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## A walk with “that wild dog of yours”: tales of circumscribed, co-negotiated and adaptive walking practices

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# A walk with “that wild dog of yours”: tales of circumscribed, co-negotiated and adaptive walking practices

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## ABSTRACT

The benefits of pet companionship – and of dog walking in particular – has been long acknowledged across academic disciplines. Much of the research values – even romanticizes – it as mutually beneficial, catalysing both human sociability and canine well-being. However, walking a dog displaying aggressive or other unwanted behaviour – dogs that fall short of expectations – severely undermines the virtues of pet companionship, extracting a considerable social and emotional toll for those seeking greater inter-species commonality. Drawing on empirical work on walking practices and the author's autoethnographic account, the paper solicits interpretations more attuned to the complexities of our cohabited socio-spatial worlds, particularly against contexts of discordance. The research demonstrates how these circumstances influence relationships with humans, often forcing dogs and their owners into liminal and contested socio-spatial existences, though also occasionally revealing exploratory opportunities. The dog walk therefore emerges as an activity that is heavily negotiated and contingent. Ultimately, the quest to ‘make space’ for seemingly transgressive dogs demonstrates the necessity and potentiality for a trans-species co-habitation that is more sensitive to the spectrum of animals that share our more than human worlds.

## Un paseo con “ese perro salvaje tuyo”: Relatos de prácticas de paseo circunscritas, co-negociadas y adaptativas

### RESUMEN

Los beneficios de tener mascotas de compañía, y de pasear perros en particular, han sido reconocidos desde hace mucho tiempo en todas las disciplinas académicas. Gran parte de la investigación lo valora (incluso lo romantiza) como algo mutuamente beneficioso, que cataliza la sociabilidad humana y el bienestar canino. Sin embargo, pasear a un perro que muestra comportamiento agresivo u otro comportamiento no deseado (perros que no cumplen con las expectativas) socava gravemente las virtudes de la compañía de mascotas, generando

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un costo social y emocional considerable para aquellos que buscan una mayor comunidad entre especies. Basándose en el trabajo empírico sobre las prácticas de caminar y el relato auto etnográfico del autor, el artículo solicita interpretaciones más acordes con las complejidades de nuestros mundos socioespaciales cohabitados, particularmente en contextos de discordancia. El paseo del perro surge como una actividad fuertemente negociada y contingente. La investigación demuestra cómo estas circunstancias influyen en las relaciones con los humanos, obligando a menudo a muchos perros y a sus dueños a existencias socioespaciales liminales y conflictivas, aunque en ocasiones también revelan oportunidades de exploración. En última instancia, esta búsqueda de 'hacer espacio' para perros aparentemente transgresores demuestra la necesidad y la potencialidad de una cohabitación entre especies que sea más sensible al espectro de animales que comparten nuestros mundos más que humanos.

### **Une balade avec «ton foufoude chien»: récits de pratiques de promenade fondées sur l'adaptation, la négociation coopérative et la délimitation.**

#### **RÉSUMÉ**

Les domaines de la recherche constatent depuis bien longtemps les vertus d'avoir des animaux domestiques et en particulier de la promenade avec son chien. La majorité des études reconnaissent, voire avec un prisme romantique, ses bénéfices mutuels, aussi bien comme catalyseur de la sociabilité humaine que pour le bien-être des chiens. Néanmoins, marcher avec un chien qui a un comportement agressif ou indésirable (un chien qui ne fait pas ce qu'on attend de lui) réduit considérablement les avantages de la compagnie d'animaux domestiques, et suscitent beaucoup d'émoi tribut aux niveaux social et émotionnel pour les personnes qui aspirent à plus de rapprochement entre les espèces. L'article s'appuie sur des travaux empiriques concernant les pratiques de promenade et sur le témoignage auto-ethnographique de son auteur. Il demande des interprétations plus adaptées aux complexités de nos mondes de cohabitation sociospatiale, surtout à l'égard des contextes de discordance. La balade du chien apparaît comme une activité très sujette à la négociation et à la contingence. Les travaux démontrent comment ces circonstances influencent les rapports avec les humains et forcent souvent beaucoup de chiens et leurs maîtres à des existences sociospatiales liminales et disputées, bien qu'elles révèlent parfois des possibilités d'exploration. Finalement, cet objectif de « faire de la place » pour ces chiens apparemment transgressifs met à jour le besoin et les possibilités d'une cohabitation entre espèces qui serait plus sensibilisée à la diversité des animaux avec qui nous partageons notre monde plus qu'humain.

## **Introduction**

The appreciation of animals as sentient, affective beings demands increasingly sophisticated understandings of our 'more than human' worlds. Geographers are

well positioned to examine inter-species entanglement, with animal geographers pioneering scholarship undermining long-standing yet outdated binary understandings of human and animal spheres of existence. Some of this burgeoning field interrogates the socio-spatial dimensions of pet 'ownership' and animal companionship, the virtues of which are widely celebrated. A notable thread explores the well-being engendered through pet-caring practices, particularly the benefits derived from exercising (i.e. walking) dogs.

Although constituting a seemingly mundane facet of contemporary society, the routinized activity of dog walking is a conspicuous demonstration of how domesticated animals and humans encounter each other in the public realm (Fox, 2006). Dog walks are thus a vital dimension of everyday place-making, with the dog, the human, and their symbiosis instrumental to the mediation of public space. Indeed, it is this 'everydayness' of dog-walking that makes it ripe for further exploration.

