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***THE HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONSHIP IN
A POSTHUMAN CONTEXT: ETHICAL AND
AESTHETICAL APPROACHES***

DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY

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Synthesis of main concepts

Contention

The issue addressed in this doctoral thesis, regarding the “animal phenomenon” and the human-animal relationship, has its source in the author’s concerns about the ethics of research in the use of animals as an experimental model. Analyzing in depth the problem of animal experiments, the only criterion that appeared to be of value to researchers was that of animal suffering. Frequently asked questions came in the form of: “What happens if animals suffer?” and “if so, how can suffering be reduced to a minimum, or even fully discarded?” We have found little research that formulates this concern in philosophical terms and that in itself highlights the ontological structure imposed onto the concept of ‘the animal’. Additionally, a lack in scientific investigations on the existence of regulations or rules that establish with certainty what is ethical and what is unethical, regarding the use of animals in various activities has been noted.

Seeking a more rigorous substantiation and a broader development of the topic, the author focused on designing a larger study on the established relationships between humans and animals. What supported this endeavor was the existence, but also the appearance of new writings in the field of philosophy, more precisely of phenomenology, about the "animal phenomenon", animality and about ethics (Ciocan, 2013; Braidotti, 2013). In these writings, the animal dimension was seen as a common attribute of both man and animal. In some of them, ‘animal’ nature was included in both the register of corporeality and the register of spirituality (Ciocan and Trepca, 2017).

In recent decades, the existence of multiple ways in which the animal makes its presence felt has been noticed, more and more, in the daily life of humans, a problem highlighted by the emergence of a new discipline, namely zoosemiotics. With the advent of posthumanism, there is talk of an ecological and an intersectional form of ethics, in which man loses his centrality in the universe, and consequently, the relation between man and animal becomes equalized. Posthumanism interrogates from within the illusion of the centrality of man in the universe. The distinction between man and animal must be explored and reconfigured in different contexts.

Therefore, we considered it necessary to name and detail the arguments on the basis of which certain philosophers adhered to the paradigm according to which there is no connection between man and animal, according to the anthropocentric perspective. At the same time, a number of other thinkers endorsed the paradigm which views the animal as a

subject, according to postanthropocentric theory. It was necessary, therefore, to directly target the new historical context of posthumanism, which seeks to relativize the anthropological differences between man and animal. This can be done by adhering to the assimilationist theory, which highlights the commonalities between man and animal. The general tendency in the evolution of phenomenology is to include and assimilate biological, psychological and ethological theories in order to identify the common spaces between man and animal. In this regard, a major contribution is made by recent developments in the field of developmental psychology and ethology that confirm the existence of emotions and empathy in animals and provide an evolutionary perspective in understanding animality and human-animal relationships (Menant et al., 2016: 241-254).

Therefore, in order to fully understand the animal phenomenon and the human-animal relationship, a new perspective is needed, one that encompasses both philosophical approaches, and namely, the differentialist and the assimilationist. I believe that the deep meaning of the human-animal rapport is based on the phenomenological explanation of the status of the animal. This seems to emerge on multiple levels, due to the decentralization of the primacy of human individuality as a subject and the broadening of its meaning towards the acceptance of non-human subjectivity.

Thus, in view of these topics of debate, the design of the research was organized starting from the following working hypotheses:

- The questioning of the ontological structure of man and animal is going to generate a better understanding of human-animal relations and is going to increase the quality of the ethical decisions taken regarding animal welfare and protection.
- The evolutionary perspective of emotions and empathy provides the right way to understand the animal being.
- Understanding the deep meaning of the human-animal relationship, from an ethical and aesthetic perspective, serves the answer to the questions “what is the boundary between man and animal” and “what are the differences and similarities between them?”
- From the perspective of posthumanist theory, the problem of empathy, in relation to the non-human subject, which emphasizes and revalues communication as an evolutionary tool, is paramount. The key to human and animal consciousness lies in emotions rather than rationality.

