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Fostering an inclusive multispecies social pedagogy: rethinking ethical human–animal relations in art

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Abstract

In their chapter 'Critical Animal Pedagogies', scholars Karen Dinker and Helen Pedersen argue that a learning society is based on a continual process of self-improvement through work and education. However, this process depends on the concept of a binary division among beings, such as humans and animals, that operates on the principles of inclusion and exclusion, which must be reassessed. The discipline of art pedagogy embodies these binary principles by perpetuating a closed system of knowledge that is anthropocentric in nature. Animals are traditionally diminished to the status of metaphors or symbols rather than being perceived as active participants in human society. This impacts our comprehension of human–animal relationships that influence socio-emotional well-being. Art has the unique ability to capture a representation of human–animal relations and re-imagining the way that animals are understood can offer new insights into multispecies partnerships and the development of social-emotional skills. This article ethically rethinks the representation of human–animal relations in art by

integrating insights from social pedagogy and ethics of care theory to challenge speciesist notions of social inclusion/exclusion in traditional art education. It also employs resonance theory as a theoretical framework to think with non-human animal subjects. This approach transforms animals into active social participants and collaborators whereby art serves as a catalyst for reflexive thinking about social inequalities and injustices. Embracing multispecies transhistorical relationships can deepen our comprehension of the social benefits of human–animal relations.

Keywords social pedagogy; art education; ethics of care; resonance theory; art history; human–animal relations

Introduction

Sanna Ryyänänen and Elina Nivala (2019, p. 3) define social pedagogy as a discipline interested in how pedagogy can support the relationship between an individual and society. Moreover, social pedagogy has a practical orientation that addresses social inequalities through education (see, for example, Beazidou, 2023; Ryyänänen and Nivala, 2019, p. 3). The field of social pedagogy acknowledges the value of animal-assisted pedagogy on social development skills (see, for example, Mickelsson, 2019; Mombeck and Albers, 2023). However, the focus is primarily on how animals impact children’s social development within school settings as opposed to a more private space, such as the home. Mombeck and Albers (2023) argue that animal-assisted pedagogy emphasises caring and bonding, influences social norms and fosters social inclusion. Thus, an intersectionality between social and critical animal pedagogy emerges, where animals are commonly thought of as teachers who can offer alternative pedagogical techniques (Corman and Vandrovcová, 2014, p. 135). Animals serve as significant sources of learning, and interactions with them can lead to new knowledge and ideas about animals (Russell, 2019, p. 118). Within social pedagogy, perceiving animals in a generalised manner as educators is a narrow scope that overlooks the significance of personal relationships and knowledge of animals derived from multispecies relations and denies animals subjectivity. Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen (cited in Beazidou, 2023, p. 2) characterises the concept of inclusion as widely shared social experience, active participation in society, having equal opportunities and all citizens reaching an elementary level of well-being. Since animals are sentient beings who are capable of experiencing emotional and social bonds, they should be incorporated within discussions of inclusion. Ensuring their inclusion as valuable members of our community within social, cultural and educational contexts can contribute to a more compassionate and equitable society.

In their chapter ‘Critical Animal Pedagogies’ (2016), scholars Karen Dinker and Helen Pedersen argue that a ‘learning society’ is based on a continual process of self-improvement through work and education. However, this process depends on the concept of a binary division between beings, such as humans and animals, that operates on the principles of inclusion and exclusion, which must be reassessed (Dinker and Pedersen, 2016, p. 153). This division is problematic because it implies that a ‘learning society’ depends primarily on humans, systemically ignoring collaborative multispecies relations. This is especially evident in the relationships between pet owners and their animals, where proximity and emotional connections inspire humans to view these animals as individuals with agency and distinct characters (DeMello, 2012, p. 6, as cited in Dimke, 2020, p. 300). While it is impossible to know the inner mind of animals or their lived experiences, seeing animals as having equal social value is a more holistic approach to multispecies co-existence.