Much of the literature on dog walking values – even romanticizes – it as mutually beneficial, catalysing, for example, human sociability and canine well-being. However, this is not universal. Walking a dog displaying aggressive or other unwanted behaviour – what has been characterized as dogs falling short of expectations (Fox, 2006; Fox & Gee, 2019) – severely erodes the virtues of pet companionship, extracting a considerable social and emotional toll for people seeking greater inter-species commonality. Yet research rarely explores dog walking that is characterized by inter-species discordance. This includes instances when 'pets' are transgressive (Carter & Palmer, 2017), failing to adhere to 'accepted' behavioural norms and conventions and displaying rather too much agency. Scholarship similarly neglects the geographies of this dissonance; how particular spaces are circumscribed or foreclosed. Under these conditions, the act of dog walking – celebrated in popular culture and across disciplines – has acute exclusionary dimensions with walkers developing strategies to mitigate or adapt to their animals' behaviour. Indeed, the dominant methodologies in dog-walking studies tend to privilege the experience of those who are capable of social interaction: humans with problematic dogs are marginalized both in public space *and* in research.

This paper addresses this deficit, exploring how restrictions on animal bodies influence relationships with humans (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011; Power, 2008), forcing dogs and their owners into liminal and contested socio-spatial existences. The dog walk emerges as an activity that is heavily negotiated and contingent, with implications for the temporal and spatial dimensions of trans-species co-habitation. Drawing on empirical work on the spatiality of walking practices of pet-owners and the author's autoethnographic accounts, the paper solicits interpretations more attuned to the complexities of our cohabited socio-spatial worlds, particularly against contexts of discordance. The study demonstrates how the beastly qualities demonstrated by dogs challenge our capacity to live in harmony in a multi-species city (Instone & Sweeney, 2014b; Westgarth et al., 2019) as public space becomes a site of inter-species encounters to be dreaded or avoided, or even a stage-set for confrontation. This can have a debilitating effect on dog-walking experiences with walks leaving human companions feeling frustrated with their dogs, isolated from fellow walkers and alienated from their localities.

The precise circumstances of encounters with transgressive dogs are subject to variable spatial and temporal characteristics (Carter & Palmer, 2017). Each walk is a discrete situational assemblage, and a mobile and transient one at that. But together

they speak to the notion that animals can become distinctly 'out of place' (Buller, 2014, p. 311) for failing to adhere to the expectations of a 'good' pet and displaying problematic autonomy. The paper also details how walkers adapt their practices to accommodate the behaviour of their dog, with space encountered in ways that avoided social contact. Yet critically – if somewhat ironically – being pushed out of place to accommodate dogs revealed new temporalities and spatialities for dog walkers and for dog walking practices. This quest to make space for seemingly transgressive dogs, demonstrates new potentialities for a trans-species co-habitation that is more sensitive to the spectrum of animals that share our more than human worlds.

## Charting the geographies of the dog walk

### *Setting the stage for inter-species encounters*

The complex relationships between humans and animals can no longer be explained through predominantly anthropogenic or anthroparchic interpretations (Fox, 2006; Philo, 1995; Wilkie, 2015). Similarly, binary articulations of animal subordination to human domination has eroded, realigning the status and perception of animals in the human experience (Irvine, 2004 in Fox & Gee, 2016, p. 124). However, whilst human exclusivity has retreated, it is far from negligible. Instead, hybridized ontologies that blend interpretations of natural and cultural and human and animal existences are increasingly privileged (Hovorka, 2018; Urbanik, 2012). Within these interpretations, inter-species co-habitation and interdependence co-define *both* the human and animal, inviting researchers to attend to 'the myriad daily practices through which human and other animal lives are entwined' (Charles, 2014, p. 727).

With some species, entwinement has evolved over a considerable timespan. In particular, co-operation and co-evolution across millennia defines dogs' contemporary relationships with humans (Pearson, 2015). This enduring dynamic has forged an inter-species proximity that has, in turn, produced an intense mutuality: 'there have to be at least two to make one ... I have a dog. My dog has a human' (Haraway, 2003, p. 12). Some have gone further to refer to trans-species conjoinment, rather neatly referred to as the 'Hu/dog' (Instone & Sweeney, 2014b drawing upon Bettany & Daly, 2008). This 'becoming-with' another species (Haraway, 2008, p. 3) can foster ontological security and comfort for humans. Perhaps the ideal animal companion embodies the space-time expectations of home; in other words that 'perform the domestic' (Power, 2012, p. 377). 'Pets' are frequently treated as family members (Franklin, 2007), or akin to children, faithful servants, or friends (Charles, 2014). Many consequently occupy a privileged place of co-habitation, often accessing the most private parts of homes and lives (Fox, 2006).

Despite an unsettling of the binaries between animals and humans and domestication and wildness – indeed, perhaps because of it – contemporary human-animal encounters are deeply contested (see Collard, 2012; Rutherford, 2018). For instance, debate endures regarding hierarchy and power dynamics between species, a point demonstrated by Tuan (1984, p. 5) who proposed that our affection for animals is, paradoxically, inseparable from a desire for dominance through which humans seek to 'subdue the unruly forces of nature'. Similarly, there are enduring concerns regarding the extent of animal agency and

associated discussion regarding attempts to harness that agency that, today, serve to frame and contextualize understandings of inter-species encounters in our more than human worlds.

