence of gendered topics and such as "dog-mom" stereotypes (perhaps similar to crazy cat ladies, stereotypes of "rich bitches" or bourgeois housewives with small dogs (for instance, think of Paris Hilton and her Chihuahua), "purse pooches" and other 'denigrated' and despised female embodiments.

Despite of the great variety of the existing studies of animal-human relations mentioned above, there is a need for studies that would take seriously the gendered, aesthetic, embodied and affective dimensions of negotiating a dog-owner relation in specific. In this paper, we focus on these neglected aspects, and offer a refreshing viewpoint of looking at this unique, personal and intimate companionship between a dog and her owner. Next, we will discuss the other theoretical notion of this study, namely dog-human companionship that 'animalizes' and gender

humans. Therefore, we address this relationship in terms of female canine companionship.

METHODOLOGY: USING FEMINIST DOG WRITING AND AUTOETHNOGRAPHY TO CREATE A RESEARCH APPROACH THAT BREAKS ONES HEART

‘Almost everything that really matters to you... brings up the problem of the simultaneity of love and rage’ (Haraway, quoted in Williams 2009-10: 139)

This study relies on critical sensory methodology (Mason and Davies, 2009; Warren, 2008: 563) which highlights the lived, sensuous experiences of the researcher. More generally, our study is autoethnographic, and articulates an embodied, affective, relational ontology. The empirical material of this paper derives from autoethnographic diary notes of Suvi and Astrid, the two authors of this paper. We share many things in common: we are researchers, friends, mothers, and dog owners. We both share our lives with purebred retrievers: Suvi has two Golden Retrievers, Sarnell Velvet Pearl, ‘Helmi’, and Greenhill’s Coralie, ‘Kerttu’. Astrid lives and works together with her two Labs, Snackbar's Rinse and Spin known as ‘Saga’, and Snackbar's Sweet Treat to Wetten, ‘Selma’.

The autoethnographic material focuses on the story of a dog called ‘Kerttu’, owned by Suvi, one of the researchers of this paper. Kerttu had had three mysterious infections after she was one year old, and was diagnosed with the fatal chronic kidney disease (CKD) at the age of one and a half years. CKD is a progressive disease for which there is no cure (College of Veterinary Medicine, 2016). Her CKD was diagnosed after several investigations by many veterinarian experts. Therefore, it is fatal from months to years, and as the time when Kerttu was diagnosed by CKD without any clinical signs, her life prognosis was given from a month to a couple of years. Being an active and happy, young dog with no visible symptoms yet, the diagnoses was, of course, hard to accept and handle (and still is) for Suvi and all the other close (human) friends of Kerttu. Here, we focus on the controversial sensations, affects and experiences around this difficult situation in which the dog owner knows her dog has a fatal disease of which she has the responsibility to take care of and most important, make the difficult decisions of the life and death of her dog. Therefore, this story offers insights to these controversies, which explore tensions between ‘animal inarticulateness and human morals, between the silent or silenced animal’ (Kuzniar, 2006: 9).

There are several advantages in writing emotionally-laden scholarly articles in academia even if ‘grief or heartbreak is rarely captured within our management texts’ (Whiteman, 2010: 331).

As Whiteman argues, ‘heartbreak can help scholars analytically and emotionally connect with their data, the people they study, and shape the purpose of their work and life’ (2010: 328). Therefore, the value of scholarly heartbreak lies in its capacity to transmit powerful and emotional experiences to scholarly audience and bring forth the acknowledgement of the sensory-based side of the researchers, research participants and the readers. Moreover, ‘a careful acknowledgement of scholarly heartbreak can help to more authentically contextualize the subjectivity of our representation of both research findings and management theory’ (Whiteman, 2010: 335). In this paper, we aim at describing and analysing the touching case of Kerttu and in this way, we may ‘be better able to ground our work in the reality of the human condition’ (Whiteman, 2010: 335) and its interrelation with non-human animals.

Meanwhile, we must – of course – remain careful about ‘sentimentalizing’ our personal and affective relations to our dogs. With this in mind, we acknowledge that there are several methodological challenges involved in this study. First, strong emotional reactions in research are not always an advantage in research as they can prevent from being able to analytically focus on the research findings and distance oneself from one’s personal grief. For Suvi, it was hard and very sentimental to produce autoethnographic material about this issue as the diagnoses of Kerttu was given just a month ago before starting this study. On the other hand, writing autoethnographic diary notes offered for Suvi a platform to share her painful thoughts, memories and experiences and therefore, worked as a kind of therapeutic activity for her. Second, the challenge of ‘aesthetic muteness’ (e.g., Warren, 2008) is present in all sensory-based research topics that involve non-verbal activities that are hard to explain or put into words. In what follows, we turn to our stories.

