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Posthuman Community in the Edgelands

Abstract

This paper draws on a study of companion animals in human households and public spaces, deploying material gained by ethnographic observation and interviews with dog walkers in urban and rural contexts. The communities which are the subject of this study frequent public places that might be described as 'edgeland' space where dogs and 'dog people' meet. The paper argues that the relationships between cross-species packs of people and dogs develop over time in the routine practice of walking are micro-communities inclusive of both dogs and their human companions. It is suggested that these might be understood as posthuman social forms with particular characteristics of inclusivity, diversity and reconstitution. Human members of such communities are also invested in, and defensive, of edgeland spaces and engaged in practices of care for both human and canine walkers.

Keywords

Community, companion animals, dog walking, human-animal relations, posthumanism

Introduction

Dog walking is a timelised and spatialised practice where, in regular encounters, dogs and their human companions form relationships of community that might be understood as 'posthuman'. Such communities, this paper suggests, are loosely knit, shifting and relatively tolerant of diversity. Posthuman communities are also distinctly located. The practice of walking through a particular space leads dog walkers to a knowledge of the places through which they walk and to the development of practices of care for those spaces and the creatures they encounter there - including other humans and other dogs.

Research has already indicated that people who live with dogs as companions are more likely to interact with others in public spaces. Dogs have been seen to act as social lubricants and to encourage human participation in community (McNicholls & Collins, 2000); but this underestimates the role of dogs as productive in the generation of relationships. This paper suggests there are "cross-pack" relations in terms of intra-species and trans-species companionship and conviviality. Commencing with a discussion of concepts of community and posthumanism, the paper locates posthuman communities in places that might be described as 'edgelands'. This conceptual landscape is illustrated and developed drawing on an ethnographic study undertaken in two locations in the UK, East

London and rural Leicestershire in the midlands of England. Data is drawn from two sources. First, field notes kept in the form of an ethnographic diary observing interactions between "packs" of dog and human walkers for a calendar year. Second, fifty two people were interviewed about their experiences of living with dogs. The majority of these interviews were mobile, allowing for observations of human/dog and dog/dog interactions also to be recorded. The resulting data is extensive, and this paper discusses one of its many themes – walking with dogs and the generation of a particular kind of community.

Posthuman lives

In thinking about more-than-human community, the notion of "dwelling in mixed communities" of species is a useful starting point. Naess (1979) developed this in exploring conceptions of community for humans who dwell in close proximity to wild animals such as bears and wolves; arguing for a de-centering of human priorities and an ethics of tolerance and respect towards wild creatures. This paper focuses on dogs - "perhaps the only fully domesticated species" apart from humans (Masson, 1998, p. 29). Many of us already dwell in a mixed community of species within our homes. Almost half of UK households contain a cat or a dog (Pet Food Manufacturers Association,

2014), and an estimated 8.5 million dogs live as pets, with 23 per cent of UK households owning at least one (Pet Health Council, 2012).

In recent discussions of the mixed-species constitution of the social world, the term ‘posthumanism’ or ‘posthumanist’ has been deployed. This is a contested terminology used to describe various discourses and philosophical claims about the human, the animal, “nature” and artifice (see Miah, 2007; Braidotti, 2013). Posthumanist scholarship is concerned with developing analytic frameworks that account for the more-than-human constitution of the social. This is not simply a case of demonstrating that the social world is constituted by non-human animals, but drawing our attention to the co-constitutive character of human/non-human lives and relations. For Haraway (2008), important in understanding such co-constitution is direct embodied experience where we “meet” and share across the species barrier. Thus we are “beings-in-encounter in the house, lab, field, zoo, park, office, prison, ocean, stadium, barn or factory” (2008: 5). Work on the family and the household for example, has drawn on posthumanism to describe the ways in which boundaries between humans and animals, friends and kin are porous and shifting (Fox, 2006; Mason & Tipper, 2008).