### **Encountering the dog walk**

The ‘entangled’ geographies within which inter-species ecologies are nested are instrumental in shaping human-animal encounters and, by extension, for understanding the multiplicity of factors governing animal mobilities (Hodgetts & Lorimer, 2020). This is particularly true in densely populated urban spaces shared by an array of animals and humans. Such is the intensity of this inter-species entwining, the term *anima urbis* was coined to refer to the life, soul and spirit of the city across species (Wolch, 2002).

Although this research focuses on the micro-geographies of dog walks, wider geographical contexts are influential. Globally, there are significant cultural and legal differences in the acceptability of dogs in public space (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011) and expectations regarding dog management such as the necessity – or not – for leashing. The research presented here was conducted in the UK where, legally, dogs are considered property with a designated owner (see Srinivasan, 2013). Consequently, dogs must not necessarily be on a leash, but must be closely ‘controlled’. Quite what ‘close control’ means is a matter of debate (returned to later). Moreover, local governments can use public spaces protection orders to restrict canine activities, for instance, banning dogs from certain areas or mandating them to be on leads.

Dog walking is marked by two key characteristics: First, it is a shared or co-produced practice, and second, it is performed within animated public spaces including streets, and footpaths, public highways and in parks and green spaces. To this end, dog walks are more instructive than they might first seem. They are:

“significant for understanding and revealing how human relations with animals, and conversely, animals with humans, are shaped in part by the spaces we occupy and share”. (Fletcher & Platt, 2018, p. 215)

Consequently, walks are exposed to an abundance of performative interactions with multiple, intersecting humans, wildlife, and other dogs and their walkers. They are also routinized and ritualized, with walkers often following familiar practices and routes. This adherence to conventions may extend into articulations of correct and responsible dog walking behaviours (Fox & Gee, 2019; Westgarth et al., 2019) itself dependent upon a complex interplay of factors including perceptions of ethical practice, perceived best interests of the dog and the nature of social relationships with dogs (Westgarth et al., 2019). Integral to this is the socialization of dogs, vital for their learning of how to behave in manners that are deemed acceptable to wider society (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011).

Although some owners perceive the dog walk as primarily benefiting the dog, with many discharging these duties even in the most inclement of weather (Temple et al., 2011), other studies of dog walking – and inter-species co-habitation more generally – extoll the virtues of companionship for *human* well-being. Research has thus drawn distinctions between ‘functional’ and ‘recreational’ dog walks (Westgarth et al., 2021). Functional walks are catalysed through feelings of guilt to provide dogs – some of which had behavioural challenges – with exercise, but were less pleasurable for the owner. In

contrast, recreational walks derive benefits and enjoyment for human companions (*ibid.*). Demonstrating this latter assertion, multiple studies extoll the human health benefits accrued through providing the regular physical activity that pet dogs require (Christian et al., 2013; Cutt et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2011; Reeves et al., 2011). Psychological benefits are additionally derived from animal custodianship, bringing humans a sense of responsibility, self-worth and companionship, attributes increasingly harnessed for human therapeutic and health interventions (Vitztiak & Urbanik, 2016; Walsh, 2009).

Extending this, sociability has been identified as a further motivation for dog companionship, with long-term friendships emerging between dog-walkers (Messent, 1983), the dogs themselves (Westgarth et al., 2019), and even beyond the dog walking fraternity (Wood & Christian, 2011). This has been articulated as a form of social capital and civic engagement (Tissot, 2011; Wood et al., 2005) with the dog becoming a facilitator in social relations and a broker in reciprocal sociability (Cudworth, 2011; Graham & Glover, 2014; McNicholas & Collis, 2000; Wells, 2004). Dogs, therefore, provide more than mere companionship for humans, becoming:

“... an antidote for the human anonymity of the public places of our contemporary society. Dogs facilitate contact, confidence, conversation, and confederation among previously unacquainted persons who might otherwise remain that way”. (Robins et al., 1991, p. 23)

Animals have long been considered agents in the realm of socio-ecological production (Fletcher & Platt, 2018; Hovorka, 2018). Dogs, for instance, are not just ‘little hairy people’ moulded around existing routines (Power, 2008, p. 549). But although animals hold *some* agency, there is doubt regarding the extent to which they possess and perform autonomy both within inter-species relationships and more specifically in the social constructions that characterize dog walking. Some contend that what agency does exist is constrained. In many contexts dogs are subject to severe control of movement in - and access to - public space (Fox & Gee, 2019; Instone & Sweeney, 2014a). In particular, the requirement for leashing in public spaces in certain regions ‘constitutes a form of mobile spatiality that keeps the dog in proximity to the owner and separate from members of the public’ (Instone & Sweeney, 2014b, p. 775). Dogs must, therefore, negotiate whatever freedom they have within the confines that humans assign them (Masson, 1998).

Increasingly, then, the dog walk is considered a compromise, with any agency contingent upon other animals and other people (Degeling & Rock, 2013; Schuurman, 2019). In other words, animal agency can only ever be fully understood in terms of how it is “co-constituted with social context” (Cudworth, 2011, p. 76). Consequently, we are called to attend to the ‘multiple coexisting and contradictory spaces produced through human – dog relations’, and in so doing to examine the problematic agency of dogs (Instone & Sweeney, 2014b, p. 782).

### ***Unsettling inter-species encounters***

As suggested earlier, manifestations of animal agency become particularly troublesome when animals fall short of human expectations of what a ‘pet’ should be (Fox, 2006; Fox & Gee, 2019; Holmberg, 2013). These challenges can have distinctly spatial implications, with animals ‘out



of place' (Buller, 2014), even when they form part of the unintentional nature of the city (Srinivasan, 2019).