What I mean by collaborative relations in the context of this article is that while there is evidence to suggest that humans gain useful socio-emotional skills from interacting with animals, animals also develop socio-emotional skills through domestication. As Reingard Spannring (2023) suggests, ‘Very often, animal learning is confused with training animals to fit into human society’. Whereas animal-assisted pedagogy focuses on the training of animals for human social benefits, I argue that animal learning is the point at which humans and animals become social partners who learn from each other. This exchange of influences from multispecies partnerships is captured in art, which can offer a

deeper understanding of human–animal kinships. Utilising Johan Zoffany's portrait of *Colonel Blair with His Family and an Indian Ayah* (1786) (Figure 1; hereafter referred to as *Colonel Blair with His Family*) as a case study to demonstrate my points and theoretical applications, this article demonstrates how historical human and pet animal relations in art can inform social pedagogy. One of the main questions I ask is: how can thinking differently about companion animals in art through the lens of social pedagogy and in dialogue with critical theories contribute to a deeper understanding of social inclusion, socio-emotional well-being and care? Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, this article is at the intersection of social art and critical animal pedagogy, as well as ethics and philosophy.

Figure 1. Johan Zoffany. *Colonel Blair with His Family and an Indian Ayah*. 1786. Oil on canvas, 96.5 cm × 134.6 cm (Source: Tate, London [T12610] <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/zoffany-colonel-blair-with-his-family-and-an-indian-ayah-t126102>)



Animals inform human social life, culture and education (see, for example, Dinker and Pedersen, 2016, p. 415). As an expression of culture, art offers a glimpse into the complex dynamics of human–animal relations. These relations are emphasised in eighteenth-century British art that commonly featured animals alongside humans due to the rise of pet ownership at this time. However, the interpretation of these relations must be critically re-evaluated since traditional art pedagogy operates as an exclusionary model that prioritises anthropocentric narratives that reflect discriminatory societal norms and humanist ideologies. Within art pedagogy, animals conventionally perceived as cultural objects or symbols rather than individualised social participants who serve an important purpose in human social well-being. As Ana Dimke (2020) argues, ‘humans must learn to look at animals conscientiously’ (p. 310) in order to address injustices towards animals in art pedagogy. The objectification of animals denies them visibility, which is a form of injustice to historical non-human animals whose narratives are oppressed. This perspective also limits researchers from fully considering the influence of companion animals on human social well-being, since they are not taught to be seen only as status symbols or extensions of the identities of human sitters in an artwork (Donald, 2007, p. 110). As Dinker and Pedersen (2016, p. 416) ask: ‘What does education become when humans are not regarded as the only subjects?’ In this article, I rephrase this question by asking: what do we learn from the representation of multispecies kinship when animals are given subjecthood? I attempt to answer this by repositioning humans and animals as social partners, challenging the way that animals are taught to be read in art education. In doing so, I hope

to contribute to art education and human–animal studies through the ‘promotion of animal ethics and animal-friendly action beyond – and through – the depiction of animals’ (Dimke, 2020, p. 298).

The interpretation of animals in art can work in conflict with the lived experiences that arise from interspecies encounters, underscoring a disconnect in the relationship between an individual and society. Suppressing the emotional aspects inherent in interspecies encounters within art pedagogy has the potential to cause psychological harm to those with lived experience. Companion animals are inextricably woven into the social fabric of human society and are central figures in the development of human socio-emotional health (see, for example, Dicé et al., 2017). Yet they are traditionally marginalised in the field of art history, which can have negative social ramifications since they are systematically taught to be interpreted as symbols rather than sentient beings. As Ingrid Tague (2015) explains, although pet-keeping was becoming socially acceptable in eighteenth-century Britain, it was a phenomenon that was associated with class and gender issues. The rhetoric of sensibility led to a compassionate shift in social attitudes towards animals in the eighteenth-century and kindness to animals was typically perceived as a feminine virtue (Donald, 2007, p. 24). However, as Thomas Rowlandson’s print of *A Lady Surrounded by Her Pets* (c. 1808?) (Figure 2) illustrates, being surrounded by animals signifies human social isolation. The representation of emotional attachments to animals is therefore not socially recognised as a positive notion – in both a historical and contemporary sense. For example, the colloquial phrase ‘crazy cat lady’ comes to mind, which can be interpreted by some as a term of endearment, yet it generally holds negative social connotations. Valuing a relationship with a cat is not deemed as valuable as a relationship with another human, thereby limiting humans from building meaningful relationships with animals for fear of criticism. This marginalises animals within human society, showcasing social exclusion.