- The deepening of a new form of ethics assigned to all species, based on the decentralization of human privilege, extends classical humanistic values, such as empathy and moral consideration onto animals.
- Uncovering people's attitudes from a well-defined cultural space regarding the human-animal relationship, will create the possibility of establishing a database to keep track of evidence about people's conceptions, thoughts, knowledge, beliefs and actions regarding our topic at hand. As a result of this data, the emergence of a new sensitivity regarding animal suffering will also be substantiated, which, in turn, might lay the foundation for a practical form of activism to take shape, in order to help change people's attitudes in relation to animals, in a much more positive light.

The stated working hypotheses were the basis for the structuring of the doctoral thesis that conceived in the form of a cross-sectional research, which mainly made use of phenomenological and posthumanist studies on animality and the relationship between man and animals. In these writings, the problem of animality in phenomenology is approached mainly from an anthropocentric point of view, and in posthumanism, it is approached from a postanthropocentric, ethical and biological perspective. Therefore, a need for the development of a new paradigm in contemporary philosophy was felt, while the emergence of posthumanism, although full of contradictions, invites debate, ethical evaluation and the promotion of innovative attitudes on the human-animal relationship in all areas of activity. However, for this to happen, there is a need for conceptual creativity. Thus, the idea of structuring the doctoral thesis in four chapters seemed to be a natural approach.

The first chapter deals with the description of animality in phenomenology, posthuman subjectivity and the evolutionary perspective of emotions and empathy in animals. The second chapter covers topics related to ethics and bioethics, while the third chapter analyzes the important elements of bioart from an ontological, epistemological and axiological point of view. Approaching the research from these two viewpoints - phenomenological and posthumanist - allowed for the fourth chapter of the thesis to be solely allocated to an original research that identifies, analyzes and interprets the attitudes of people in the Romanian cultural space regarding the animal phenomenon, the human-animal relation, the moral status and the aesthetic value of animals. The synthesis of the chapters provides a holistic picture of the relationship between man and animal and of the

way people's attitudes regarding the complexity of these relationships take form in a well-defined historical context.

The organization of the research design and the analysis of participant's attitudes towards the human-animal relationship, in a phenomenological and posthumanist context, provides an updated picture of how this relationship, observed at the micro level can be correlated with the macro-social image. Added to these are the visible growth and value of debates in academia, discussion forums or various organizations on bioethics and bioaesthetics, both in local and global contexts.

Research methodology

The design of the research comprises two parts: a part of theoretical substantiation and one that is applicable in-situ, based on psycho-sociological research methods, in which we used both quantitative and qualitative methods. The combined methodological approach allowed for a formulation of a series of solid conclusions in relation to the manner of conceptualizing, characterizing and categorizing the animal phenomenon from an ethical and aesthetic perspective. In addition, people's attitudes towards this phenomenon weighed critically in the aforementioned analysis. Generally speaking, attitudes are expressed on a cognitive, emotional and behavioral level and have an impact on the way information is processed. Accordingly, attitudes directly influence people's self-image, self-esteem and living environment. The combined, quantitative and qualitative methodology used in the research brings forth robust scientific arguments in support of the debated ideas and at the same time, opens new research perspectives.

The diversity of constructs related to the attitudes of the people investigated in this research, corroborated with different methods of quantitative and qualitative analysis, applied to different samples, provides a comprehensive and valid picture of the phenomenon studied and its implications at the practical level. Rather than providing conceptual clarification, this study aims to stimulate research on attitudes from an ethical and aesthetic perspective, which is imperative, given that the meaning and significance of the answers obtained are extremely relevant in developing and improving laws, social policies and ethics, to ensure the welfare of animals and their protection, in the process of breeding and exploitation, in research or in art. Moreover, by integrating different approaches to the investigated constructs, the paper is a step forward in understanding the phenomenon. Last but not least, the administration of questionnaires with the role of discovering and identifying the attitudes of people from a well-defined cultural space, is

another way of integrating them into complex educational programs on the role of bioethics and bioaesthetics in the life of the community. The application of the questionnaire, developed and validated on the Romanian population, alongside the discussions held at the levels of different organizations, academic and professional fora, integrating the arts and sciences in addressing the discourse on animal ethics, for deepening the understanding of a key issue and to influence public policy and the artistic community, all represent as many ways to achieve this goal.