Dogs have an energy and behaviour – a 'dogginess' (Holmberg, 2013) – and perform bodily functions that have justified their marginalization in public spaces (Urbanik & Morgan, 2013). They can disrupt the order of the city, countering the codes and expectations of behaviour and challenging human dominion:

Barking, pooing, chewing, roaming and biting – dogs are trouble! And they trouble the notion of the human-centred city in significant ways ... (Instone & Sweeney, 2014b, p. 775)

In response, the behaviour and movements of animals have been subjected to spatial control and surveillance (Fox & Gee, 2019), and physical restraint and mobility restrictions (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011), often enforced through local ordinances (Srinivasan, 2013). Additionally, dog training and socializing activities further represent efforts to 'civilize' the animal (Fox, 2006), to behave less beastly, to be more controllable, and ultimately to be more human-like. In these ways the desire is that the animal becomes more acceptable to wider society (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011).

Researchers have explored how the management of animals influence relationships between people and their companion animals. In domestic spheres, exclusions may confine dogs to certain parts of the house (Power, 2008). Institutions such as care homes and refuges may prohibit companion animals, ironically often at a time when their human companions would benefit most from their company (Cudworth, 2011). In contrast, however, limited spaces may be reserved for the exclusive use of humans with their dogs. Dog parks and off-lead dog exercise areas are quintessential 'beastly places' (Philo & Wilbert, 2000), 'where canine needs and desires invert the anthropocentric order of the city' (Włodarczyk, 2021, p. 495). Some advocates assert that 'more than human' families should claim more such public spaces as their own (Urbanik & Morgan, 2013).

Aligning with re-evaluations of interspecies interactions away from the freedom-dominance duality (Smith, 2003), it is misleading to characterize these relations as being a simple dichotomy between inclusion and exclusion. Instead 'transgressive' behaviour fluctuates with space and time (Carter & Palmer, 2017). Mirroring assertions that companion animals occupy 'liminal' spaces (Fox, 2006), inclusivity is similarly conditional, dependent upon a range of fluctuating variables. For instance, exclusions may have temporal dimensions, with dogs prohibited from places during certain seasons such as lambing or bird nesting.

Exclusion and self-exclusion can also be contingent upon other dimensions of pet ownership such as the dog's (and for that matter, 'the owner's') temperament and how others perceive certain animals or breeds. Consequently, social perceptions can weigh heavily on some walkers. Many are aware of public judgements of 'good' and 'bad' dog-walkers, influencing choices of where, when and how they walk their dogs (Amberson, 2022, p. 172) or otherwise determining who is – or is not – considered to be a responsible dog owner. Indeed, the ability to predict and therefore avoid, conflicts involving dogs in public spaces is cited as one of the key obligations of dog owners (Westgarth et al., 2019).

An issue of particular concern is how dog aggression, and the fear of dogs, can undermine urban conviviality and human-animal/human-human sociability (Lulka, 2009). For instance, the fear of dog attacks has been identified as disincentivising peoples' use of parks (Madge, 1997). Others consider how individuals with dogs possessing

aggressive tendencies or 'behavioural quirks' may avoid social situations, for example people crossing the street upon sight of another dog, 'limiting opportunity for community ties and increasing anxiety' (Graham & Glover, 2014, p. 220). Even dog parks – lauded as ideal spaces of inter-species sociability in our intense urban environments – are critiqued as sites of conflict, undermining compatibility between dog walkers and fellow park users (see Chen et al., 2022).

Ever more intensive urbanization, alongside an increasing desire for people to have their pets accompany them in the city, exacerbate inter-species tensions, leading to fraught ecologies of being (Instone & Sweeney, 2014a). Yet despite many extolling the virtues and sociability of dog walking and companionship, for many the experience is less than convivial. For some, practices can become the source of considerable contest, profoundly unsettling for humans and animals alike. Given this prospect, this paper responds to calls to consider how restrictions placed on animal bodies affect relationships between people and their companion animals, identifying how space is used differently – or even not used at all – to manage problematic inter-species encounters.

## Methods

The research follows an established methodological practice of walking and sensory ethnographies (see Ingold & Vergunst, 2008; Pink, 2015). More specifically, it reflects broader contentions of walking as intimately linked to bodily senses and the materiality of the city (Middleton, 2010); in other words, an embodied and affective experience (Edensor, 2000). Although accounts from beyond the realm of animal geographies have discussed the broader ways in which walking can be constrained (Imrie, 2000), little research explores dog walking activities that are less than symbiotic or that are subject to inter-species dissonance.

The research draws on four years of mobile auto-ethnography, namely the author's experience of managing a dog (a Jack-Russell terrier) displaying aggression to other dogs, and subsequent attempts to manage this. Auto-ethnographic insights were voice-recorded or written in brief note form during walks, or shortly thereafter. Notes were not necessarily recorded for every walk, but certainly after a troublesome or particularly affective encounter. Particular attention was directed to assess how embodied experience of walks were influenced by interactions with others and regarding adaptations made to manage my dog's behaviour. Further accounts were drafted that reflected on prevailing patterns across seasons or on the evolution of rituals, routines and adaptations of dog-walking practices over time.