I consider that a *critical* posthumanism is required, and following Wolfe, hope that posthumanist scholarship might contribute to “an increase in

vigilance, responsibility and humility" as we live in a world that is decreasingly understood "humanocentrically" (Wolfe, 2010: 47). Work on households has examined some of the contradictions and tensions in more-than-human lifeworlds (Tipper, 2011); but has often emphasized the decentering of the human rather too heavily. Smith writes compellingly for example, about the ways in which she, and other keepers of "house rabbits" understand rabbits as full household members with peculiarly rabbit concepts of the management of household space (2003: 188). However, companion animals live in a human-centered world and such extensive accommodation is rare. It is more often the case, as Masson argues with respect to companion dogs, that we are essentially their "jailors", and that companion animals must "negotiate any freedom they achieve within the confines we assign them" (2008:34).

Public spaces of dog walking are spaces of beings-in-encounter and enable the emergence over time of posthuman micro-communities through routine practices. The term "posthumanist" is a useful descriptor for these more-than-human social institutions and practices which are co-constituted across species. The focus of this paper concerns what Haraway (2008) calls "cross-pack" relations - those formed outside the home between humans and dogs when species meet through walking together.

While those with rabbits, cats or other animal companions living in the home may engage in social networks around the breeding, showing or rescue of animals, dogs are distinctive in drawing people into public space through the need to be exercised (Wells, 2004). In a world where their lives are determined by the humans they live with however, not all dogs are exercised sufficiently. The Kennel Club of Great Britain suggests a minimum of 30 minutes a day for all kinds and ages of dog (The Kennel Club, 2013); yet one in five dog guardians in the UK do not walk their dogs daily (Derbyshire, 2010). For those who do regularly walk, qualitative research indicates that dogs motivate people to walk from a sense of responsibility (Knight & Edwards, 2008). In addition, regular dog walkers have been found to demonstrate high levels of household connectivity (Westgarth et al, 2009). This research focuses on such dog walkers, suggesting that those who walk with dogs as a routine practice become, through regular encounters, communities. While the term "posthuman community" has been used previously (Author,   ), it is undeveloped. This paper elaborates the notion of posthuman community by considering its distinctive features (of eclecticism, dynamism, location and lose constitution) in relation to an empirical study of the daily practices of human and dog walking packs. In observing the interactions of regular walking packs where relations between dogs and guardians were generally

positive, and in speaking about inter-pack exchanges with dog guardians who cared for the dogs they shared their lives with, the darker side of dog guardianship plays a more muted role than it might, albeit that issues of power and human control do make their presence felt. This paper is a part however, of a wider project in which questions of human domination and issues of violence have been disscused (Author,).

Places of community

The research on which this paper draws is situated in two study sites, both of which demonstrate the ways in which human experiential knowledge of public spaces transforms them into places we have a sense of intimacy with. This occurs "through experiences mostly fleeting and undramatic, repeated day after day and over the span of years" (Tuan, 1977, p. 183); and many packs of humans and dogs who know each other well, do so as a result of routine walking. The idea of place as reiterative is useful in thinking about the continuous constitution and reconstitution of groups of dogs and dog walkers. New members are incorporated and old members die or move away and new configurations of community emerge, often shaped by memories of past individuals and configurations. For Relph (1976), everyday knowledge of place leads not only to intimacy, but to feelings of protection. Newman (1974) futher argues that such

intimacies encourage practices of care and a process of "natural surveillance". Data in this study suggests that the routine practise of walking leads dog walkers not only to a knowledge of the places through which they walk but to the development of practices of care for those spaces, and these include taking on roles which can be understood as a form of surveillance.

There has been research which indicates that people with dogs are more likely to interact with others in public spaces; and that dogs often facilitate such interactions (Sanders, 1999). Walking with dogs results in a significantly higher number of chance conversations with complete strangers than would be likely if walking alone (McNicholls & Collins, 2000). In addition to enhancing social interactions amongst humans and expanding their social networks (Veevers, 1985), dogs have been seen to act as catalysts for human reciprocity (Guéguene & Ciccoti, 2004), and to facilitate community participation and enhance the sense of community in a locality beyond the relations between those walking dogs (Wood, Giles-Corti, Bulsara & Bosch, 2007). This relegates dogs to tools enabling human interaction rather than actants in the production of community. Yet increased and positive interactions with other humans are dependent on dogs behaving "appropriately" (Sanders, 1990). In addition, not any dog facilitates community however they behave, for younger and "good tempered" dogs are stronger social lubricants than older animals or those which have received negative media

attention (Wells, 2004; Fridlund & MacDonald, 1998). Others have found that particular groups of dog breed seem associated with higher levels of canine and human interactivity (Westgarth et al, 2009); and that where dogs are able to interact freely off the leash, there is more likelihood of networks establishing themselves between households with dogs (Westgarth et al, 2010). The social interactions between humans and dogs, both as individuals and as packs, are therefore significant.