Hence, this doctoral research offers theoretical and empirical contributions to the literature investigating the animal phenomenon and the many facets of the human-animal relationship.

Thesis structure and chapter synthesis

The doctoral thesis is structured in four chapters, each one presenting a motto, in the introduction, with a summarizing role on the approached topic. All chapters begin with a few preliminary remarks and end with an inventory of the issues researched and the results obtained.

In the *first chapter* we presented and analyzed theories, concepts and arguments regarding the ontological structure of man and animal, using anthropocentrism as an essential criterion and, at the same time, analyzing how posthumanism helps delineate the intellectual and historical itineraries of the deconstruction of the human subject, conceptualized in a monistic ontology.

If classical humanism puts man at the center of the universe as an individual subject, the position defended in this thesis is similar to the posthumanist current and militates in favor of a non-unitary subject, interconnected with itself, but also with others, human and non-human. The author believes that anthropocentrism cannot be overcome unless we understand the complexity and depth of these phenomena and only then can we orient ourselves towards the contemporary era of posthumanism, in which the process of deconstruction of the human state is in full metamorphosis.

The new current of thought, posthumanism, militates for a relativization of the differences between man and animal, rallying to the assimilationist theory which highlights the common aspects of man and animal, contrary to the differentialist theory which emphasizes the difference between them. The general tendency in the evolution of phenomenology is to include and assimilate biological, psychological and ethological theories in order to identify the common spaces between man and animal. In this sense, a

major contribution is made by recent discoveries in the field of developmental psychology and ethology that confirm the existence of emotions and empathy in animals and provide an evolutionary perspective in understanding animality and human-animal relationships.

The author firmly claims that the phenomenological analysis of the animal should be seen as an intentional analysis, for it highlights elements related to its transcendence, temporality, corporeality, egotism and otherness. The phenomenology of animality has been approached in two major ways: in a reductive sense, eliminating from discussion all scientific or philosophical theories about animals and in a methodological way, highlighting the points of access to the animal being. The role of phenomenology, concerning this issue, is to start from the complete and everyday experience of the animal.

Humanism and the centrality of man in the world order are found in the writings of philosophers such as Heidegger, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty or Jean-Paul Sartre. Some phenomenological approaches bring into question the animal dimension, specific to the human being, but also to the animal being which manifests itself, both in the register of corporeality and spirituality. Other approaches focus exclusively on the animality of non-human beings. Some philosophers, such as Heidegger, emphasize the ontological, structural, and constitutive differences between man and animal and highlight the special character of man, claiming his uniqueness and singularity. In contrast, posthumanist philosophers challenge this special character of man and consider that, in this manner, what is offered, is the possibility of justifying any form of cruelty, injustice and discrimination to which the animal falls victim. These debates bring to the fore research on how to approach the understanding of animality, an understanding that has as its starting point the fundamental structures of man or, conversely, one that avoids these structures and identifies those common elements of man and animal.

The ingress of biological and ethological theories into the evolution of phenomenology has led to a weakening of the anthropological difference. Thus, most of the works in the field that earnestly take the issue of non-human animals are posthumanist. Posthumanism designates an exit from the domination of human nature and creates a future based on equality between species and equality between the organic and the inorganic (Moldovan, 2019: 85).

As a philosophical approach, posthumanism tries to reconfigure anthropocentrism and solve the problem of dividing the planet between humans and non-humans. To understand the animal phenomenon, posthumanist writings no longer take as a starting point those traditional characteristics such as consciousness, perception, self, ability to

reason, the ability to enter into contractual relationships or to have similar behaviors with human beings. Some authors, among which we would include Nussbaum, Derrida, Diamond, Wolfe, Braidotti, Agamben, De Waal, ground their ethical attitudes toward nonhuman animals on our common „corporeality, mortality and finitude” (Nussbaum, 2006: 327; Diamond, 1991: 133), characteristics that make us “creatures alike”, and the way to access human and animal consciousness is found in empathy and emotion rather than in reason (de Waal, 2008: 285).

