Domestication and the dog: embodying home

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Domestication is one of the most significant relations shaping human and nonhuman livelihoods. Traditional examinations of the relation have emphasised the centrality of human intentionality and control. In contrast, research in geography in the last 10 years has demonstrated the limitations of human agency, and the role of surprise, experiment and uncertainty in these relations. Despite this burgeoning interest, there has been little detailed empirical research into these relations, and particularly into the ways that domestication is imagined, practised and maintained in the everyday. Focusing on dogs as companion animals, the paper addresses this gap, examining everyday relations taking place between people and dogs in the house-as-home. It argues that everyday practices of home have long been central to domestication, but that these relations have expanded and consolidated in the contemporary period. In this context, the everyday domestication of dogs is entwined with the performance of 'respectable' middle-class identities through home.

Key words: domestication, dogs, everyday practices, home, Australia, animals

Introduction

Domestication is a key process through which humans have claimed dominance over nature, including nonhuman natures and the nature of the human body. It has most often been examined as an historic biological and cultural process through which the 'wildness' of plants and animals was brought in and re-made in the image of human culture through selective breeding and incorporation into human social structures (e.g. Clutton-Brock 1990). However, research increasingly demonstrates that domestication is not a one-off, historically located conquest over nature as these perspectives imply. Rather, it is an experimental, contingent and contestable process that draws in culture and nature, human and nonhuman, mind and body, and that frequently exceeds human control and intentionality (Anderson 1997; Cassidy and Mullin 2007; Leach 2007). Domestication is not a finished or stable relation, but must be continuously negotiated and held in place. Despite this recognition, little attention has been afforded to the practical ways that domestication is embodied, performed and maintained in the everyday. Ordinary practices within familiar spaces such as the home are a particular absence (although see Kaika 2004), which is striking given the historic centrality of home – as a place, practice and idea – to domestication. In this paper I address these gaps, examining everyday relations

of domestication around dogs-as-companion-animals in middle-class Australian homes and elucidating the ways that dogs are produced as 'domestic' bodies. I argue that dogs are being disciplined in new ways that reflect changing social, cultural and economic imperatives around homemaking and pet-keeping that have emerged across post-industrial nations since the 1980s. In this context a disciplined dog is part of the performance of respectable middle-class identities.

I begin by foregrounding the significance of vernacular and often unintentional practices in the historic unfolding of domestication, with a focus on dogs. I then examine contemporary relations of domestication through the everyday experiences of 22 dog-owning, middle-class, suburban Australian households. Empirically, the research is situated alongside a recently renewed interest in human–dog relatings. It builds on recognition that dogs have a key place in human familial relations and that canine agency impacts on practices of family (Franklin 2006; Power 2008) and home (Gregson 2007; Power 2008). It is distinct, however, in its explicit examination of these as relations of domestication, and in particular its insistence that domestication is an ongoing relation that takes place through rather than simply around canine bodies. More than altering the materiality of home to absorb canine excesses such as hair and urine (cf. Gregson 2007), relations of domestication are intimately

bound up with the re-imagining and re-making of canine bodies and subjectivities in the image of home. I particularly attend to the spatial, social and economic relations informing these practices, addressing an absence that exists in contemporary analyses of 'pet love' (Nast 2006).

Dogs and domestication

Examining domestication as an everyday practice requires challenging the delineation that is traditionally drawn between domestication and taming (e.g. Beck and Katcher 1996). This distinction powerfully captures the vast extension of human power over the livelihoods of nonhumans through domestication, but also risks a slippage whereby stories of everyday practice and the richness of everyday intimacies and knowledges can become lost, despite evidence that such relations have been central to the historic unfolding of domestication (Haraway 2008). Instead, this paper examines domestication as 'a process of drawing animals into a nexus of human concern where humans and animals become mutually accustomed to conditions and terms laid out by humans' (Anderson 1997, 464). This opens space for recognising gradual and vernacular relations through the focus on processes of drawing, and keeping, animals in, and the broader political, social, cultural and economic context of these practices. Following Haraway (2008), I examine what happens when species meet and how these species (human and dog) co-evolve through the encounter of domestication. These relations are at once individual and societal. Everyday practices, although traditionally sidelined as taming, are inseparably entwined with broader scale processes oriented at the physiological and behavioural disciplining of dogs. Developing this idea, I summarise key moments in canine domestication before foregrounding the role of the everyday and the vernacular in this unfolding. I focus on dogs in western societies.