Figure 2. Thomas Rowlandson. *Lady Surrounded by Her Pets*. c. 1808? Graphite, pen and watercolour on paper, 28 cm × 29.1 cm (Source: Courtauld, London [D.1952.RW.310] <https://gallerycollections.courtauld.ac.uk/object-d-1952-rw-3102>)



Social pedagogy offers a unique lens through which to rethink human–animal relations because it seeks social justice for marginalised individuals (Beazidou, 2023, p. 3), although existing literature does not consider animals as marginalised individuals. Because social pedagogy is interested in how education informs social identity and how people function in society, it embraces the values of relationality and empathy. These values can cross species boundaries, shedding light on social inequalities for both humans and non-humans. In this article, I propose an alternative and more ethical method for looking at human–animal relations that repositions subjects as near-equal social actors. This method is two-fold: first, centralising relationality and care through a framework of ethics of care and perspectives from social pedagogy that redirects attention to human–animal relations in art. Second, I propose resonance theory as a useful theory to think with non-human animal subjects in art, which can foster more ethical transhistorical multispecies relationships to better understand social inequalities and injustices. Ultimately, this approach transforms animals into active social participants and collaborators whereby art serves as a catalyst for reflexive thinking about the social benefits of human–animal relations.

Johan Zoffany's *Colonel Blair with His Family*: a case study

Johan Zoffany (1733–1810) was a German-born painter who was active in England, yet he painted the conversation piece of *Colonel Blair with His Family* in 1786 in either Lucknow or Cawnpore, during the artist's tour of Bengal in search of securing commissions from wealthy patrons (Head, 2021, p. 16). In *Colonel Blair with His Family*, Zoffany depicted Colonel Blair in a semi-interior setting, alongside his family that includes his wife, two daughters and an unidentified young Indian girl, as well as a cat and a dog. Colonel Blair served in the Bengal army in colonial India where the family spent several years and acquired their fortune (Head, 2021, p. 16). This fortune is reflected in the elegant interior setting in the painting, as well as the fashionable costumes on the figures. The paintings behind the figures in the forefront of the painting reinforce the foreign Indian landscape where the family temporarily resided, a visual commentary on the geopolitical situation. On the right side of the painting, behind the Indian girl and pet animals, Zoffany painted a glimpse into the elegant interior of the family's residence, further articulating their wealth (Baldassarre, 2008, p. 82). Within this interior, a decorative golden mirror and what appears to be an expansive study is portrayed. This lavish interior is juxtaposed by the outdoor setting that peeks out beyond the column on the opposite, left side of the painting.

In the painting, Zoffany positioned Colonel Blair and his wife in the middle of the canvas as the central figures, seated on an ornate loveseat. Although Colonel Blair is understood as the patriarch of the family unit in the painting, Zoffany painted the figure of Colonel Blair gazing adoringly at his wife and holding her hand affectionately. The portrayal of their loving relationships holds significant social value, since it elevates Mrs Blair's status by affirming her worth as a subject deserving attention. Yet, rather than gazing back at her husband, Mrs Blair looks towards the left side of the painting, where Zoffany portrayed the couple's eldest daughter in front of a harpsichord. The eldest daughter appears to be mid-performance, delicately holding the corner of the music book, poised as if about to turn the page. Meanwhile, her other hand lingers over the keyboard. On the other side of the painting, Zoffany depicted Colonel Blair's younger daughter, Marie, standing casually against the loveseat, back-to-back with her mother.