In posthumanism, life has value in itself, not only human life, but the life of every living thing is assigned value and all creatures are equal, no scale being there to rank them. There is, therefore, an equalization of any form of life with that of man. The end of classical humanism should not be seen as a crisis, but should rather be seen as harboring positive consequences (Kojève, 1979: 434-435).

Thus, posthumanist human-animal relationships must be seen as transformative, but with the preservation of each other's identity. To change the mentality regarding these relationships, we should start from Spinoza's monistic theory, and in the foreground, we must bring the common spaces of human-animal interaction, because we are all “part of nature” (Braidotti, 2016: 96).

In the second chapter we discussed the issues of ethics and morality, at the beginning of the third millennium, in addition to the freedom and rights of people and non-people, as well as topics about bioethics, the fundamental form of ethics of the posthuman era. In the elaboration of this chapter, the author's main goals consisted in defining and establishing the concepts of ethics, morals and bioethics, so that, based on these, the paths that lead to the initiation of debates about rights and freedom in the animal world would be later identified. Although the earliest debates on morality appear in theological writings, concerns about secularized ethics appear only in the late 19th century. After a period of several decades, in which ethical issues were not a major social concern, in the last decade of the 20th century, ethics returned to the forefront, triggering a strong social movement that advocated for human and animal rights and freedoms.

We considered it paramount to frame the animal rights debate section of the thesis, by commencing with a brief presentation of the research and the principles of ethics, the field concerned with concepts such as values, good and evil. There is no person who is not influenced, in one form or another, by the principle of ethics, regardless of acting or not upon a certain impulse, since they themselves could be the subject of an ethical assessment, at any given moment.

Living in society, people need a common code of ethics that enforces common priorities and standards. Inevitably, conflicts arise in human societies, the role of ethics being to identify common solutions in order to resolve them. In the encounters between humans and non-humans, ethics has the role of allowing them to live together, based on relations of cohabitation reorganized in such a manner that this coexistence is harmonious, but the process requires active empathy.

Bioethics, a branch of applied ethics, combines biological knowledge with that of human values. As diverse as the bioethical fields are, so are their evaluation criteria and principles. Bioethics is considered to be „the meeting place and battlefield of the visions about mankind, about life and about the human condition” (Aluaş, 2016: 10). Dignity, integrity, autonomy, and vulnerability are the basic principles of bioethics. Within the concept of bioethics, the phrase “animal bioethics” is secured to a particular position, which refers to man's relationship with the animal world and alludes to the moral responsibility of humans in the process of raising and exploiting animals, here included: animal experimentation, biodiversity conservation or the use of animals in recreational or art activities.

The posthumanist perspective on ethics views not only human beings but also animals to be ethically significant. In this area of ethics, all animals are included, because human actions on the environment often affect them negatively. In posthumanism, it is considered that there is neither humanity nor pure nature, but on the contrary, the boundaries between man and the instruments of knowledge of nature are in a perpetual change, and the communion with the animal kingdom becomes more obvious and impossible to avoid. The relationship between man and animal, in posthumanism, is restructured and leads to a profound egalitarianism between humans and animals. This egalitarianism is based on the common division of livelihood on the same planet, the same territory and the same environment.

Furthermore, the third chapter of the thesis is devoted to the ontological, epistemological and axiological analysis of bioaesthetics and bioart. In writing this chapter, the proposed itinerary was to find the best arguments regarding the emergence and role of bioaesthetics and bioart in the contemporary era. For this purpose, firstly reviewed were the most important topics that lead the discussion on the elements regarding the current crisis that art is facing. Following is a tentative definition of the meaning of aesthetic revolution, and finally, the defining elements of bioart were showcased, with special attention catered to the art of using live animals in the artist's work. Although, lately, there

are numerous discussions about the art of everyday life or environmental art, in philosophical aesthetics, frequent debates are held in regards to bioart, as having the object of study the aesthetic appreciation of animals. Finally, this chapter bridges the gap between environmental aesthetics and the aesthetics of live animals.