Canine domestication can be tracked to the Neolithic. In contrast to dominant depictions of people bringing wolves into human settlements, early domestication was driven by wolves moving in for scavenging benefits. Behavioural modifications such as begging for food, rather than selective breeding, underpinned selection processes with tamer animals rewarded with food and the safety of human settlement and subsequently achieving greater opportunity to reproduce (Driscoll *et al*. 2009). This mode of selection drove marked, unexpected physiological changes such as increased neotony, and a diversification of coat patterns (Clutton-Brock 1995). These dogs predominately existed on the outskirts of human settlements. As this position strengthened, a second phase of relations, driven by the desire to productively utilise dogs' unique skills for security, hunting

and companionship, emerged. This shift drove the intentional selection and breeding of dogs along functional lines. These functions defined dogs' place in society, and saw them selected for specific capacities including receptiveness to human instruction. Functional nomenclature to differentiate dogs is characteristic of this extended phase. In Celtic and Saxon times, for example, dogs were known by terms like 'finder' and 'stealer' and did not exhibit stable, breed-specific characteristics in the same way as modern dogs (Ritvo 1988). For much of our shared history the human–dog relation has been defined by this functional dependence.

The idea of dogs as pets is, in comparison to functionally based relations, a relatively recent phenomenon. Prior to the Victorian era, people who kept pets were subject to criticism and ridicule, social conventions that only the elite could ignore (Franklin 1999; Ritvo 1988). The Victorian era was a watershed, seeing the growing popularity of pet-keeping and a growing alignment between physical appearance and breed type. A series of social and economic shifts underpinned these changes. First, the Enlightenment fostered a sense of mastery over nature that developed into curiosity toward animals. When combined with the pet-keeping practices of society's elite, this created a foundation for widespread pet-keeping (Franklin 1999). Second, from the 1800s the emergence of the middle-classes ruptured traditional demarcations of social class and status. In this void, pet-keeping became a marker of social status (Blaisdell 1999; Franklin 1999). The consequent emphasis on 'high status' animals led to experiments in dog husbandry in pursuit of new and unusual breeds and characteristics. This third defining period included the establishment of the Kennel Club to regulate the newly emerging breeds.

Analyses of canine domestication usually focus on the large-scale reconstruction of dogs since the Neolithic, as described above, including the historic transition from wolves (Serpell 1995), and the role of fancy and fetish in post-Victorian relations (Tuan 1984). In contrast, the more ordinary relations defining these periods have been obscured. The everyday and the mundane, particularly cohabitation and human needs for safety and security in this context, have played a defining role shaping canine domestication across each period. In early histories the everyday need for survival and the desire for companionship were driving forces. This pursuit of safety drove unintentional selection processes that had far reaching and irreversible outcomes, particularly the consolidation of canine neotony. Victorian era practices are similar. Although the dominant re-telling of this era emphasises the role of fancy and fetish in producing new and unusual 'high status' breeds (Tuan 1984), a broader history reveals the pressures of urbanisation and everyday cohabitation

as further stimuli. Urbanisation brought people and dogs into everyday proximity, fostering residents' interest in dogs, but also prompting health and safety concerns that drove growing distrust and fear of dogs perceived as having impure or 'mongrel' blood lines. This strengthened the emphasis on standardised and 'pure' breeds (Lulka 2009), with the need to safely cohabit in increasingly crowded cities becoming a key driver of the formalisation of canine domestication.