Beside the figure of Marie, Zoffany depicted a young Indian girl holding a black-and-white cat that Marie interacts with. Although the Indian girl's identity and relationship with the family remains unknown, she is conventionally understood as an *ayah* – a housemaid or servant that would have likely been charged with caring for Marie (Gopal, 2023; Tate, n.d.). However, both Marie and the Indian girl are depicted as having similar heights and appear to be of similar age, which suggests a relational connection based on visual similarities. Alternatively, historians speculate that the Indian girl may be Blair's illegitimate child, an idea supported by the colours of her costume that mirror that of Colonel Blair's (Gopal, 2023). This possibility may explain the compositional decision to separate her from the rest of the family by positioning her in the right margins of the canvas to convey her status as an outsider (Tate, n.d.). Other pictorial details that further reinforce the Indian girl's outsider status and exoticism include the darker colour of her skin and her North Indian Muslim-style dress (Gopal, 2023). Furthermore, the Indian girl's bare feet contrast with the visible shoes worn by the other figures that implies their elite status and illustrates how pictorial details like costumes can serve as a means of exclusion.

The colours of the costumes worn by the figures in the painting suggest a correlation of relationships, reinforcing the notion of relationality between them. For instance, Mrs Blair's satin blue dress and white shawl is similar to the skirt and shawl that her eldest daughter wears, implying a close mother–daughter relationship. Meanwhile, Colonel Blair's red jacket with gold details and white garments is similar in tone to the red dress with gold accents and white tunic that the Indian girl is portrayed wearing, which suggests they are connected, perhaps as something more than simply a master and servant relationship. The youngest daughter, Marie, does not seem to have a relational match through her costume and she is depicted in a white dress that has less satiny shimmer than her mother's and sister's dresses. Marie's costume is decorated with light pink sashes and lace details around her neckline. However, the viewer's attention is directed to Marie's bold red shoes that do not quite match the rest of her costume, even though the addition of pink bows compliments the pink sashes in her dress. Moreover, both Mrs Blair and the eldest daughter wear dainty white satin shoes that Marie is not painted with to match. Instead, I interpreted Marie's shoes as Zoffany's subtle comment on the relationship between Colonel Blair and the Indian girl, whose costume features the colour red. The red shoes therefore serve as a visual clue that reaffirms the suspicion that the Indian girl is his daughter, just as Marie is clearly understood to be his daughter. In other words, the colour red connects both girls as daughters to Colonel Blair.

At the bottom right of the canvas, near the feet of the Indian girl, a dog with white and brown spots is portrayed, gazing mischievously up at the cat in the Indian girl's arms. Zoffany exaggerated the cat's expression, portraying it wide-eyed and alert. Priyamvada Gopal (2023) argues that the cat's glowering expression implies a sense of discomfort. The cat's expression can be interpreted as a reflection of the Indian girl's feelings; she is also portrayed wide-eyed and with a stern expression, which contrasts with the aloof, grinning expressions of the other figures – even the dog. Grouped together in the right margins of the painting, the Indian girl, dog and cat are understood as pets; 'Young Indian servants were sometimes described as "pets" and had a status in Britain and British portraiture as ornamental or decorative curiosities' (Gopal, 2023). However, a derogatory perception of animal pets as only serving to dehumanise other humans (although simultaneously elevating the status of non-human animal statuses) overlooks the importance of relationality and how the figures inform socio-emotional dynamics in the work, which I will elaborate on.

Ethics of care

There are different approaches to caring in a broad sense and across disciplines like medical and social work, yet how we care about what we see in art necessitates careful ethical consideration. Why do we care at all and who do we care about when we examine artworks like *Colonel Blair and His Family*? Education is capable of '(re)producing injustices and inequalities' (Dinker and Pedersen, 2019, p. 45), making education part of the biopolitical landscape. Lauren Corman and Tereza Vandrovcová (2014, p. 138) call for a more holistic and anti-species pedagogy that includes animals in pedagogical discussions. I argue that this begins by addressing the question of care. Ethics of care can offer a practical theoretical framework that can help address this question by prioritising relationships and emotions, challenging species boundaries and offering a more holistic approach to multispecies kinships.