In everyday life, animals have always been appreciated from an aesthetic point of view, especially pets and wild animals, often considered “objects of aesthetic delight” (Parsons, 2007). However, in recent years, circus shows, dog shows and cat shows have become extremely institutionalized events. In addition, there are plentiful exhibitions of live animals. All of this has attracted the attention of artists, art lovers, but also animal rights activists, who were concerned about the ethical aspects of such events, labeled as ‘cultural’.

Contemporary aesthetic theory does not have a well-structured body of ideas on this topic, being practically silent. By showcasing, in this doctoral thesis, the most famous art exhibitions that make use of live animals, we considered that bringing them into the light of current philosophical aesthetics will enrich people's conception of aesthetic value, in general, and of the aesthetic value of animals, in particular.

Furthermore, living animals have long been neglected by theoreticians because, unlike classical works of art, they are “too ontologically complex to serve as aesthetic objects” (Parsons, 2007: 168). The beauty of animals lies in their attributes and functions, being a familiar beauty, but too little understood.

To these debates are added those regarding the multitude of artistic languages in posthumanist art and the role of bioartists’ ethical attitudes. The aesthetic revolution manifests itself at the level of revolutionary policies of the sensible and determines a change in the manner of conceptualizing art, this change generating a specific form of freedom, manifested at the level of the sensible.

Bioaesthetics encompasses an emerging field of research that brings together bioethics and aesthetics, to lay the foundations of new theoretical directions, in what would amount to a practical structure, a compilation of the axiological and anthropological investigations within the field of bioaesthetics and the manner in which it manifests itself in the avant-garde, exploring and offering directions for treading in uncharted territories. The role of bioaesthetics, as a revolutionary policy of the sensible, exposes artists, but also art consumers, to the surprise of unexpected encounters, and these encounters will determine the exaltation of the present. Moreover, the scope of aesthetics has been extended to an aesthetic of everyday life, in the sphere of which various phenomena,

objects, living things and practices of everyday life have been incorporated. This type of aesthetic includes not only contemplation and reflective mental states, but also sensory and bodily pleasures, the so-called lower senses of smell, taste and tactility, as well as negative or seemingly insignificant reactions, minor momentarily reactions or behaviors specific to our lives.

The growing popularity of bioart, in which animals are seen as objects of aesthetic appreciation, and biotech art, in which some of the top scientific achievements of biotechnology are also considered works of art, are part of the movement defined as the aesthetic revolution. Thus, there is an absolute openness to creation, renouncing established norms and restrictions of the representative regime of art, regulating its own laws.

Both pragmatism and phenomenology describe the aesthetic appreciation of nature and the appreciation of works of art, starting from the environmental model. Environmental aesthetics is an aesthetic of involvement, there is a mutual participation of the viewer and the object, which is in line with the practical, cultural and historical interests of people. In this type of art, the viewer is transformed, there exists an aesthetic awareness and not just a state of passive contemplation.

Furthermore, the use of technology, living or dead beings in posthumanist art promotes discontinuity. In balanced societies which are considered healthy, discontinuity is accepted and understood as a diversification of aesthetic needs, even if sometimes they do not consider this type of art to be beneficial. The multitude of artistic languages has generated a new type of aesthetics. The approaches of artists such as Kac, Stelarc, Orlan, Kounellis, Evaristti, Nitsch, Laval-Jeantet and many others, come from a different perspective. Being creative does not necessarily mean doing something completely new and useful to society, but it means combining things that already exist but have been considered separate until that moment. Interdisciplinarity, a basic characteristic of posthumanism, encompasses all layers of the present. Thus, contemporary art is redefined as applied anthropology or socio-political practice. Posthuman aesthetics dissociates itself from the abusive modern decree, according to which everything must be approached starting from *anthropos*, and leaves room for an empiricist vision that prefers to rely on man's senses, celebrating one's sense of belonging to the register of the living. In this context, the integration of the animal in the aesthetic act seems natural. This trend has been supported by quite a few art galleries, which consider the living animal and certain aspects

of biotechnological research as works of art, and their exposure to the public as a rather understandable practice.