Meanings of home and the domestic run through the described relations. Since the Neolithic, the domestic has been associated with safety and security (Hodder 1990), which has informed the production of human homes and settlements (Kaika 2004; Power 2009). In quite straightforward ways, dogs that do not threaten human safety and livelihood, that reflect the values and ideals that frame the domestic, have been seen as appropriate in human settlements and provided with opportunities to reproduce. These values have arguably increased in significance since the mid-20th century as the house-as-home has become the key site of human–dog relatings. Together with the growing commodification of dogs, which has led to the creation of new consumer products and spaces (e.g. puppacinos, dogs and celebrity cultures), and to the growing mobility and disposability of pets, this has significant implications for human–dog relatings. As I now show, these patterns, which Nast (2006) argues are peculiar to 21st-century post-industrial societies, also shape relations of domestication, including the ways that dogs are imagined and maintained as 'domestic' bodies. This foregrounds domestication as a profoundly geographical project that is as much about when as 'where' species meet (Haraway 2008).

The research

I draw on interviews with 22 dog-owning households who were part of a broader study about animals and homemaking. Participants were recruited through community dog training clubs and shelters in middle-class suburbs in Sydney, Australia (see Figure 1). These clubs are volunteer run and popular amongst new dog owners in Sydney, being widely recommended by veterinarians and local government when dogs are first vaccinated or registered. People who had acquired a dog within 12 months of joining the research were prioritised as a goal was to examine the process of accommodating to cohabitation with a dog. Respondents participated in a diary–interview process over a 12-month period. An initial interview was conducted, two diary activities completed, followed by a final, reflective interview. All participants completed at least one interview, 13 completed all activities. This paper draws predominately on the interviews.

Participants were predominately from a middle-class, Anglo Celtic background. Although the call for participants was gender neutral, asking for people who had 'recently acquired a new dog', women were the only respondents. As the primary carers of the dog, women were typically responsible for attending training and were therefore the primary audience of the advertisement. This parallels other research that shows that women are frequently the primary carers of dogs (Fifield and Forsyth 1999). I return to this gendering in the conclusion. However, although women were the primary participant, the home-based nature of the research meant that it also included insights from children and male partners. Nine households included children living at home (including seven young children and two teenagers). Of the thirteen other households, three had regular visits from grandchildren. This is notable because children significantly shaped interactions with dogs, including influencing the decision to get a dog (see Power 2008).

The dogs in the research were of diverse size, breed and age. In keeping with broader trends, participants' relationships with these dogs were framed as companionate and familial, and were negotiated through the spaces of home (e.g. Franklin 2006; Power 2008). Fourteen were acquired as puppies; eight were adult dogs from rescue shelters/ pounds. Participants had diverse experiences with these dogs. Despite many believing that it would be easier to initiate puppies into the household, both groups experienced similar challenges when first bringing their dog home. While some relationships went smoothly, others were upsetting and confusing.

Choosing a dog

In this and the following section I draw out practices and cultures surrounding the everyday domestication of dogs within contemporary middle-class Australian homes. Middle-class moralities of home are a key organising principle in these relations.