Ethics of care is a normative ethic that is a branch of moral philosophy or ethics. Rather than focusing on what is right or wrong, ethics of care considers various nuances and the moral significance of social relationships, positioning well-being and care for others at the forefront (see, for example, Sander-Staudt, 2023). However, care ethics is not just about well-being, but ultimately about forming good relationships with others (Slote, 2007, p. 12). Ethics of care is also part of virtue ethics, defined as a 'certain ideals, such as excellence or dedication to the common good, toward which we should strive and which allow the full development of our humanity' (Velasquez et al., 1988). Put simply, caring is at the core of what it means to be human. This makes care both a value and a practice (Held, 2006, p. 9).

Ethics of care theory repositions care as relational and involves emotional dynamics. Specifically, it prioritises moral emotions like sympathy, empathy, sensitivity and responsiveness (see, for example, Held, 2006, p. 10). I agree with Michael Slote (2007, p. 11), who argues that ethics of care must involve caring for those that we have never met in order to achieve moral relations. This makes ethics of care a useful transhistorical method for connecting with historical figures, even if only with their image, that can offer new perspectives on modern relationships. Ethics of care has garnered attention in the fields of

education and psychology (Slote, 2007, p. 3). However, its application within the arts is new. Ethics of care can not only illuminate relationships depicted between subjects in art, but also allow new relationships to form between contemporary audiences and both human and animal historical subjects depicted in these artworks. Revealing these multispecies relationships can shed light on issues of social disconnect that are linked with speciesist politics and can help repair broken relationships between humans and animals.

Introspection as care: reading social inclusion and exclusion in art

Ethics of care requires a level of introspection in order to think about the well-being of others and confront biases. Yet introspection can be dualistic, resulting in an avoidance of critically examining patterns of injustice and personal beliefs (see, for example, George, 2019, p. 169). Acknowledging the influence of animals on self-conception destabilises assumptions about the idea of the autonomous human and is altered by animal pedagogy (see, for example, Oliver, 2009, p. 22). Joshua Russell (2019, p. 120) stresses that encounters with others draws attention to our sense of self and brings about the potential for relationality. Expanding on this point, I suggest that the potential for relationality occurs when individuals influence each other through their relationship. For example, in Zoffany's *Colonel Blair with His Family*, relationality is visually translated through the action of trust. In particular, the representation of trust between human and animal figures through the gesture of touch and the gaze.

In the painting, Marie gently holds the cat's limp paw, where the action of touch can be interpreted as a form of trust. The depiction of trust between them can also be understood as friendship and familiarity. Both Marie and the cat also look out at the spectator, further articulating their trust in each other since we can presume that they trust each other to look away even though they are still touching. Taking it a step further, depicting figures looking outward towards the viewer can also signify the subject's trust in the spectator to acknowledge them and establish a connection by reciprocating the gaze. In this moment, the spectator can experience emotions like sensitivity and responsiveness that promotes a relational engagement. Recognising our own desires to be seen reinforces our moral responsibility to care about the emotional needs of others, so looking back not only at the human subject but also the animal becomes a gesture of caring. In contrast, the dog is depicted not gazing towards the viewer and has more bodily autonomy because he is not held. It is possible that the spectator may feel less called to be responsive towards the dog and have more empathy towards the cat. However, the marginalisation of the dog, positioned on the outskirts of the painting and in the dark bottom right corner, might evoke a sympathetic response from some spectators who perceive the dog as a neglected subject. The lack of interaction with the dog can then be interpreted as the epitome of social exclusion.