In thinking about the particular characteristics of communities of dog walking in public spaces, Oldenburg's (1999) work is instructive. He outlines key features of an ideal typical setting for informal public life in the United States; comparing cases of "third spaces" (after home and work) -- including cafés, bookshops and bars -- to this ideal type. Oldenburg's concern is the decline of spaces in which informal community emerges with the development of suburban America which is:

> …hostile to both walking and talking. In walking, people become part of their terrain; they meet others; they become custodians of their neighbourhoods. In talking, people get to know one another; they find and create their common interests and realize the collective abilities essential to community… (1999, p. xiv)

In the practice of walking with dogs, walking and talking is the mechanism for the emergence of relationships. Oldenburg's third space is an informal gathering space that is inclusive and local. Such places have various characteristics: they unite neighbourhoods; assimilate newcomers; bring together those with similar interests; provide a "staging area" for interaction and enable the emergence of "public figures" who know everyone and care about their neighbourhood. Third spaces may bring different generations together, and in their convivial atmosphere, people get to know and subsequently to care for one another. Finally, third spaces are political fora where ideas are discussed, and where there may be divergence of experience and point of view (1999, pp. xvii-xxvi). The discussion of empirical data which follows uses elements of Oldenburg's third space community in thinking about the specific qualities of the communities that dogs and dog walkers form, in addition to notions of attachments to place and posthumanism.

Researching in the edgelands

The idea of "edgelands" comes from Shoard (2002) who discusses the distinct features of "interfacial land" in urban and rural landscapes. Urban parks are turfed for recreational football, municipally gardened, concreted and fenced,

while national parks are often used for farming and heavily regulated. Edgelands however, enjoy less management and have often become rich in wildlife. Farley and Symmonds Roberts argue that the wilds of the edgelands has rather more authenticity that the "enshrined, ecologically arrested" spaces which pass for official wilderness (2012, p. 8). The dog walking communities from which the empirical material for this paper is drawn, are situated in what can be described as edgeland contexts of different kinds.

The dog walkers of a village in rural Leicestershire walk across countryside proper. They navigate fields with farmed animals and crops, crossed by official routes and meander paths. Movement along paths leaves room for some interaction, but it is in places of congregation -- by hedges at the sides of fields, on farm tracks or in less managed areas of recreation grounds – that people and dogs take time to gather and "hang out" together. The Lea Valley Park in East London is a patchwork of more traditional marshland that has been "upgraded" with paths for walkers and cyclists, interspersed with areas of open space. It is seen by some of its users as "countryside" and there is an abundance of wildlife. In testament to its ambiguous status however, viaducts crossing the Park are decorated with graffiti, the marshes are cross-cut by rail lines and electricity pylons, and parts are edged by housing estates. While dog walkers have

established routes, there is much space for meeting and stopping and the relatively open landscape encourages gatherings of packs who know one another.

Edgeland spaces are different to other venues where dogs and dog guardians may encounter each other and "hang out". In the UK, many urban dwelling dogs are walked in public parks or around streets. While "dog parks", or fenced areas of public parks where dogs may be "off-leash" (or lead) are rare in the UK (certainly compared to the US), lead-only dog walking is increasingly specified in towns and cities. Edgeland spaces however, are not subject to the levels of surveillance apparent in public parks and enable off-lead walking. The human walkers in this study saw edgeland spaces as those of relative freedom for dogs, as one put it: "It's not a proper walk if I don't bring them [her dogs] here [the marshes of the Lea Valley Park]. They love it here because they can do their thing, run about with their people [other dogs], rootle around…" Walking dogs on the street, and/or exclusively on-leash, was viewed as undesirable and undertaken only if edgeland walks were not possible.