The attitude of the art consumer is influenced by one's own knowledge, by one's own system of values, own opinions about people and animals, art and its role, and about relationships and nature. Bioart compels the viewer to step out of reflective contemplation and to incorporate, in one's feelings, the pleasures offered by the tactile, olfactory or gustatory sense. In this type of art, the artistic context forces the viewer to give answers that help identify what is ethical or unethical in animal treatment. The commitment to interdisciplinarity that bioart works seem to nurture, coupled with professional seminars and forums integrating art and science in addressing animal ethics, can deepen the understanding of key issues to influence public policy and the arts community in local and global contexts. Thus, it seems that, at times, bioartists manage to fulfill our concerns, hopes and fantasies through their work.

The *fourth* chapter was structured in the form of two studies, which investigate the attitudes, knowledge and behaviors of people regarding bioethics and bioaesthetics in the Romanian cultural space. In this chapter, we have looked at how people's attitudes and their resulting effects on everyday life are shaped. If ethics refers to the way people live their lives, our concern was to identify how individual responsibility leads to the formation of attitudes and how they affect the extremely complex human-animal relationship. The first study is a qualitative one, of elaboration, validation and testing of a questionnaire, and the second study is a quantitative one, a statistical analysis of the data collected from the respondents, based on the questionnaire elaborated and validated with the help of the first one.

The first study describes the process of developing and validating an emerging tool used in measuring ethical and aesthetic attitudes regarding the human-animal relationship. The exploratory factor analysis of data collected from a sample of 219 participants suggested the existence of five latent dimensions: ethical attitudes, aesthetic attitudes, human superiority over animals, human-animal similarity, and strong emotions towards animals. All identified sub-scales had a good or excellent internal consistency, and the items kept in the tool covered the entire conceptual space proposed by the experts in the preliminary discussions, suggesting a good content validity. Regarding the validity of the construct, the gender differences observed as factors are congruent with the results in the literature: female participants had displayed a higher level of emotions, behaved in a more ethical fashion in decision making and were more invested in animal welfare. Thus, the

psychometric characteristics of the developed instrument are encouraging. However, it is necessary to replicate the structure of these factors by applying the confirmatory factor analysis to the data collected from another sample. It is also necessary to assess the validity of the criterion, by establishing the predictive power of the scale, in relation to behavioral indicators, such as eating behavior and completing the assessment of construct validity, by testing the association between scores offered by our instrument of analysis and the scores of instruments measuring similar constructs. According to our analysis, the ethical and aesthetic attitudes seem to be insufficiently correlated, so that they would be considered independent, but they do seem to share the variance with the other extracted dimensions.

The qualitative analysis of questionnaire validity was performed by the “focus-group” method. The focus group consisted of six people, with expertise in areas related to the subject of the study: veterinary professionals, philosophers, environmental activists, experts in ethics and artists. The group met in a single online meeting, which lasted about two hours. The author of the thesis selected the participants, moderated the group and performed the content analysis based on the transcript of the meeting. The meeting was the last stage of the elaboration of the questionnaire and had as its central objective the evaluation of its validity. All participants in the focus group considered that the educational environment needs to be more dynamic and should persevere in integrating animal rights issues which, implicitly, will aid in completing young people’s literacy in bioethics and bioart.