In Zoffany's painting, both social inclusion and exclusion are depicted, sometimes simultaneously. While the dog can be interpreted as a figure who is socially excluded, and the Indian girl's non-European identity also makes her racially excluded from the rest of the figures, Marie's status is more complicated. Marie's elite class status is clearly articulated by her casual pose and fashionable costume in the painting that visually links her with her aristocratic family. However, the way that Zoffany positioned her in the painting with her back turned to her family adds complexity. On the one hand, Marie's pose can be interpreted as an expression of independence, and on the other, the literal turning of backs suggests exclusion. Moreover, her mother Mrs. Blair's attention is fixated on the eldest daughter, which creates a sense of social hierarchy based on ageism. Marie's angled pose towards the right where the other marginalised figures are placed within the composition associates her with them and the category of pets. The marginalised grouping of human and animal figures on the right side of the painting creates a 'little family portrait of their own' (Gopal, 2023). Marie's desire for interaction and emotional needs are met by members who belong to the category of pets, and even though Marie is not understood as a pet, 'pets' become important to her socio-emotional well-being. This perspective repositions 'pets' as important social actors who provide Marie with the emotional care that she lacks from her family in the painting.

While contemporary theorists like Donna Haraway (2008, p. 17) discuss the notion of interspecies co-existence and entanglements, emphasising the importance of relationships, what motivates or is at the core of these relational foundations is not addressed. For instance, Haraway draws on the idea of 'becoming with' other species, but the question of how remains unresolved. I propose resonance theory as a possible solution. Nilgun Kahraman (2016, p. 316) defines an ethical relationship as a basic

and trustworthy relationship where every moment is valuable. Building on this idea, I define ethical relationships as relationships that demand respect and response between two beings, which is at the core of what it means to be human. Response is therefore key to forming relationships. Vivienne Bozalek (2016) draws attention to the importance of acknowledging differences, which can still connect entities and strengthen relationships. Bozalek (2016) writes: 'Haraway (2008) reminds us that response-ability is not solely located in dualistic but also multidirectional relationships which are not only human but which can include other species, recognising as well the asymmetry of these relationships' (p. 196).

Each relationship is a unique experience and the way individuals listen and respond will also be particular to each case. Care ethics is a personal experience between the one caring and one cared for (see, for example, Noddings, 2013, p. 5). Attentiveness, which is an element of care, 'involves regarding and listening carefully, opening ourselves to being affected by the other' (Bozalek, 2016, p. 195). Furthermore, there is a connection between resonance and care where 'caring and relating thus share conceptual and ontological resonance' (De La Bellacasa, 2012, p. 198). Care can be understood as what creates relations and is not a moral obligation yet is unavoidable. Care ethics is thus concerned with interpersonal relationships, which makes it a complementary ethical framework to think about resonance theory with.

Resonance theory: thinking with and responding to others

The concept of well-being is embedded in resonance theory. This perspective challenges anthropocentric narratives by considering the well-being of animals to provide a more nuanced perspective of human–animal bonds that is relevant in both a historical and contemporary context. Resonance theory offers a practical methodology for looking at animal subjects by proposing a way to speak with, as opposed to for, them. Resonance can also be thought of as vibrations that are linked with consciousness (Hunt and Schooler, 2019, p. 378). As Anne Bogart (2020) writes, 'Resonance is what ripples and radiates; one energetic being influences the vibrations of another' (p. 2). Therefore, resonance is something that we engage with on a conscious level, it does not happen spontaneously. Intentionally experiencing these vibrations or resonance inspires a response between entities that leads to relationships.

Resonance theory has evolved beyond the parameters of scientific fields, and has been adopted as a sociological theory in the field of psychology and sociology. It is only beginning to be explored in other fields within the humanities. Ethicist Hartmut Rosa (2019) supports the usefulness of resonance theory to explain the human desire to create relationships. Building on the idea of social alienation in the work of the Frankfurt School members, including theorists Karl Marx, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, resonance theory puts forth the idea that relationships give life value, offering a new framework with which to address the issue of social alienation, as discussed by the Frankfurt School theorists (see Bronner, 2013, p. 39). Rosa argues that resonance is an alternative mode to alienation and is how we relate to the world (Corrêa et al., 2021, p. 123). It is difficult to avoid experiencing the sensation of resonating with others or having an experience of resonance because we ontologically reject alienation. According to Rosa, resonance is part of what it means to have a 'good life' and is what drives a human's purpose for 'being-in-the-world' (see, for example, Tsuo-Yu and Shuwen, 2021, p. 759).