The material that follows is taken from two ethnographic sources -- interviews with people who live with dogs, and observations which were recorded. Field notes were kept in the form of an ethnographic diary of encounters with dogs and their people in part of London's Lea Valley Park, recorded daily for a calendar year across 2009-10. This has given a detailed

picture of the nature of this particular community of dog walkers and their interactions over an extended period. In addition, material is drawn from semi-structured interviews with dog guardians, investigating their relationships and everyday lives with canine companions. Thirty seven interviews were undertaken in 2010 and 2011 with people walking dogs on the marshes which form part of the Lea Valley Park. A second phase of interviewing was undertaken in 2014 to see how far locality affected the data, and fifteen interviews were undertaken with people walking dogs in and around a village in rural Leicestershire. There were however, no substantial differences in data obtained from interviewees living in urban and rural locations.

Most of the interviews were "walk and talk" or mobile interviewing, accompanying informants as they go about their daily routines and asking questions along the way (Hall, Lashua and Coffey, 2006). Participants were accompanied on their usual dog walking route, the priority being to put people at ease and talk to them in a situation where they are dog-focussed. Some interviewees chose other locations, such as pubs, cafés or their homes. The observational material and the interviews chart the practices of "responsible" dog guardians who walk their dogs regularly and have close bonds with them. Those who don't walk with dogs cannot be part of such communities, neither can those referred to in both the research locations as the "fair weather walkers" who do not

walk regularly. This may well influence the findings presented here - participants in this study already demonstrate practices of care for the dogs they live with by regularly exercising them. The study focused on the positive relationships between people and companion and the project did not intend at the outset to research issues of maltreatment or of violence, yet the data was surprisingly revealing of the 'dark side' of dog guardianship with over half of the participants in the study living with dogs they had obtained via rescue organisations. This data however, is discussed in other work which foregrounds the vulnerability of dogs as 'pets' (Author,).

In addition, there are those who walk with dogs but who avoid contact with both other people and other dogs -- perhaps because of their own aversion to sociality or that of their dogs. This is not to suggest that all walkers (either canine or primate) were highly sociable. Rather, that different relationships emerge between different animals in their interactions and whilst some quickly bond, for others, it is more of a case of "rubbing along together". Whatever the strength of community bonding, dog walking communities are constituted by dogs as well as by their human companions. The data for this project is also co-constituted as we were a "research pack". I was accompanied on the majority of interviews by the dogs who share my home, and my field observations were made while dog walking. This resulted in certain peculiarities – interview narratives are

disjointed, interrupted by ball throwing, barking, dog play, greeting dogs and people who are "not being interviewed", and random incidents, such as a dog fight and a participants' dog running away. Both the interview sample and to some extent, what could be observed, is shaped by the relationships of "my" dogs, to others. The involvement of dogs in the project was crucial however – they secured legitimacy in the field and interactions between people and dogs stimulated and provoked responses in interviews.

Walking with dogs

> First walk at half past six… then I'll take them on a proper walk, about half nine, quarter to 10, and then I go again just after lunch, depends what I'm doing. (interview, Leicestershire)

A routine of walking, such as this above, was a key structuring device in the day of all interviewees, and for many, this was not a matter for human-exclusive planning but something "you have to negotiate" with dogs. People often expressed guilt if they did not adhere to routine times of walking, while others picked up on dog cues for walking with a number asserting that their dogs could "tell the time". Times and places of walking are not always a decision made

exclusively by human walkers. For a minority, it is the dog that decides where to go and when:

> It has to be the right time, doesn't it [to partner]? Set walks. We can walk him for five hours over … well anywhere. We took him down to the seaside didn't we? Walked for hours. But he still wants to go, when he comes back, to where he always goes. That's just kind of how he is; he's quite controlling. (interview, Leicestershire)

On individual walks most dogs are, to differing degrees (depending on the attitude of their guardians) at least able to influence the route taken and the time spent. Dogs may change route to greet other packs, or may engage in extended play which modifies the direction of the walk or the time spent engaging with other dog walkers; as in these examples:

> Across the marshes the woman with the bassett and the beagle are heading towards us. [Name of dog] wants to play with the beagle, so [name of dog]'s owner, who was going the same way as us, doubles back on herself to walk with this woman. (field notes).