The performance of respectability is central to middle-class practices of home and is part of the construction of middle-class identities. The appearance of order through the maintenance of a tidy house and garden is key to this construction, as is the sense that children are disciplined and under control (Lauster 2010; and see Dowling and Power in press). The everyday relations through which this is achieved, including cultural decisions about the nature of mess and dirt, and acts of cleaning, are key components of home and family making. Management of canine bodily excesses is part of the negotiation and maintenance of these values. This was evident in the ways that people understood and interacted with dogs: in very practical and mundane ways dogs were evaluated and re-shaped to reflect the spatial, material and cultural
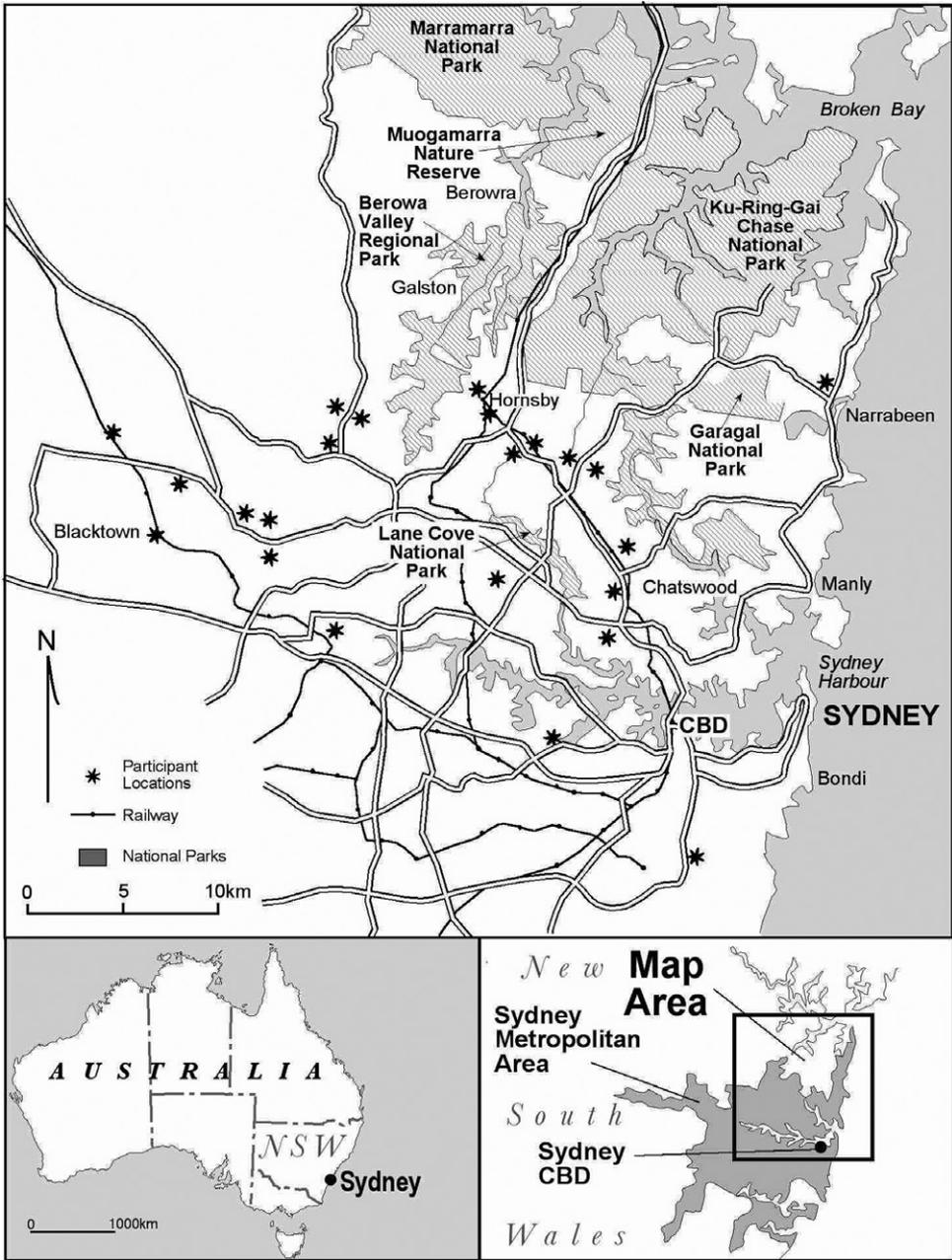
Figure 1   Map identifying the approximate location of participants' homes

context of home. Rather than altering the materiality of home to absorb and obscure the canine presence (Gregson 2007) or allowing a free-rein (Smith 2003), dogs were disciplined to embody and perform domestic ideals of cleanliness, orderliness and control. This informed participants' choice of dog (this section), and their sense of appropriate behaviour in dogs (the second section, below). In this realm of practices dogs were imagined as a lifestyle choice that should not detract from or alter home, but fit within the existing lifestyle and ideal of home.

Dog hair was a central concern influencing dog choice. Most participants expressed a preference for non-moulting dogs:

Oh, dogs that moult make such a mess, it is just horren-dous . . . the convenience more than anything, there's nothing worse than having dog hair over absolutely every-thing. (Jane)

I didn't have any idea about wanting a pretty dog, or any particular breed or anything like that other than I didn't want a dog whose fur moulted everywhere, [. . .] we don't do housework every week or anything, we only do it like once a month, but I still didn't want a house that was covered in dog hair. (Heather)

[. . .] another reason why I was quite keen on you know schnauzer is because they don't moult and I'm a neat freak so I can't stand you know hair and stuff. (Rosemary)

Choices were informed by breed and biology, with dogs perceived as low-shedding valued regardless of whether participants characterised themselves as having a relaxed approach to housekeeping, or being a 'neat freak'. Dog hair clung to couches and clothes; it was viewed as dirty and threatening to home as a hygienic and clean space. Choosing the 'right type' of dog supported participants' sense of themselves as clean, and actively maintained home as a clean and tidy space. In this way dog choice contributed to a sense of respectability and consolidated the performance of broader classed identities.