For Rosa (2013, pp. 167 and 182), resonance has two distinguishing features: (1) resonance is a relationship rather than a stance; and (2) resonance is different voices listening and responding to each other. I insist that listening and responding to animal voices should be respected as part of the collection of 'different voices'. However, what is unclear is what Rosa means by a 'stance'. I interpret 'stance' to mean an ethical position that follows the establishment of a relationship, in alliance with certain political systems. For instance, an anti-speciesist stance that may result from the experience of forming a close bond with an animal. In this case, I agree with Rosa that resonance would be more closely connected to a relationship than to a stance. Rosa's second point is also significant and should be unpacked in two parts. The first part about resonance being about hearing different voices is impactful because it promotes inclusivity and an acceptance of different perspectives. This can be understood as the acceptance and respect of marginalised voices and belief systems, even biological differences among species. This perspective of resonance is complementary to pluriverse theory, which emphasises the idea of different voices or world visions. This is because pluriverse theory proposes a way for different groups to co-exist based on the principle of respect and relationships that obligate individuals to listen

and respond ethically to each other despite differences (Hutchings, 2019). The second part of Rosa's definition reinforces how listening and responding becomes a call to action and can be practically put into practice.

Imagining relationships: resonance theory in praxis

Engaging with resonance theory is possible through the act of imagination. Care ethics supports being in relationships with unfamiliar others whereby imagination becomes a crucial part of the process. Amanda Bailey and Mario DiGangi (2017) suggest that imagining emotions and sentience in other life forms is going beyond 'simply asking if animals experience affect of emotion' (p. 13). Imagination therefore becomes an action-based approach that moves beyond asking to doing by imagining emotions that lead to entangled relationships. Lori Gruen (2013) defines these relations eloquently in her definition of an 'entangled empathy' as:

A type of caring perception focused on attending to another's experience of wellbeing. An experiential process involving a blend of emotion and cognition in which we recognize we are in relationships with others and are called upon to be responsive and responsible in these relationships by attending to another's needs, interests, desires, vulnerabilities, hopes, and sensitivities. (p. 223)

For instance, as discussed previously, imagining the emotions of animals like the discomfort exhibited by the cat and feelings of neglect that the dog may be experiencing in Zoffany's painting enables contemporary spectators to sympathise with the animals. This can establish transhistorical relationships with the animal subjects where resonance theory is fruitful since it is grounded in relationship building and the call to respond to others. This response, however, would require acknowledging the real presence of these animals as sentient beings with emotions. However, Terrence McDonnell et al. (2017, p. 2) argue that resonance is constructed on the basis of actual (rather than imagined) social interactions that shape our relations with other people and objects. This conflicting understanding of resonance may appear problematic, but I propose resonance can operate both through actual and imagined relationality. It is the actual relationship through social interaction with others that allows for an imagined ethical relationship to develop.

Children and pets were a common trope in eighteenth-century British portraiture and understood as having similar statuses and intellectual capacities (see, for example, Meacham, 2011; Plumb, 1975). Pets were also conventionally understood in gendered terms, whereby feminine pet-keeping symbolised the human female subject's future maternal role (Tague, 2015, p. 260). As Dimke (2020) writes, pets are typically "'projection surfaces" for human fantasies' (p. 313). This understanding of pet animals is problematic since perceiving animals as substitutes for future children denies them their own identity and subjectivity. This undervalues the unique human-animal relationship that is specific to the historical moment portrayed (Kahraman, 2016, p. 316). Perceiving pet animals as childlike substitutes also anthropomorphises them by infantilising the animal. This distorts the notion of care as only significant within a human context, despite care being essential to building trusting multispecies relationships. This perception also restricts contemporary spectators from recognising and respecting animals as individual subjects with whom to form actual relationships since traditional art pedagogy insists that pet animals symbolically represent placeholders for future humans.