> [Name of dog] runs up… wanting to join in. "I wasn't going to come this way" said her owner "but she wanted to see her mates". The dogs muck about in the wet grass - lots of running in huge circles - and we worry about the time and being late for work. (field notes)

In other cases, dogs may have their own agenda which catches their guardians by surprise:

> …loads of noise on the lake, and there was this like Armada of geese, you know, and we were saying… "oh there must be a fox around, obviously they're alerting everybody" and then we thought "where's [name of dog]?" So she was she was on an island, we hadn't realized -- we were calling her and calling her and then we saw that she was in a stand-off with a goose… so all of the kerfuffle in that big lake, it was all our dog, and we hadn't been aware at all, we were just kind of thinking "isn't nature interesting?" [laughing] (interview, London)

In such cases, it is the human walkers who deploy various tactics (enticing or disciplinary voice, bribes such as food rewards, distractions such as balls and toys or ultimately, tethering or making the dog sit or lie flat, in order to assert

control over the dog's behaviour. Thus despite the ability of dogs to influence walking practices, this remains very much within the boundaries of human conceptions of "acceptable" dog behaviour.

Whatever the conflicts of interest, walking was viewed positively by every interviewee, and some people seemed drawn to dogs because of a love of walking or the "countryside":

> I didn't kind of get [name of dog] with the idea of "oh it'll give me access to the marshes"… but I knew it would give me access to er getting out every day and you know, being in a bit of countryside 'cause it never occurred to me that I'd walk him on the roads where I live. (interview, London)

For most, having a dog forces people to walk, despite poor weather, illness, time constraints of work and the extra work involved in drying out and cleaning up on wet days. This push outside is to be welcomed:

> It's getting away from the desk, and getting the fresh air, and this time of the year, the fields of buttercups are lovely and … [name of dog]

> bouncing, it's just such a pleasure to see that and throwing the ball and hearing him run - he sounds like a horse! (interview, Leicestershire)

> … you wouldn't get up to get out just for a walk very often even if it was a nice day. We all want some excuse to go out, we want a reason to get out and do something, some reason to get out into the country, and dogs provide that sort of reason. (interview, London)

Some said that walking the dog(s) was "frequently the high point of my day" others simply liked the fact a dog took them out of the house. For all the people in the study, dog walking was seen as a necessity whatever the weather: "It doesn't matter if it's raining, or snowing or cold, I'll go out. And I wouldn't do that if I didn't have a dog" (interview, London). Where there were negative aspects these came in the form of concern that "old dogs can restrict your walking quite a bit" (interview, London). This led to anxieties over the exercise enjoyed by dog walkers and the quality of life of dogs. Some would take older dogs out even when they were unable to walk (in backpacks, trolleys or prams) in order to continue the processes of both human and canine socialising.

There were some tensions however. In one case, a dog regularly refused to walk:

> There are things that we might wanna do that we know [name of dog] doesn't. So we don't do them. So sometimes I think "oh God, I wish she wasn't quite so unpredictable about whether she'd walk or not". Sometimes you get all prepared and everything. We had friends with a baby and a little boy who was desperate to walk with her and we got down here and she did a pee, did a poo, walked round the car park and got back in [the car] again [laughing]. (interview, London)

Not all walks proceed smoothly. While the overwhelming majority of dog-human and dog-dog interactions documented in the diary data are positive, there are occasional problems. Most contacts between walking packs are initiated by dogs off-leash, greeting either other dogs or humans and these may not always be warmly received. In some cases, guardians will tether their dogs in the presence of other dogs or people who they do not get along with; or humans will attempt conversation when the dogs of either pack clearly wish to keep a distance.

Generally however, interviewees in this study thought that walking enables public communication, and that without a dog, people tend not to walk so much in public space:

> …my sister lives next door. She hasn't got a dog. She's got two cats. She drives to work and drives back and she never walks anywhere. She doesn't know anybody. So I'm telling her what's going on in the village because she doesn't know, and I know because I've got a dog and, when you've got a dog, you speak to other people with dogs or other people who haven't got dogs want to stroke your dog, so you always talk to somebody. (interview, Leicestershire)

For Oldenburg (1999, pp.210-15), routine walking is a vital for the generation and sustaining of localized community. In both study sites, people felt that knowledge of both the places and people of their locality was facilitated by the walking that they undertook specifically because they lived with a dog, and acknowledged the dogs' active role in initiating encounters with other packs.

