



WHAT IF? WHAT NEXT?

SPECULATIONS ON HISTORY'S FUTURES

ROUNDTABLE

**THE FUTURE OF THE ARCHITECTURAL
(POST)HUMANITIES**

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MULTISPECIES WORKPLACES

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Urban geographers have revealed cities to be multi-species environments shaped by the keeping, management and regulation of animals inside and outside their boundaries. Architectural history and theory, however, have remained stubbornly anthropocentric. By studying places where real animals and humans co-exist and form interspecies relationships, it can be shown that architecture shapes and structures interspecies relationships and identities. This paper is part of a larger examination of spaces of consumption and leisure shared with companion animals, such as membership-only dog parks and pet-friendly hotels, and spaces of co-work, such as pet-food research laboratories and petting cafes. Amazon's Lake Union Headquarters in Seattle will be used to introduce this larger project. At Amazon, around 800 dogs work each day and the offices and amenity spaces have been designed to accommodate their presence. While Amazon refer playfully to the dogs as 'associates' and 'employees', the dogs make a serious unpaid contribution to Amazon's reputation and the social cohesion and well-being of its human employees. With dog-friendly workplaces increasingly common, their design is a bellwether of interspecies relationships and architecture's part in the development of a more-than-human society.

Introduction

The complex relationship humans have with dogs is evident in the polarized debates between those who condemn petkeeping as “sentimental”, “Oedipal”, “narcissistic” (Deleuze and Guattari)¹ and akin to chattel slavery (Tuan, Francione and Charlton)², and those for whom companionship with a non-human animal presents a compelling personal and philosophical challenge to human exceptionalism (Haraway)³. The seven breed classifications used globally by canine pedigree clubs reflect some of these contradictions. Herding, Sporting and Working dogs are grouped on the basis of their work with humans in farming, hunting, fishing, sled-pulling, guarding, and policing. Toy Breeds are defined (technically) by their diminutive size and, culturally, by their status as “fur babies”; terriers and hounds by their ancestral lineage. The last category, ‘non-sporting’, is seemingly as arbitrary as any in Borges’ fictional Chinese taxonomy of dogs. The three most popular dog breeds registered to come to work at Amazon’s Seattle campus in 2017 were golden retrievers and Labradors, and labradoodles.⁴ In 2019, as the fashion for neotenous breeds took over, the French bulldog, chihuahua and the Goldendoodle took the top three places.⁵ None of these dogs belong to the working breeds and on social media they were portrayed as idle and unproductive, albeit cute, additions to the office. Amazon, however, claim that “our dogs usually assist their owners with their day-to-day work.”⁶ A piece on working at Amazon on the company’s blog is titled “How much does Amazon love dogs? Just ask one of the 7,000 pups that ‘work’ here.”⁷

The presence of dogs in corporate offices is increasing, but the causes and consequences of this for work, workers, and workplace design are understudied. Workplace design is often featured in architectural discourse and media, and its effects have been researched from the points of view of psychology, health and wellness, management and innovation, ethnography, labour theory and justice, and more. It is widely accepted that architecture is an important factor in how organizations and individuals behave in and perceive workplaces. In animal studies, work is of great interest, yet the contribution of the design of physical environments to work relationships has not been discussed beyond questions of captivity, control, and welfare. The design of ‘multispecies workplaces’⁸, has yet to be considered as a distinct question in either architecture or animal studies, yet interspecies work happens somewhere, it is situated and shaped by the built environment.

In the most literal sense, the physical and cultural accommodation of animal co-workers requires tailored design. Large numbers of animals in the workplace demand complex interventions and solutions to resolve the functional requirements that ensue from accommodating bodies with species-specific needs and behaviours. The services of an architect, interior designer, and an expert in animal behaviour, might be engaged. The design of pet-friendly offices reflects the kinds of inter- and intraspecies relationships the organization anticipates, and broader societal ideas about interspecies relationships. Issues of hygiene and canine control persist but play a less significant role than questions around intimacy and touch, play and socialization. Architecture and interior design are subsequently mobilized beyond the workplace, revealing through images and stories the values and ambitions of the organization in regard to its canine associates. With dog-friendly workplaces increasingly common, their design is a bellwether of interspecies relationships and architecture’s part in the development of a more-than-human society. For these reasons the subject is worth attending to. Firstly, though, we must understand what dogs in are doing in offices.