Depicting a member of the British upper class directly touching or interacting with someone of a lower class would have been deemed socially unacceptable and unconventional during this period within the genre of portraiture. In Zoffany's portrait of *Colonel Blair and His Family*, the cat, who is held by the Indian girl and interacted with by Marie, serves as a link between the girls. The cat can therefore be interpreted as a connector that helps facilitate relationships between other subjects in the work. This is not, however, to suggest that the portrayal of the genuine relationship between Marie and the cat is immaterial. Instead, the cat can be understood as a social participant in a broader network of relationships by serving as a shared relational point of contact in the painting. Perceiving the cat as a social connector enables spectators to engage with resonance theory, specifically Gruen's (2013, p. 223) idea of entangled empathy, by imagining a relationship that could exist between Marie and the Indian girl. To elaborate, imagination can be understood as a form of response by the spectator who cares about the imagined emotional needs of others in the painting. These emotional needs include

a recognition of their imagined desires and sensitivities (Gruen, 2013, p. 223), which in the painting revolve around the notion of social belonging and acceptance. As Ryyänen and Nivala (2019, p. 8) explain, the idea of belonging is core to social pedagogy because it is a human need that is about supporting communication and social relations, which I propose art can visually convey. Paying attention to how belonging is visually translated can underscore the notion of togetherness that belonging aims to achieve. However, belonging is linked with existential inequality that goes beyond individual desire and has systemic and structural dimensions (Ryyänen and Nivala, 2019, p. 8), which I propose are rooted in speciesist politics that excludes animals from being thought of as beings who require belonging, or are individuals from whom belonging is sought by humans. To correct existential inequality, it is therefore fundamental that animals be included in discussions of belonging.

Conclusion

... barred animals always leave traces; they cannot be erased. The repressed always returns.
(Oliver, 2009, p. 22)

Social pedagogy emphasises the importance of community to address issues of inclusion/exclusion (Beazidou, 2023, p. 3). This article advocates for the importance of recognising animals as valuable members of human communities. Re-imagining companion animals as part of a wider network of relationships can reframe them as connectors who facilitate relationships with others. It is therefore necessary to include animals in social pedagogical discourses, whereby art as a reflection of human culture can serve as a catalyst for reflexive thinking. This can offer deeper insights on the topic of inclusion/exclusion where an analysis of sociocultural influences can help illuminate discriminatory attitudes (Dimke, 2020, p. 315), which have historical origins and contemporary relevance.

Art has the power to illuminate how inclusion/exclusion operates within human society, especially in regard to animal subjects. In art pedagogy, animals are traditionally taught to be interpreted as symbols, which objectifies them. This article urges a critical re-evaluation of human–animal relations in art that recognises the socio-emotional value of animals themselves as individuals and their roles as active participants and collaborators in human social well-being. This shift in thinking about the representation of animals promotes a more holistic and non-hierarchical perspective on interspecies coexistence that can recreate a society that embraces social justice by being inclusive of all beings (Beazidou, 2023, p. 3). It can also reveal new strategies for inclusivity within socio-pedagogical practices by acknowledging the significance of human–animal kinships.

Through an analysis of Johan Zoffany's portrait of *Colonel Blair and His Family* (1786) as a case study, this article demonstrates a more ethical approach to reading animals in art through ethics of care and resonance theory, drawing on insights from social pedagogy that focuses on inclusive education. This article explores how critical theories such as ethics of care and resonance theory can reposition care, relationality and emotions in such a way that animal subjectivity can be perceived and ethical human–animal relations can be more justly considered. I argue that engaging with the representation of animals through rationality and emotions, which are notions supported by ethics of care and resonance theory, can strengthen transhistorical multispecies relationships. I also suggest that imagination plays a key role where the act of imagining emotions and relationships can be seen as a form of response that stems from caring. Imagination fosters transhistorical relationships to emerge between contemporary spectators and historical subjects, both human and animal, which can illuminate modern social issues about belonging.

Declarations and Conflicts of Interest

Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

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