Talking dog

All the interviewees commented on meeting people through walking the dog. A number remarked that people will start conversations making the assumption that people with dogs will be sociable. This may be because dogs are seen to legitimise walking as well as facilitating conversation:

> You can't walk without a dog can you? It's not the same is it? There's no purpose….And having a dog helps you talk to people, there's lots of people now that I know. (interview, London)

> People do come up and talk to you, there's camaraderie with other dog people. People say "good morning" to you if you've got a dog. They might just ignore you if you were sort of wandering around. (interview, London)

The idea that walking without a dog is seen as odd, or that it is experienced as purposeless was common. Some groups of dog walkers may integrate those without a dog into their routine walking: "she's not got a dog, but she wouldn't meet anybody or see anybody in the village at all, if she didn't come out walking with us" (interview, Leicestershire).

Dogs also provoke deeper social engagement by themselves interacting and forcing pauses in walks or by encouraging walking together. In both cases this extended interaction facilitates the possibility of human relationships:

> If you go for a walk in the park you may say 'hello' to passers-by but it rarely goes beyond 'hello'… but once you have a dog and the dogs start playing together then, you know, you get into conversation with people and that's just a very nice thing to be social outside with other people…(interview, London)

The interactions between dogs and groups of dogs becomes a subject of conversation. Talking about dogs provides ways in to conversation:

> What do we chat about when we see other dog walkers? You chat about dogs, you talk about dogs and what dogs get up to and this sort of thing. You could say it's an inexhaustible subject of conversation! Now, I don't know whether it's just we're so bereft of bloody things to talk about that we have to talk about the dogs but er, but you do keep finding yourself doing so [pause] animals are quite intriguing. (interview, London)

Many interviewees acknowledged that the groups one becomes a part of are strongly influenced by the dogs – if the dogs do not get along well, then people are rarely likely to exchange more than a passing greeting:

> There's regulars you talk to more than others, but then it depends on how your dogs get on as well. If the dogs don't get on then you tend not to stop, so that sort of dictates who you speak to really. (interview, London)

Routine exchanges with regular walkers, often over years, means that human walkers accumulate much knowledge about other people and their dogs, and what people know about other packs is a significant feature of the diary data. In some cases, friendships were made as a result of the friendships established between dogs, and the repeated interactions of their humans over time. For those dog walkers with children the friendships of dogs are often compared to the relationships made through younger children:

> … she's [the dog] got her friends that she knew when she was a puppy, so they become your friends, like having children, with their parents... there's lots of people that I know with dogs the same age that we met when they were puppies and all end up walking and meeting and chatting. (interview, Leicestershire)

All the dog walkers in the study had something to say about dog walking and sociality, and many found friendships emerged between dog-walking humans:

> that was an unexpected nice thing about having a dog, I got to meet lots of interesting people… I've made a couple of friends in fact in owning a dog and having a regular walk. (interview, London)

There is also conviviality which develops from the routine encounters, and opportunities for socialisation of both humans and dogs that emerge in and beyond the spaces of the edgelands. The interviews and diary data are peppered with talk of dog walkers having dinner, being invited to parties/for a coffee/to a local event or visiting when a dog or their human is ill or injured. While the timelised and spatialised qualities of dog walking mean regular encounters, there is an ad hoc quality to meetings, and it is a minority of walks that are planned and these are usually between walkers who have become friends, or who meet for company at otherwise anti-social times: "It's good to have someone to go round with when you're early, especially in winter when it's so dark" (interview, London).