The auto-ethnography was supplemented with eight semi-structured interviews. Respondents ranged in age from approximately 22 to 70 years. All self-identified as having dogs with behavioural issues that impacted their social interactions. Respondents' dogs varied in breed. All but one were 'rescued' or adopted from shelters, although this was not identified as being necessary or desirable for participation. Respondents were recruited through pre-existing networks, with several met through training programmes for reactive dogs. This purposive sampling was extremely effective given the benefits of having a pre-existing rapport with interviewees in research that explores what is, for many participants, a troubling and sensitive topic.

The interviews occurred in a range of public spaces. Five took place 'on the move': three on urban streets with two in rural areas. Such 'go-along' interviews embed

**Table 1.** Overview of interviewees.

Interviewee #	Gender	Age (years)	Occupation	Dog breed	Context
1	Female	30–39	University researcher	Cross breed	‘Go-along’ walking interview in a suburban location (1.5 hour) followed by a 90-minute interview
2	Male	40–49	Academic	Jack Russell	Interview – telephone (1 hour). Urban and suburban dog walking practices.
3	Female	20–29	Retail assistant	Lurcher	Interview – face-to-face (1.5 hour). Urban and suburban walking practices.
4	Female	40–49	Consultant researcher	Mastiff	‘Go-along’ walking interview (1.25 hour) in an urban area, followed by a 60-minute interview
5	Female	65+	Retired	Lurcher (cross)	‘Go-along’ walking interview (1.5 hour) in a rural location, followed by a 45-minute interview
6	Female	50–59	Self-employed/business owner	Alsatian	‘Go-along’ walking interview (1.5 hour) in a rural location followed by a 45-minute interview
7	Male	30–39	Self-employed sales	Rottweiler	Interview – face-to-face (45 minutes). Mainly walks in rural locations, with occasional urban walks.
8	Male	20–29	Construction industry	Labrador	‘Go-along’ waking interview (30 minutes) in an urban area followed by a 45-minute interview

researchers ‘in the mobile habitats of their informants ... facilitating access to their experiences and practices as they unfold in real time and space’ (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 478). Specifically, accompanied dog walks permit reflexive storytelling regarding walking experiences (Cudworth, 2011; Fletcher & Platt, 2018) with respondents demonstrating and narrating particular routines and interactions (Table 1).

Honouring assurances given to participants, individuals and locations are anonymized. Participants were given contextual information regarding the study and consented to participation. Full ethical approval was received from my host institution (MMU EthOS reference: 2018-0953-825). An interview schedule and an analytical framework was developed based on themes drawn from the literature and from my own experience, focusing on characterizing problematic dog behaviour, the spatial and temporal dimensions of dog walking (emphasizing inclusionary and exclusionary facets and adaptations made to accommodate the dog’s behaviours) and the impacts on social intercourse and sociability. Qualitative data analysis followed the protocols established by Miles and Huberman (1994).

## Analysis

### *“That wild wee dog of yours”: characterising problematic behaviour*

The research responds to the challenge to attend to the multiplicity of practices through which human and animal lives are entwined (Charles, 2014). It reflects how dogs and humans share walks, but in unsettling ways; the problematic behaviour of the dog shapes a human experience that falls short of what many hope for. These circumstances had striking socio-spatial implications reflecting research articulating walking as contingent upon broader relational ecologies and societal dynamics (Hovorka, 2018); namely, how

a problematic dog relates to other animals and people, in space and time (Degeling & Rock, 2013).

Participants described, and in the mobile interviews narrated, animal behaviour that contrasts starkly with literatures celebrating dog walking and animal companionship, instead identifying inter-species encounters exceeding human intentionality (Power, 2012). Respondents often explained how their experience of managing a dog with behavioural issues contrasted with the more convivial experience of most other dog owners. One mournfully reflected that she vicariously dwelt upon the shared human–dog experience they could enjoy *'if only we had a nice dog'*. Another spoke regretfully about how their experience fell far short of their *'romanticised'* expectations of having a dog that walked to heel and could be recalled when off the lead. They referred to occasions when their dog had attempted to attack other dogs or even people on walks, with some encounters leading to heated exchanges and even, on occasion, to confrontation.

Other less serious incidents permeate accounts, but together they cumulatively determined the (anti)sociability of dog walking experiences. Characteristic of these accounts were reports of dogs barking or straining towards other dogs or people, a source of frustration, embarrassment and anxiety that exerted a significant emotional and social toll on participants. One interviewee reported a *'visceral crushing feeling'* after even relatively minor negative interactions, eroding her confidence, and leaving her fearing, for example, that her dog's barking could be reported for causing a public disturbance. Another elaborated how the behaviour of her dog – barking and lead straining – left her feeling self-conscious, saying:

*"People look at you, staring. Sometimes they'll say something too – like tell you what to do. "Let him off the lead", or ask "can't you train him better?" "He's a lively one"; that's common! They probably don't mean to make you feel bad but you still do". (Interview)*

Describing how her dogs *'bounced with excitement'* on walks, a further interviewee said:

*"It's the embarrassment that gets me. You're out walking, and you know people are looking and judging you. Some seem sympathetic and maybe smile at you. But you know what they're thinking. And with ours, it's just excitement; they're just bouncing around happy to be out. It must feel terrible if they're being aggressive" (Go-along interview)*

My auto-ethnographic notes are punctuated with descriptions of how my own dog's barking and straining at other dogs foreclosed convivial interaction with fellow dog walkers. In fact, this became a defining characteristic of our walks, to the point where one family member referred to him as *'that wild wee dog of yours'*. On walks, fellow walkers avoided us, crossing the street or turning in the opposite direction. Although I recorded a general sense of appreciation for these avoidances, knowing they helped to mitigate escalations, I also detected a tangible detachment from fellow walkers:

*"The woman with the big docile lab crossed the street today – and then waved and smiled at me! I'm grateful – she knows what a spectacle Tommy [my dog] makes. Though it would be great to chat with her – to have some interaction beyond a sympathetic wave! (Author's notes – October 2019)*

This dislocation was echoed by interviewees, all of whom reported that their dog's behaviour precluded sociability. One reflected: *'I see other people adapting their behaviour. They'll see me coming and they'll change course, quick!'*

Fundamentally, tensions emerge through the spatial proximity of dogs with behavioural challenges with other animals and their human companions. But a further concern regards the behaviour of *other* dogs, particularly those unleashed and able to make an approach. Extending observations on the responsibility for owners to contain their dogs in public (Srinivasan, 2013) and the recognition that leashing animals modulates possible aggression (Westgarth et al., 2010), such encounters proved deeply frustrating given that the 'problematic' dogs were under close control, with their autonomy tightly constrained. One participant referred to how other dogs off the lead 'invaded' their animal's space, expanding debates regarding the circumstances under which dogs should be considered out of place (Buller, 2014). Another interview also expressed her frustration at this particular issue:

*"Dogs that are off the lead are a real pain. They come up and [her dog] really kicks off at them. They're not actually being aggressive – just want a sniff and to say hello. But you know my dog is aggressive and under control. Your dog might not be aggressive – but is it under control? I don't think so!" [Interview]*

Despite the challenges, respondents reported an acute sense of obligation to walk their dog, resonating with work identifying routinized walking as essential for the dog's well-being and welfare (Fletcher & Platt, 2018; Westgarth et al., 2019). Several explained they had learned to live with their dog's behaviour, with one citing a willingness to accept 'bad' behaviour as being the 'natural' disposition of their dog. All had developed conscious strategies to negotiate the timing, location and duration of walks to mitigate or adapt to their dog's behaviour, a point now turned to in detail.

### **Negotiating the troubled dog walk**

Participants were acutely aware of the temporal and spatial specificity of their dog's behavioural characteristics, with several referring to a need to moderate their dog's 'animalness' or 'wildness'. One interviewee reported their dog was 'tamer' at home. Another similarly referred to their dog's *'Jekyll and Hyde character: great in the house, but outside he goes into guard dog patrol'*.

All interviewees described how previous encounters had escalated into contests for space, and even conflict. This was illustrated in one go-along interview when a participant identified a small grass area that had become the stage-set for a protracted territorial contest:

*"There's a chihuahua that lives here [pointing to a house]. He's walked without a lead and basically this square belongs to him. He tries to see off our dog which has led to problems. Let's just say he's met [my husband] a few times, involving [my husband] standing and shouting 'get your dog under fucking control!'."*

These and similar encounters had significant impacts on when, where and how dogs were walked, resonating with Power's observation of how human activity is altered to 'incorporate the needs, preferences and pleasures of dogs' (Power, 2008, p. 549).

Respondents had developed mental typologies of places – specific to each human/animal dyad – according to the likelihood and implications of a negative encounter. Such ‘anticipatory knowledge’ is vital for managing dogs with behavioural issues in outdoor spaces (Brown & Dilley, 2012). Demonstrating this, one interviewee referred to their ‘perpetual vigilance’, with walks considered carefully to moderate their animal’s behaviour:

*It’s all planned – always! Like a planned mission. There should be the Mission Impossible soundtrack or something playing in my head!*

In practice, walks were often curtailed, subject to meandering detours or avoided altogether to limit social interaction with dogs or even certain dog owners (Schuurman, 2019). Ironically, respondents unanimously reported they avoided places recognized to be ‘dog-friendly’ precisely due to the fear of inter-animal encounters. This included dog-friendly parks, public houses and cafes, or events in public spaces that were advertised as ‘dog-friendly’.

Perceptions regarding ‘safe’ places for walking were nuanced and highly contingent. Overall, urban areas were perceived as offering greater opportunity to evade unwanted encounters. Several interviewees preferred to walk along roads, not because they found pleasure in traversing these spaces, but because they were confident other dogs would be under close control. Most respondents also suggested urban areas offered more options to avoid encounters by using side streets, passageways or alternative routes. On one walking interview, a participant with a reactive dog took me to a nearby newly constructed but uninhabited housing development, knowing she would be less likely to meet other people or dogs. Others walked in places where dogs were not necessarily prohibited, but where their access or autonomy was restricted in the hope that the animals they encountered would be more predictable:

*I love seeing dog walking restrictions, when it’s the lambing season or places where dogs are allowed but only on leads. At that time of year, you’ll come across dogs but they won’t get up close and personal . . . if they are under proper control’.*



[Image 1: Assembled ranks of gravestones in a cemetery, Greater Manchester, UK. Author’s own, taken on a go-along interview].