Working Like a Dog

If we discount office dogs as workers because of a perceived absence of purpose, exertion and expertise, many jobs humans hold must also be disregarded. Human work is complex. Its categories and definitions are under continual theorization at the same time as they are the subject and arena of political struggle. Any discussion of animal work, then, necessarily involves a reconsideration of human work. In the other direction, discussions about human work have rarely engaged questions of animals, their work, or the workplaces we share with them. Be they

Marxist or liberal defenders of capitalism, theorists in the social sciences have tended to see labour as exclusively performed by humans, while animals are mere tools or resources. As Marx said:

We presuppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality.⁹

For Marx, man's will and consciousness is the crux of the distinction between us and animals across all activities, and work especially.¹⁰ Animals have historically been seen as passive creatures whose labour is merely taken. Farm animals in particular are treated as a kind of "ultraflexible proletariat, exploitable and destructible at will."¹¹

Scholars in animal studies object to this human exceptionalism and make the case that animals *do* work.¹² For Jocylene Porcher work is the "primary medium of our ties" with domesticated animals. Work is "where animals are most evident and have the closest proximity to us."¹³ To recognize their work requires that we "consider animals as other than victims or natural and cultural idiots that need to be liberated despite themselves."¹⁴ Forensically studying the behaviour of farm animals, Porcher goes on to argue that they have "interiorized human work rationalities. . . they are implicated in a task, and they know it."¹⁵ Dogs very clearly recognize when work has finished and the rules no longer apply. Even while a dog might know itself to be working, they are rarely recognized as *real workers*, with income, social status, workplace regulations, opportunities for self-development, vacations and retirement.¹⁶ Of course, human labour can also be exploitative, enforced, harmful, degrading, undervalued and poorly remunerated. Some would argue that work in the capitalist economy is always a scene of exploitation and commodification, and it would do little for the welfare of animals to be recognized alongside humans as workers. For others, work can be meaningful and the challenge is "whether work can be reorganized so that animals have greater agency regarding the nature and terms of the work relationship."¹⁷

Dogs, like humans, are a social species that live in a hierarchical society, and obey cultural rules and ritual behaviour. Dogs and humans are roughly similar in personality, emotion, cognition, and perception (or at least in comparison with animals such as ticks whose perceived world, its *umwelt* as Jakob von Uexküll describes it, is radically unlike ours). This proximity means that dogs not only work *with* humans, they often *replace* them or act as human surrogates. And unlike machines, dogs fail and succeed at work in the same way human as do. Both species have limits to how long they can sustain attention to a task¹⁸ and both can be flexible and autonomous at work as no machine (yet) can. They know when it is possible or desirable to disobey the rules.¹⁹ Both species are motivated and trained to work through repeated purposeful practice and reward. Dogs, like humans, are social learners who respond to praise or scolding and are keen observers of other's actions. For dogs, there must be affection and trust between them for there to be cooperative, secure and sustainable work relations. They need an affective and cognitive investment in the work. Which brings us back to Marx, for intentionality and self-consciousness have long been seen as pre-requisites for agency.

Four-legged Agents

The philosopher Bruno Latour has revisited the question of agency. Latour argues that 'any thing' that makes a difference to other actors is an agent. Be it machine or animal, if it influences how history unfolds it is more than a mere backdrop. Latour writes that agents "authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence [and] render possible", as well as "block" and "forbid".²⁰ In the Latourian view the distinctive Amazon door-desk is credibly just such an agent. In 1995, when Jeff Bezos needed desks for his five employees, he found it cheaper to buy a solid core door from Home Depot and attach 4x4 timber legs than to buy a desk. As Amazon grew, the desk—with added bracing—was retained as a symbol of the company's declared commitment to ingenuity, creativity, and frugality (Figure 1). For Bezos, the door desks were "a symbol of spending money on things that matter to customers and not spending money on things that

don't."²¹ Amazon's homepage includes instructions on how to build one and employees who come up with cost-saving ideas are presented with a miniature desk called the "Door Desk Award." The desk, thus, does several kinds of work: it makes an elevated flat area upon which other tools can be held and manipulated; and it performs symbolic work, reminding employees and customers of the company's values and origins.



Figure 1. Rosie and Door Desk at Amazon (2008). Photograph by Linda Lane, Wonderlane Studios, Flickr, Creative Commons.