A STORY OF FEMALE CANINE COMPANIONSHIP: LIVING TOGETHER WITH ‘KERTTU’

‘Dogs occupy the niche between our fantasies about intimacy and our more practical, realistic needs in relation to others, our needs for boundary and autonomy and distance’, Knapp (1998: 210) suggests. I always knew I wanted a dog, and funnily, through my friends who had Golden Retrievers, I fell in love with this breed. I have had three Goldens by now, Kerttu is the third one. To me, a Golden Retriever represented the intelligent, friendly and versatile working dog, the perfect family dog, therapy dog, and assistant dog all embodied in one intelligent and lovable figure. ‘Getting a dog can be such an intensely personal matter, all tied up with that Disney ideal’ (Knapp, 1998) critically writes. Was I desiring fantasies and dreams of a perfect life, too?

Kerttu is a happy and lively, almost two-year-old Golden, living with me, my fiancée and one-year-old boy, and Helmi, the 8-year-old Golden from another kennel. Kerttu has a funny and very special character. She wants to be always in the centre of the actions of our family and interacts actively with us humans in our mundane life. Kerttu has helped me to see the fine-grained details of joy when jogging in the woods, and she has proved me how important it is to be present ‘in the present’, to live *in* this moment. Even if Kerttu is friendly and seems to love humans a lot, sometimes she shows signs of sensitivity and extreme nervousness to other people and dogs.

It is hard to write these reflections down, but I do it now. Thus, it was Friday morning. Usually when I woke up my two beloved female Golden Retrievers, Helmi and Kerttu, aged 8 and 2, always followed me upstairs. But this time Kerttu stayed downstairs on her own bed, and came upstairs a moment later than usually. This seemed somewhat strange for me. I sensed something was wrong but didn’t know what and therefore, I thought it was just a silly piece of my imagination. Maybe I had become too sensitive as the sister of Kerttu had been diagnosed by kidney failure and euthanized just a week ago.

Kerttu had something seriously wrong with her kidneys, as well, the veterinarians told me. I couldn’t believe this was happening. This was one of the gravest situations that I have had with my dogs. I felt pain and hopelessness. Why me and my dog? I did not know how to think positively despite of these desperately devastating diagnosis. What had I done to deserve to be in this situation? Why me and my dog? Why were all the other puppies healthy (despite of one who needed to be euthanized at the age of 11 months for the same disease)? These questions didn’t leave me alone for months and I felt overwhelmed by being surrounded by these questions. The vets were unsure about the diagnosis and didn’t give me any life prognosis for Kerttu as ‘she was doing seemingly incredible fine’, but this uncertainty only made me feel worse.

Finally, six months later, in February 2016, we drove to Helsinki for further examinations to find out what exactly could be wrong with Kerttu. There was a 5th year student from the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine who interviewed me for an hour before taking Kerttu for further examinations that would last for the whole day. The diagnosis was stunning and chocking: she had chronic kidney disease, IRIS stage 2. She was given from 1 month to a couple of years of time to live. For the following week, I was struggling with mixed emotions of relief and anxiety; on one hand, it was relieving to talk finally with a veterinarian who was very

professional and seemed to know a lot about this disease. On the other hand, I felt so sad for Kerttu and for our companionship. What if she lived for a month only? For me it felt absolutely impossible to let her go so soon. The responsibility and the power that I have over Kerttu's life is frightening. How do I know when it's time for her to go and for me to decide to put her on sleep and to fly away? Will she show me somehow if she is suffering? I hope she will.

It's May now and three months have passed by since the serious diagnosis of Kerttu. She has been totally fine, with no clinical signs yet. Already by now, she has taught me many important aspects of life. First, when I look at her, I can sense the excitement and enjoyment of life and her attitude to not worry about the following day. That is something animals are better at than us humans. The ability to live fully in the present moment is a real talent of Kerttu! Second, there is no need to be afraid of death. Everybody needs to face the death anyway. Actually, it would be horrible to live forever, there would be no point in living then... still, it took two weeks to handle the heartbroken 'death sentence' Kerttu got from the university hospital.