I too assessed routes according to the likelihood that it might be attractive to other dog walkers, particularly if dogs could be unleashed and therefore able to approach us. My decision-making also considered whether routes would permit what I referred to as 'avoidance manoeuvres' or places with limited opportunities to give dogs, including my own, space. Spaces to be avoided included enclosed alleyways or parks with just one entrance and egress point, or linear walking routes such as narrow footpaths or canal towpaths. One diary entry stated:

*Stupidly decided to risk a shortcut down the [200 metre, very narrow] path between the industrial units. Bad idea - two other dog walkers were using the same path. Had to pick him [my dog] up and cover his eyes. He still kicked off though. Nightmare! Won't risk that again!*

Interviewees also considered how the micro-geographies of the dog-walk were exploited to accommodate challenging animal behaviours. Adaptations varied according to the characteristic reactivity of animals and the features and participant's knowledge of the locality. Several made innovative tactical use of small-scale permanent and impermanent features on streets and neighbourhoods, navigating spaces heuristically. For instance, street furniture, vegetation, and parked vehicles were used to disrupt sight lines, breaking the attention of a dog or concealing dogs from each other. One respondent liked to walk in a cemetery because, when in alignment, the ranks of gravestones closed dogs' lines of sight across a significant distance (see Image 1). Others referred to the choreography required to avoid potentially troublesome encounters, including sharp U-turns and detours. Even these adaptations, whilst managing their dog's interactions, created further anxiety for walkers who felt their need to rapidly disappear into alleyways or to double-back made them look suspicious, or as one interviewee said, as "a bit dodgy!".

The strategies of avoidance and adaptation also had temporal dimensions. One interviewee 'avoided busy walking times'. Others walked early in the morning or late at night; times when 'there's nobody around' (interviewee). This extended across weather conditions and even the seasons. For instance, a respondent reported that they looked forward to winter walks when the weather was less conducive to others walking their dogs. Resonating with observations by Temple et al. (2011), my own auto-ethnographic notes



[Image 2: 'Tommy' roaming on a remote beach, Embo, Scotland. Author's own].

similarly commented on how inclement weather produced more convivial walks, once noting: *love a nice rainy day! No other dogs to contend with.* (Author's diary – January 2018).

### **Dog walks as exploration**

Although most interviewees agreed that their dogs' behaviour was a source of alienation, there were occasions when the necessity to accommodate their dog's reactivity entailed discovery and exploration, opening new geographies for walkers. My own autoethnographic account relays how seeking quiet, even isolated places to walk took deliberate planning, undermining spontaneity. But I also found many new places that I otherwise would never have encountered. Many were quite unremarkable: *'banal industrial estates and car parks that emptied after working hours'* (Author's diary, January 2019). At times, however, I expressed a sense of exploration: *'Discovered a new green space behind the warehouse on xxx Lane. Lived here for seven years – never knew it existed'. (ibid)*. This 'exploration' sometimes involved plotting routes across quieter rural or less densely populated or less frequently visited areas where walks would be more likely to unfold without incidents:

*'... the only place he's allowed off the lead is on a beach, way up in the north of Scotland – there's no one there. And if there is someone there you can see them from miles off'. (Author's diary, September 2018) (see image 2)*

Interviewees reported how their adaptations across space and time were similarly revelatory, introducing them to previously unknown places, or providing them with new perspectives on their localities. One reported some satisfaction in this discovery: *'I was consciously avoiding human traffic and dogs and all the rest of it ... I suppose there is something appealing about spaces that are between the spaces on the map'*.

There was also evidence that sociability was not entirely forfeited by participants. Interviewees often sought fellow owners of problematic dogs or met people in similar circumstances, for instance on training programmes or organized walks. These interactions allowed participants to encounter the wider world with people that understood them and the difficulties of walking a dog with behavioural issues or significant reactivity. In some instances, this led to the formation of small social groups and enduring friendships. One interviewee reflected:

*I meet with three other women and we all walk together. Two of the dogs have problems but the three of them all play together.*

Another interviewee described similar walks with the owners of problematic dogs as *'an act of solidarity; these crazy dogs together'*. Consequently, such activities permitted owners to co-negotiate walks with their troubled dogs, providing a sense of sociability more resonant with the conventional experience of owners of dogs without acute behavioural characteristics and challenges.

### **Discussion – making space for problematic dogs**

Humans and animals are embedded within intricate social ecologies, with existences significantly influenced 'by the spaces we occupy and share' (Fletcher & Platt, 2018, p. 215). But



despite our long and deeply integrated co-existence with dogs in our more than human worlds, they can be uneasy co-habitants (Fox, 2006; Fox & Gee, 2019). Demonstrating this, dog walking, though lauded across academic literature and in public discourse, is neither necessarily co-operative nor exclusively convivial, with this research recounting multiple ways that animal behaviour exceeds human intentionality (Power, 2008). In particular, the dogs at the centre of this study failed to behave in socially accepted ways; or, in other words, to adhere to the expectations of a 'good' pet. Such displays of either too much animal agency - or an exhibition of beastly qualities - has been cited as undermining both peoples' capacity to live in harmony in a multi-species city (Instone & Sweeney, 2014b) and anthroparchic interpretations of inter-species relationships. Indeed, it is perhaps this ambiguous existence that at least partly explains why such dogs have often been ignored in previous research.

Empirically, the research illustrates how potential engagement with fellow walkers and dogs significantly influenced where, when and how walks were performed (Amberson, 2022). In the cases outlined here, walkers used a heightened awareness of their spatial and social surroundings to anticipate potential encounters, enabling responses that were both timely and geographically attuned (Brown & Dilley, 2012; Haraway, 2008). More particularly, people deployed a range of evasive and adaptive actions to counter the unpredictability of the dog walk and to manage their dog's behaviour. Through these actions, humans took what Westgarth et al. (2019) refers to as *responsibility* for their animals' behaviour, making alterations to routines to assert control over the dog walk and to curtail animal agency. For instance, walks were carefully considered in advance, including in terms of locations and routes taken or the time of the day that the walk occurred. Although this undermined some aspects of socio-spatial spontaneity, even planned walks remained far from formulaic, with respondents continuing to report unpredictability and problematic interactions depending upon the other animal-human dynamics encountered. Consequently, on the walks themselves, walkers had to also use micro adaptive behaviours, with space negotiated in iterative and improvised manners to limit possible conflict or contestation (Schuurman, 2019).