In the second study, the final remarks of the current investigation prove the robustness of the results. This study was conducted on a number of 209 people, of different ages, genders, levels of education and professions. As bioart becomes more popular, it is important to understand the characteristics of its consumers and its critics. The created questionnaire is one of the first measurement tools of its kind, targeting both bioethical and bioaesthetic attitudes and demonstrated good psychometric qualities in both samples, having a good to excellent internal consistency, indicating the expected existence of correlations with similar measuring instruments. Furthermore, we have managed to signal the appearance of differences found in the literature regarding significant variables, such as eating behavior and gender differences. In addition to validating the analysis, the generally satisfactory results indicated a correlation between the perception of bioart as aesthetically valuable and favorable attitudes towards the use of animals for entertainment and a lack of concern for protection in animal management. This conclusion is relevant because it reflects the attitudes found in the discourse of bioart critics.

Conclusions and personal contributions

The deep meaning of the human-animal relationship consists in a phenomenological explanation of the status of the animal and then expands on multiple levels, to access the knowledge of the ontological structure of man and animal, which will increase the quality of ethical decision making regarding their welfare and protection. The emphasis on empathy, from the perspective of the posthumanist theory of subjectivity, revalues communication as an evolutionary tool, and the key to human and animal consciousness is found in emotions rather than in reason. Understanding the deep meaning of the human-animal relationship, from an ethical and aesthetic perspective, completes the answer to the question “what is the boundary between man and animal?” and “what are the differences and similarities between them?”

The current doctoral thesis provides contributions to the understanding of the concepts of animality, bioethics and bioaesthetics, using an approach derived mainly from the philosophical theory of phenomenology. More specifically, the doctoral thesis is the first research paper that, based on a questionnaire validated on the Romanian population, aims to provide coherence and applicability to factors relevant in forming attitudes towards the human-animal relationship, the moral status of animals and their aesthetic value.

Moreover, this research can be a starting point for the inclusion in educational programs of topics that investigate the emotions, feelings, beliefs, perceptions and actions of people in the Romanian cultural space, regarding the animal phenomenon. People's attitudes have an impact on how they process information and therefore directly influence their self-image, behavior and living environment.

The research perspective, derived from philosophical theories on animality, animal rights and bioart, provides a sustainable approach to these constructs that can be easily translated into effective debate practices. Discussions at the level of organizations, academic and professional fora, which integrate the arts and sciences in addressing the discourse on animal ethics, in order to deepen the understanding of a key issue and to influence the artistic community from an ethical point of view, are just as many ways to achieve this goal.

At the same time, the diversity of constructs related to the attitudes of the people investigated in this research, corroborated with different methods of quantitative and qualitative research, applied to different sample typologies, provides a comprehensive and

valid picture of the phenomenon studied and its implications, on a practical level. Rather than being conceptually prescriptive, this study aims to stimulate research on attitudes from an ethical and aesthetic perspective, which is imperative, given that the meaning and significance of responses are extremely relevant in developing and improving laws and ethics to ensure the welfare of animals and their protection in the process of breeding and making use of them in research and in art. By integrating different approaches, in delineating the investigated constructs, a step forward was taken in understanding the phenomenon. Last but not least, the administration of questionnaires, with the role of discovering and identifying the attitudes of people from a well-defined cultural space, is another way of integrating them into complex educational programs on the role of bioethics and bioaesthetics in community life.

Therefore, this doctoral research offers theoretical and empirical contributions to the literature investigating the animal phenomenon. The presented studies offer valuable directions in the following issues: conceptualization of the animal construct; conceptualizing and measuring attitudes towards bioethics and bioart; establishing the background and results of bio-artists while highlighting the importance of developing legislation consistent with setting clear boundaries in all activities involving animals.

From a theoretical point of view, our study provides clarifications on the animal phenomenon, being the first of its kind to investigate this construct among the Romanian population, and aligns with studies that support posthumanist perspectives on bioethics, considered the fundamental ethics of this century, and those about bioaesthetics, viewed as the revolutionary art of the sensible. The multitude of contemporary art works, which have integrated living or dead animals into the final artistic product, giving them the status of works of art, have generated public commentary on the ethics and aesthetics of these works. They have also sparked debate in academia to reveal the impact of these extraordinary encounters between man and animals. Consequently, regardless of people's attitude, this impact denotes the construction of a personal prosocial awareness, oriented both to oneself and to others.