I heard from one of the owners of the siblings of Kerttu that the breeder hadn't informed about the disease the other owners of the same litter even if she promised me to already a half a years ago. This might be a familiar form of CKD, say the veterinarians and therefore, the owners of Kerttu's siblings should have been informed about this. Some of the owners reacted furiously and were very angry about the breeder's negligence and unethical behaviour. I don't know what to think about the breeder now. Breeding is business for them, but at least for me, the owner, it is a far more complex matter, as we are dealing with living creatures and human-animal companionships.

It is strange how during the past few months my initial affects of deep grief, despair and frustration have changed into the sensations of great gratitude, happiness and joy. My senses have become more sharpened. I have become prepaid for the death of my dog, and view it now as an inseparable part of our lives. I feel now deeper companionship and being in the world with my dog, emotionality in the everyday moments with her, and some kind of 'silent' healing.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The animal has been dominantly absent within the field of organization studies, and our field has largely overlooked our organized relations with animals (see O'Doherty, 2016; Sayers, 2016 as exceptions). In order for us to talk about organization, we cannot limit our scope to human beings or human actions. Today, the notion of 'inclusive leadership' has become another

fashionable buzzword in the now so hugely popular realm of diversity management. Somewhat ironically, perhaps, the rhetoric of *inclusion* in this timely domain departs from an assumption often taken-for-granted within our scholarly field more broadly, the assumption that those who 'do', develop and participate in organization are human beings exclusively. In this paper, we want to critique this limiting and excluding assumption. Rather, we acknowledge the need to consider our connections to other living and breathing beings.

We need to take animal agency seriously and explore how the inclusion of human-animal relations, such as canine-human companionship, could inform organization theory and praxis. Therefore, bringing forth our immediate, material and affectual relations (cf. Pullen and Rhodes, 2015) with non-human animals (Wilkie, 2015: 323) might offer novel insights into discussions about intra-species interactions within our field, as well as open up novel pathways to more inclusive, ethical and caring understandings of organisational life. In line with Haraway (2007), we regard dog-human companionship as a constitutive, changing and historical relationship. This relationship is easily romanticized, stigmatized or thought of as a suspect/sentimental form of bourgeois attachment (e.g., Knapp, 1998; Kuzniar, 2006). Meanwhile, human-canine relations tell us something valuable about powerful affects such love, joy and anger, shame and suffering, desires for care and closeness, always already present in organizational life.

In this paper, we have discussed dogs, and our beloved bitches, and shared the special story of the young dog 'Kerttu' in particular. What has emerged from this piece of writing? Specifically, we argue that the inclusion of dogs and insights from dog-human companionship could teach us something valuable about inter-species communication, questions of 'otherness', dealing with death, ethics, care and responsibility. Specifically, the relational actions and embodied interactions between our dogs and us humans could enrich our understandings of the sensory-based, affective and embodied aspects of organization.

This paper explored the topics of care, companionship and communication in a dog-owner relationship, and aimed to make two main contributions: first, through the story of Kerttu, we described the sensory-based and embodied ways and fine-grained details of everyday behaviours through which aesthetic companionship in a dog-human relation was materialized. Based on the in-depth autoethnographical diary notes from the companionship between Kerttu and her owner Suvi, the aesthetics of the companionship seemed to build on sensory-based, fine-grained qualities of mundane interactions and affects.

Second, we illustrated how heartbreaking, even distressing autoethnographic material allowed us to move beyond rationalized thinking towards more sensuous and touching interpretations and research findings (compare Whiteman, 2010). Therefore, in the spirit of Thoresen and Öhlén (2015: 1589), our analysis speaks for a view that regards the researcher's personal experiences as an *embodied, affective activity* that can provide compassionate conceptual outcomes. Therefore, any researcher doing qualitative research should carefully think about possible research topics that stemmed from their personal affections and experiences and thus, lead to more reflexive analytical outcomes (see Whiteman, 2010).

Taken together, we argue that insights from feminist dog-writing methodology and human-canine-companionship could contribute to developing more personal, critical and alternative forms of writing in and about organization. In contrast, the present study calls for a more embodied, relational (e.g., Paul, 2009; Woodward and Ellison, 2010) and compassionate understanding of ethnographic research. Moreover, this study defends the benefits of sensory methodology (see e.g., Mason and Davies, 2009; Warren, 2008) in order to pay attention to the mundane, and often (analytically) neglected aspects of human-animal companionships.

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