Critically, these adaptations solicited significant collateral damage to sociability as it entailed avoiding places, people and fellow-dog walkers. This was a source of regret for walkers who felt they were making considerable concessions in their pet companionship experience. This clearly exacted a social and emotional toll on the research participants who yearned for greater inter-species mutuality, contrasting sharply with accounts that rather uncritically celebrate dog walking practices and animal companionship. Some respondents reported that the anticipation of anxiety and conflict emerged as an overriding and often debilitating concern (Westgarth et al., 2019). For many, dog walks had become something to dread, even avoided altogether; mindsets that are reminiscent of agoraphobia. Far, then, from facilitating confidence and conversation and challenging the anonymity of public places (Robins et al., 1991) managing dogs with challenging behaviours forecloses the very spaces where micro-publics should engage with civility (Amin, 2002; Graham & Glover, 2014; Lulka, 2009).

These circumstances clearly foster a broader concern for the management of canine autonomy; that is, for those that must make space and time to accommodate dogs with unconventional behaviour. After all, sociability has been cited as being vital if animals are to gain acceptance in wider communities (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011, p. 125). However, in the very act of being pushed out of certain places, it would be remiss not to acknowledge that for many the desire to persist with exercising even the most problematic of

dogs revealed new temporalities and spatialities for walking. This entailed both the discovery of novel places for and practices of dog walking and – in a more profound sense – led to new human and inter-species relationships, friendships and social networks being forged.

Core to these observations is the long-standing concern regarding the circumstances under which dogs (and their human handlers, for that matter) should be considered 'out of place' (Buller, 2014). Given that the main challenge for the dogs in this study stems from the propinquity of co-located animals in the inter-species city, the adaptive actions taken by walkers could be considered attempts to 'create space' for animals. Yet this creation of space<sup>1</sup> has dynamic and at times contradictory qualities. Reactive dogs are at once deeply affected by their wider worlds and the interspecific characters that animate it, yet are simultaneously dislocated from it, particularly given their handlers desire to avoid contact. Reflecting re-evaluations of interspecies interactions away from the freedom-dominance duality (Smith, 2003), and similarly prompting a migration away from the domestication and wildness binary, it is also misleading to characterize these relations as being a simple dichotomy between inclusion and exclusion. Rather, such companion animals occupy a 'liminal space' (Fox, 2006); inclusivity is dependent on a vast array of factors.

Clearly, the precise circumstances of encounters with transgressive dogs fluctuate across spatial and temporal dimensions of their existences (Carter & Palmer, 2017), demanding recognition of the 'contingent nature' of inter-species bonds (Power, 2008, p. 541). Walking – and perhaps each walk – is best understood as a discrete situational assemblage, and a mobile and transient one at that. Meanwhile the dogs themselves – even whilst under 'close control' – were instrumental in the making of publics and public space, further demonstrating the mutuality and interdependence of inter-species relationships (Haraway, 2008). This resonates with further work by geographers to understand 'degrees or autonomy' possessed and performed by animals; autonomy that is variable, uneven and situated (DeSilvey & Bartolini, 2019, p. 107). As stated in Power (2008, p. 549), dogs are not just 'little hairy people' that must fit existing routines, but instead, participants' plans and activities were altered and extended to incorporate the needs, preferences and pleasures of dogs". These and similar such insights speak to broader conceptualizations of time – space territorialities whereby public spaces are revealed as 'never static or independent, but ... relational, interdependent and entangled in transformative processes' transcending spatiotemporal scales beyond that made visible in the specific situation (Kärrholm, 2016, p. 19).

Dogs, to redeploy an earlier phrase, really can be trouble, challenging our capacity to live harmoniously in a multispecies city (Instone & Sweeney, 2014b). The tension that emerges from these scenarios can potentially render some dogs surrendered to adoption charities or abandoned. In extremis, consequences may be fatal; the overwhelming killer of dogs is not illness, but behaviour that deems animals 'unadoptable' (Cudworth, 2011, p. 151). Given these rather drastic alternatives and given the social and emotional bonds that dogs and their human handlers share, it is unsurprising that people expend considerable effort to accommodate the autonomy of their animal. For these hu/dog dyads, dog walking requires careful, conscious and very deliberate mediation and is subject to constant negotiation and renegotiation across spatial, social and temporal dimensions of their existence. Further

research and carefully planned public campaigns that appreciates and explains how and why this occurs will hopefully reveal the potential for more nuanced and sensitive understandings of contemporary animal encounters; understandings that ultimately must be more acutely attuned to the spectrum of animal behaviours that unfold across our more than human worlds.

## Note

1. The 'Yellow dog project' was established to recognise dogs requiring 'space' while training, recovering from surgery, or being rehabilitated. Dogs wearing a yellow ribbon, bandana or similar indicates that this is a dog "which needs some space". The Swedish International Gulahund Yellowdog programme was launched in June 2012 by Eva Oliversson, dog behaviourist and dog trainer. <https://www.yellowdoguk.co.uk>

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