However, those with dogs that have been depicted in the media as problematic or aggressive sometimes found it quite difficult to socialise and felt that people avoided them. For these walkers, the community of dog walkers is exclusive and prey to popular stereotypes of "dangerous dogs". For others, the

behaviour of their dog (in this example below, boisterous and domineering) and the anticipation of people's reaction to the dog, led to a form of self-exclusion:

> the personality of the dog makes that social interaction. He [her dog] stops me from interacting with other dogs and other people. Definitely. I'm very wary, my eyes are on fields all around me when [name of dog] is walking, in case I see somebody and then have to put him on the lead or change my route. It depends on the dog owner. (interview, Leicestershire)

Such cases were a small minority in the study, and these walkers were still able to enter relationships with some other packs.

These cross-pack formations are enabled by both place and association. These are fractured as different communities emerge in different edgeland locations and at different times of the day, where, as often observed in the diary, there are "the usual people in the usual places". Many interviewees spoke of "their people" as the particular groups with which they speak most often, and may perhaps socialise. Those humans forming the closest bonds are those where the dogs are "friends", and also where common interests emerge through regular conversation, and these are very often linked to notions of appropriate care for and relationships with dogs.

Diversity in the edgelands

For Oldenburg, a diversity of people from all walks of life and the novelty and interest sparked in conversation between those who would be unlikely to meet is a key attraction of third places (1999, pp.45-47). In both the study sites, dog walking brings together a diverse range of people (in terms of political associations, social class and occupation, age, sex, and in one study site, sexuality) and the presence of dogs provides a talking point for people who would otherwise be unlikely to meet:

> You strike up conversations with people that necessarily wouldn't have been part of your world…this very strange underworld of Hackney that I would never have tapped into, [but] because I was a dog walker, I was let in… (interview, London)

Oldenburg (1999, p. 24) considers that third places involve social levelling, being inclusive environments which are open to all-comers and in which ones status is irrelevant. One interviewee confided that she was "fascinated by what people actually do" because the dress code of dog walkers usually leaves little clue to their social status. Unlikely personal interactions made through dog walking,

and the facilitating role of 'dog talk' enables a sociability that overcomes differences of, for example here, age and presumptions about gender:

> There's this very tall lady, well it's a man with blonde hair who dresses up as a lady… and [there are] all the old people, all these pensioners, talking to her as if she's a lady. It's a bloke! But no, they don't worry, they accept this person and everyone just gets on and talks about their dogs and their history. (interview, London)

Many of my interviewees expressed the view that people who live with dogs are "more tolerant" of other people and more sociable. Some further suggested that the reason for this is the process of walking and talking with other people and their dogs in which on a regular basis "you open your lives up to other people" (interview, Leicestershire).

Care in the edgelands

The familiarity with the place where one walks leads, as Tuan suggests, to a sense of intimacy. Dog walkers share knowledge about place, for example, the location of wild orchids, or where best to forage for blackberries; or about the historical development of the space. Some know the area from childhood and have a depth

of familiarity others may not have. The narratives of dog walkers also recall Relph's notion of the defence and care of place enabled by intimacy, and Newman's concept of surveillance. This is particularly so in the winter when in the Lea Valley for example, "the dog walkers are the only people that use the marshes, and keep an eye out and know what's going on"' (interview, London). Stories of reports made to park authorities and to the police include organised dog fighting, injured wildlife, abandoned vehicles and a woman who had been sexually assaulted. This notion of a community of people who 'keep an eye out' is in keeping with Oldenburg's ideal of publically spirited individuals in public spaces:

> …it's a nature reserve…but, if push came to shove, it would be all the dog-walkers protecting that area down there,… if it wasn't for the dog-walkers then I think that y'unno it would be a different place down there I really do. The dog-walkers make that a safe accessible place for everyone to go whatever time of day. (interview, London)

The communities of dog walkers are active both in preserving edgeland space and in promoting their interests as users of open spaces. For example, in the year prior to the London 2012 Olympic Games, dog walkers were an important group

within the Save Leyton Marsh campaign which protested against the siting of a 'temporary' Olympic training facility on Leyton Marshes and continues to be actively concerned with plans for 'development' on the site (http://saveleytonmarsh.wordpress.com/2012/). Here, dog walkers engage politically in order to preserve the edgeland places through which they walk and the practices within these places. As Oldenburg suggests, such places can be arenas where political ideas might be expressed, refined and have possible effect.