Along with, or more to the point, underneath the tables are livelier four-legged agents. Amazon's Lake Union headquarters in Seattle, accommodates around 500-800 dogs every day, about a tenth of the 6000-7000 dogs registered to come to work. Designed by NBBJ and completed in 2015, the office complex in the Denny Triangle covers three city blocks over an area of five acres. It comprises three 38-storey towers, a mid-rise office block, and a multi-purpose meeting centre. A sprinkling of colorful vertical blades does little to enliven curtain walls of dark-tinted glazing. The 'Spheres' (2018), the three glass-domed conservatories that serve as the employee lounge and retail space are a rare architectural showpiece in the ensemble. Amazon's preference for inconspicuous corporate architecture that integrates into its urban surrounds stands in contrast to Google's new headquarters by Thomas Heatherwick and BIG or the Applepark by Norman Foster.²² The interiors are marginally less corporate than the exterior, inflected by a pervasive nostalgia for an earlier era of garages, industrial lofts, and DIY furniture. This sentiment is exemplified by the incorporation of old-style phone booths. There are polished concrete floors, steel mesh balustrades, unpainted timber, exposed ductwork and services; and brightly coloured furniture. Amongst the many artworks is one assembled from rollers from the warehouses. Every wall declares affirmative slogans including the company motto "Work hard. Have fun. Make history." Facilities include a self-serve "market" offering food and flowers (called MKT and only available for Amazon employees); foosball, shuffleboard and ping pong in common areas; a video game lab; maker-space with 3D printers; craft room, and a Harry Potter-themed library. The meeting space flips from seating 1800 people into a sports court every Friday afternoon, with basketball hoops that descend from the ceiling.

The facilities for dogs are in a similar vein to those for humans: pragmatic, with moments of self-conscious, perhaps cynical, informality. Its facilities for dogs are not architecturally noteworthy, nor are they pioneering or particularly lavish. Alongside the spheres is an on-campus off-leash dog park with carefully selected plants, artificial turf, rocks, and platforms for dogs to climb on and water fountains that incorporate ground level drinking bowls. The company promotes the park to the public, who have 24-hour access, but it is a mere 90 square metres and woefully inadequate for the number of dogs at work at any time. A small 'doggie deck', with more artificial turf, two fake fire hydrants and four tree trunks, is on the 17th floor of the tower named Doppler.

It pales against the sensory rich and architecturally playful designs of many contemporary dog parks. In the lobby of the rooftop park is a plywood wall to which coloured tennis balls have been affixed and a screen-printed commemorative portrait of the first Amazon dog, Rufus. Inside, the offices feature a “dog-friendly alternative workspace”, a lounge-type environment where people and dogs can relax together. Surfaces are designed to resist water and stains. Waste bags and treats are complimentary, and an in-house dog day-care is available for when humans have to attend meetings. Around the campus, businesses such as Just Food for Dogs, Puddles Bakery, and veterinary clinics have opened. A dedicated team manage Amazon’s canine affairs. Many other companies have redesigned their interiors to accommodate office dogs with the inclusion of soft spaces where dogs and humans can lounge or play together. Overt references—in art and furnishings— to the presence of dogs is typical in such interiors. Compared to these canine-themed spaces the adaptations made at Amazon are minimal, despite the large numbers of dogs, and there is little of the celebratory canine kitsch seen elsewhere. Dogs in the office are integrated and normalized.



Figure 2. Dog Park at Doppler, Amazon HQ, Seattle, 2016. Photographed by Hiro Protagonist2004, flickr, Creative Commons.

It is not the quality of the architectural interventions that draws my attention to the phenomenon of the pet-friendly workplace, or to Amazon’s version of it. It is rather, its growth and its concentration in particular sectors. According to the SHRM 2016 Employee Benefits research report, 7 percent of US employers permitted pets in the workplace, up from 3 percent in 2013.²³ Amongst the “10 most dog-friendly companies of 2019” listed on CNBC’s ‘make it’ news site, half have pet-related businesses, while the others are e-commerce and software companies: the San Francisco headquarters of Uber and Airbnb; Procore Technologies in Los Angeles; Ceros in New York; and Amazon’s headquarters in Seattle. Many other US-based tech companies are dog-friendly including: Zynga, the online gaming company; the HR software company, Workday; Zoosk, an online dating site; the online events ticket sales company, Ticketmaster; Sittercity, an online marketplace for in-home care, Etsy, Autodesk and Advent.

The pet-friendly workplace needs to be situated, first, within the larger history of work and capital and, secondly, within the specific character of the tech industry. In other words, we must ask, 'why now' and 'why at Amazon?' What agency do office dogs at Amazon exert?