The second theoretical contribution of this doctoral thesis is to strengthen the results which are in favor of supporting debates about animal ethics that militate for the abolition of human tyranny over animals and for the extension of human rights to include animal welfare, which is relevant for this century. The animal must be included in the moral compass of any community within the larger human society, and should no longer have the status of human property. Instead, the animal should be granted the status of

person, from which derive all other legal rights: justice, dignity, protection, respect, value of purpose in itself.

The third contribution involves the validation of posthumanism, seen primarily as an ethical attitude that clearly places man in relation to a world that is constantly in a state of overwhelm, resulting in a simultaneous undermining and reconstitution of the idea of individual and collective responsibility. Posthumanism focuses on the deconstruction, not the replacement of the human subject. The posthuman dimension of postanthropocentrism can be seen as a deconstructivist movement, but what is deconstructed is the supremacy of the human species, destroying any persistent notion that human nature, anthropos and bios, are categorically distinct from the lives of animals and non-humans.

From a methodological point of view, a significant contribution of this paper is due to the fact that it combines quantitative and qualitative research methodology. This combined methodological approach allowed us to formulate a series of robust conclusions regarding the manner of conceptualizing, characterizing and categorizing the animal phenomenon, from an ethical and aesthetic perspective, as well as retracing human-animal relations. At the same time, it hopes to deepen people's attitudes towards the human-animal relationship, a connection that is expressed cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally and can have an impact on the way information is processed and therefore directly influences human self-image, but also the living environment of animals.

From the viewpoint of the thesis' practical implications, our study offers researchers a validated questionnaire on the Romanian population, as a working tool in studying people's attitudes and perceptions regarding the human-animal relationship. The developed questionnaire has well-rounded psychometric qualities, having a good to excellent internal consistency, indicating the expected existence of correlations with similar measuring instruments, signaling the emergence of differences found in the literature on significant variables such as eating behavior and gender differences. The results obtained from the applied empirical part of our research provide important data about the source of positive emotions, empathy and the value system in the human-animal relationship in everyday life. As bioart becomes more popular, it is imperative to understand the characteristics of its consumers and critics, and the generally valid results indicate that there exists a correlation between the perception of bioart as aesthetically valuable and the favorable attitudes towards the use of animals for entertainment, paired with a lack of concern for protection in animal management. This conclusion is relevant because it reflects the attitudes found in the critical discourse in the field of bioart. Thus,

identifying opportunities to explore the human-animal relationship in different contexts, such as institutional workplaces, in volunteering, or in leisure activities, can increase the chance of expressing positive attitudes toward animals.

Finally, universities can also contribute to the development of students' bioethical and bioaesthetic attitudes, by including in their study programs some extracurricular activities or courses that would develop their critical thinking skills and artistic appreciation. In this way, students would be able to develop their ability to explore themselves in relation to the realities of life, and such measures could help increase motivation for personal development and educational commitment to literacy in the field of bioethics and bioart.

As a corollary of the research, this doctoral thesis has some definite elements of originality and innovative contributions.

1. Based on recent discoveries in developmental psychology and ethology, we propose a paradigm shift in conceptualizing the “animal phenomenon” and human-animal relationships. We believe that, in order to reach a deeper understanding of animality, the starting point should not be the phenomenological paradigm of the fundamental structures of man, but the evolutionary paradigm of emotions and empathy. This way, the animal is reconnected to its own world and the world of human existence.
2. The principles of ethics must be established from the perspective of posthumanism, which militates for discarding the tyranny of human nature and for creating a future based on equality between species.
3. As a philosophical approach, posthumanism attempts to reconfigure anthropocentrism and attempts to solve the problem of dividing the planet between humans and non-humans.
4. Bioart is an art of the environment, it is an art of action and has a direct influence on the art consumer, particularly in one's approach to human-animal relations.
5. Identifying people's attitudes towards the moral status of animals provides new data for setting rules and limitations to what is ethical and unethical in the use of animals in breeding, research, and entertainment.

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