In addition, third places are characterised by people having an awareness of how things are and should be, and taking action to protect place and the beings which inhabit them. Here for example, a dog walker finds a dog "out of place":

> "Is that your dog?" he asks pointing to the black and white puppy. The woman says it has followed them. He says it belongs to someone on one of the narrow boats [on the River Lea] and he will take it back. The woman says she will go back that way so there is no need. It's all very amicable, but he is quietly persistent. (diary entry)

Taking time to stop and talk is characteristic of dog-walking practice and in some cases, this in itself can be a practice of care. The diary and interview data indicate

routine care interventions such as driving people and dogs to veterinary appointments, shopping and dog walking for people who are ill, or looking after the dogs of other walkers when they are away. Practices of care are particularly evident in situations of loss. Dog walking communities are characterised by transience – people age, become ill and die or relocate and enter another community. The relatively short life span of the dog means that people may slip out of dog walking communities temporarily or permanently, after the loss of a dog. The interview and diary data document high levels of concern for the health and wellbeing of dogs amongst dog walkers, and that dog walkers appreciate the empathetic understanding they receive from other dog walkers when dogs are ill or die.

Oldenburg's third space communities are characterised by the presence of key public figures, and amongst dog walking communities, these can be either dog or human. In the year when the diary was kept, the Lea Valley Park saw numerous deaths of well-known dogs and lost some human public figures. An example of the latter was the best known of a group often referred to as "the old boys" who had detailed knowledge of the area and were a well-known sight. This narrative runs across the diary data from illness and death in January, until the last entries in December. The concern for this person, messages relayed of his illness, visits to hospital, grief expressed at his passing and the worries over his

dog are indications of networks of care; and illustrate Oldenburg's observations about public figures who become so strongly identified with place that things cannot be quite the same in their absence. Deaths, illnesses and relocation lead to reconfigurations of walking patterns and to new networks of people and dogs, yet new configurations are often haunted by memories of people, of dogs and of relationships.

Conclusion

People and dogs, walking together in edgeland spaces might be considered a community. The picture painted here is of a fractured community, perhaps best understood as pluralities of micro-communities that are defined by time (regular points of walking) and space (routes in which dogs and human walkers encounter one another). These communities are characterised by a commonality of place and attachments to it, a commonality of interest in walking and, for the humans who have agency in deciding this matter, an interest in common in terms of their experience of lives with another species.

The empirical material suggests that such communities have certain characteristics. First, there is identification with outside place(s), peculiar in that this is a shifting and dynamic location for the emergence of community as the

community is generated, reproduced and intensified through the process of walking.

Second, these communities are not exclusively human, but consist of dogs and humans in individual and cross-pack interactions. Dogs have a degree of agency in the creation of these micro-communities in that interactions between dogs is often the enabler or prohibitor of social connections, and is certainly key to the deepening of relations. The cross-pack constitution of such communities enables them to be described as 'posthuman'. Communities of dogs and human walkers are thus posthuman in two ways: in being made up of relationships between dogs and human guardians, and in terms of the ways such relations change the ways in which both humans and dogs engage with other beings. This has implications for how sociologists (and others) understand the notion of community and suggests the possibility of a diversity of beings in various spatially located communities. It also broadens the analytic focus of human-dog relations from those between individual beings or smaller scales of collectivities (the family or household), to broader networks and public spaces.

Third, these posthuman communities are characterised by a relatively high degree of tolerance of diversity. Humans from various social backgrounds are brought into proximity through dog walking. There is also tolerance of diversity of human-dog relationships and of dog behaviour, although this is less

pronounced. Finally, there are a range of practices of care within these communities and concern for the wellbeing of both human and canine members. At times, more traditional forms of political engagement emerge from discussion amongst human walkers, focused on the protection of edgeland space.

Not all dogs and dog walkers are embedded in the communities discussed in this paper. Some dogs and some people are antisocial and may self-exclude. Others may be ostracized. The exclusion of those with dogs that are pathologized on grounds of breed type or behaviour is certainly a matter which warrants further investigation. This said, the evidence from this research indicates that most regular dog walking packs are connected in positive relationships to varying degrees of intensity; forming eclectic communities of a posthuman kind.

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