Changing Work

Just as we might find it easier to see that a dog pulling a sled is working, it is easier to comprehend the labour of the blue-collar warehouse employees in the Amazon fulfilment centres than the effort of their better paid associates bearing job titles such as: Solutions Architect; Alexa Shopping Product Adviser; Manager, Taxonomy; and Senior Escalations Investigator. The last is a stressful job that involves the adjudication and resolution of client accounts suspended from selling by the company, but that is not readily apparent from the title. For each of these jobs it is not clear what prior skills and knowledge one would need to carry them out. Indeed, companies such as Amazon tend to emphasize personal qualities over formal qualifications. Amazon claim that the qualities it is looking for in its employees are "tenaciousness", "conviction", "inventiveness", "curiosity", "thinking differently", "risk taking", "resourcefulness"²⁴ and the capacity to be "vocally self-critical, even when to do so is awkward or embarrassing."²⁵

Vocations that value curiosity, creativity, collaboration, entrepreneurship, care, and the like tend to be concerned with the manufacture and distribution of affect, concepts, information, and images. Today's employment market in knowledge economies, of which Amazon is just one representative company, is dominated by work that involves what Maurizio Lazzarato calls "immaterial labor" and which he proposes entail entirely new forms of organizational management and subjectivity. Managers on the one hand allege the importance of each worker's creativity and individuality, while on the other, insist that workers adhere to the organization's values, desires and beliefs.²⁶ When the Amazon Senior Escalations Investigator takes a cigarette break, her choice conflicts with the organization's values.²⁷ When, instead, she 'works out' during her lunch hour in one of the subsidized gymnasiums around the campus, her effort is encouraged. It easy to see why activities that promote employee fitness and wellness are favored over those linked to ill health and shortened life expectancy. But what good do dogs do?

Dogs enhance the company's image and reputation. Photographs on social media of animals and humans together in workplaces tells a particularly potent story in the capitalist marketplace. Dog-friendly offices are perceived as more "homey", comfortable, friendly, and "stress-free" than offices without animals.²⁸ The sheer diversity of physical appearance amongst dogs lends the impression of organizational flexibility and creativity. But there is more. Mary Mary argues that our relations with animals are invariably tied to the prevailing system of production, and "we have entered a capitalist relationship with animals."²⁹ That relationship sometimes takes the form of honing the animal towards ever greater efficiency through chemical or genetic intervention at the cellular level substituting for breeding, training and discipline. Other modes, however, take a 'collegial' form, privileging relations of intimacy and trust, and integrating animals into new labor sectors, such as emotional labor. The idea that pets are a "low-cost, wellness intervention"³⁰ is pervasive in the management literature that feeds the knowledge and innovation economy. Advocates claim the presence of dogs in the workplace has calming effects, decreases stress, increases socialisation amongst employees, boosts energy and morale, lowers rates of absenteeism and improves productivity.³¹ Accordingly, Google declares its "affection for our canine friends" is "an integral facet of our corporate culture."³² But why are e-commerce and digital knowledge companies such as Google and Amazon particularly invested in office dogs?

A Soft Touch

Unlike the door desk and other *instruments* of labour, the social relationship between dogs and humans means that dogs actively perform "labour itself."³³ They *work* to boost office morale in a way that, say, fresh flowers or an espresso machine, don't. Dogs perform caring or therapeutic work primarily through the ways in which they accept, solicit, and respond to human touch and attention. Behavioural scientists have demonstrated that it is specifically tactile interaction with

a dog, rather than just positive cognitive associations about dogs, that lowers blood pressure levels in humans.³⁴ Contact comfort between humans has been shown to have the same effect in hospitals and other sites, but in the context of what some have diagnosed as contemporary “touch paranoia” is increasingly absent from workplaces. Unwanted touch is a cause for misunderstanding and is subject to social and legal forms of biopolitical discipline and surveillance. Beset by high-profile and damaging sexual harassment allegations—Amazon’s Seattle offices included—the tech industry has been acutely concerned with policing touch. In workplaces that consider tactile interaction between human employees to be inappropriate, the ability to use touch effectively at work is inhibited. People curtail their use of touch even when they think it would be positive.³⁵ While the worker whose hand touches only the keyboard may be relieved of exposure to that which is abject or threatening, the positive aspects of touch are also jettisoned.

A series of zoonotic pandemics—the 2009 Swine Flu, SARS, MERS avian flu, Covid-19—have intensified anxieties around touch and extended them to interspecies touch. As Nicole Shukin observes, at one end interspecies touch holds zoonotic threats, while at the other extreme it embodies therapeutic promise.³⁶ So pronounced has this polarized view of animal touch across species lines become that Donna Haraway created the word ‘transfection’ to capture the coincidence of biological risk and affectionate attachment. There are, obviously, many people who dislike dogs and actively avoid contact with them, but equally there are many more who have sought to bring dogs into their homes during the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns, replacing contact with other humans with canine companionship. In the context of the pre-pandemic office, it could be argued that dogs compensate for the deprivation of the sensuous, social and tactile aspects of touch in the workplace. When we stroke animal bodies we stimulate the affect, the feelings of care, that have been so often used as the privileged qualification of our humanity. The pet-friendly office might function as an antidote to the economic rationalisation, the cold feeling, that enables the class distinction between those who work in the offices of Amazon and the underclass who pack and fetch boxes of treats and toys for consumers. The dog-friendly office is another aspect of the intersection of cognitive labour, lifestyle management and personal enhancement that characterizes the corporate campuses of e-commerce. Dogs at Amazon enable human employees to access specific experiences and emotions not otherwise available between humans. Their work promotes the social goods of friendship and care.³⁷ Given Amazon’s data collecting powers, the contribution dogs make to its workplace in measurable terms—absenteeism, retention, productivity—is likely already quantified and costed against the costs of cleaning, policing, registration, etc. But it’s a philosophical leap to fully acknowledge dogs as co-workers, let alone remunerate them for their effortful self-constraint, their willingness to lie still for hours, or give themselves up to petting from strangers.



Figure 3. Dog park at the Spheres, Amazon headquarters, Seattle. Photograph by Wanderingwithcamera, flickr, Creative Commons.

Conclusion

Amazon's alleged enthusiasm for dogs in the office might be little more than a cynical means of binding its employees to the company, but I am optimistic that the *consequences* of its pet-friendly policies might yet exceed its motives. As more corporations seek to emulate the example of high-profile tech companies, there is growing pressure on landlords and regulators to permit the presence of animals in city spaces where they are currently excluded. Societal transformations are already taking place in unexpected places, places that in other ways are architecturally banal and politically dystopian. Nevertheless, we should keep our eye on them even as we make the necessary revisions to architectural history and theory that would open us to the more than human.

Endnotes

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- ¹⁵ Jocelyne Porcher, "Animal Work," *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Studies*, ed. Linda Kalof, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 306-307.
- ¹⁶ Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, "Animal Labour in a Post-Work Society", in *Animal Labour: A New Frontier of Interspecies Justice?*, eds. Charlotte Blattner, Kendra Coulter, and Will Kymlicka, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 207.
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- ¹⁸ William Helton makes a case for animal scientists to undertake research on dog's capacity to maintain vigilance and attention, like that of Mackworth's research on humans in the 1940s. William Helton, "Canine Ergonomics: Introduction to the New Science of Working Dogs," in *Canine Ergonomics: The Science of Working Dogs*, edited by William Helton, (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2009), 10-13.

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- ²⁰ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 72.
- ²¹ Interview with CBS 1999.
- ²² From workers reportedly crashing into glazed walls to political questions around architecture's role in managerialism and gentrification, Applepark and the Googleplex have rightly attracted significant critical attention. Following journalistic awe and ridicule they have been the subject of more lengthy literary satire, for example, Dave Eggers, *The Circle* (2013) and scholarly critique (Claudia Dutton, Douglas Spencer, Erin McElroy, Benjamin Bratton, Stephanie Polsky, Daniel Ashton and Seth Giddings).
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- ²⁵ The term self-criticism was introduced by Josef Stalin in 1924 and derived from Lenin's belief that the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party should engage in self-criticism and actively and ruthlessly expose its own shortcomings and admit mistakes. Mao dedicated a whole chapter to the "conscientious practice" of self-criticism in the *Little Red Book*.
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- ²⁷ Juxtaposing the company's affirmative policies on dogs in the workplace alongside its prohibition of children, starkly reveals the ways in which its employee's life choices and identities are shaped by its 'values'. Facebook, Google, Microsoft and Apple offer back-up child care for their employees but not Amazon, an issue that has come under more intense scrutiny in 2020. Chavie Lieber, "Moms at Amazon are Fighting for Child Care. The Company Would Benefit from Listening," *Vox* 5 March 2019. Available online: <https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2019/3/5/18252174/amazon-moms-child-care-back-up-day-care>
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