Perceived activity levels were the second most common factor influencing dog choice. The importance of match-ing the needs of dogs with those of the household was frequently expressed.

. . . you know we've got a young energetic boy and we wanted a dog that would play with him so but we didn't want one that needed enormous amounts of exercise and so on because we can't supply that with our lifestyle. (Rosemary)

Lydia wanted a dog that would enjoy her one and a half hour daily jogs,

but didn't need six hours a day of exercise. [Why were those things important to you?] Well fitting in with our lifestyle really. [to son:] We have to drive you to school don't we, so we can't walk him to school or anything like that.

Similarly Tess explained,

I really wanted a lap dog, a dog that likes to be cuddled [. . .] and my last dog being a foxie was just so totally highly strung and he had so much energy that I was hoping I could find a dog that was a bit calmer and people said that poodles are intelligent but they're not as skitzy as the foxie. He's just so good, you can see how relaxed he is.

Matching dogs to an existing lifestyle meant finding a dog that performed to the same activity rhythms as

human householders. By contrast, overly energetic dogs would disrupt the rhythm of home, waking too early or refusing to sleep, and requiring that householders assumed more energetic schedules. Quiet dogs were similarly disruptive: failing to play and spoiling activities like walking and running by refusing to accompany people or lagging.

The suburban location of the research is a broader context framing relations of activity. Limited to the rela-tively confined space of a suburban house and garden, dogs were dependent on people for stimulation. This dependence was problematic for participants who explained they had limited time to exercise and play with dogs outside of work and family commitments. Perceived time constraints reflected broader gendered work patterns and suburban morphology. First, households were typi-cally dual income, with both partners undertaking paid work outside the home during the day. The requirements of human-family life were a first priority in the evenings and left little time for dog-oriented activities. The fragmen-tation of household schedules, a legacy of the growing valuation of individuality within middle-class families, and the increased interpenetration of home and work (see for example Dowling and Power in press), compounded these relations. Second, car dependence, a product of car-oriented urban design, and broader cultures in which cars have become important devices for managing the fragmentation of family life and facilitating 'good' parent-ing choices (e.g. choosing the 'best' rather than simply the closest school, see Dowling 2000) exacerbated these stresses. Car reliance limited the frequency of local walking: participants who drove children to distant schools, or drove because they juggled the school run as part of a series of broader familial responsibilities, were less likely to walk, as captured in Lydia's comment above. Contrastingly, the minority who lived closer to school, lived close to their workplace or worked from home (paid or unpaid) were more likely to walk as part of their regular daily routine. In each case participants expressed the importance of choosing a dog that articulated with this existing 'lifestyle'.

A third way domesticities shaped dog choice was through the idea of the 'designer dog', a term that includes the ubiquitous 'oodle' breeds. These dogs were favoured by many participants. Miff, for example, explained that 'interbreeding' was responsible for a family-oriented dog, a dog with a 'good temperament, really good positive attitude' and a cleaner home:

you can do vacuuming at 10 o'clock at night pre-children or you go oh gee that's annoying me, get up at 9 o'clock and clean the house, but with children you don't have that luxury. [. . .] so you know, we get a bit of fur on the carpet where she lays but not great big clumps of it and I think that's a good thing with some of the inter-breeding.

These comments were typical. The apparent stability of designer dogs was central: they were seen as less dangerous and more reliable, were believed to shed less, be healthier and smarter – in other words, they were represented as a controlled bodily form with clear behavioural and physical boundaries, a physical form that mirrors the domestic values that participants espoused. These ideals persisted despite the typically 'leaky' behaviour of these dogs: like any dog, they at times shed, barked and urinated inside.

Disciplining dogs

Once dogs entered home a second phase of practices commenced. These were aimed at remaking dogs in the image of the domestic and involved disciplining dogs so that they embodied and performed the material, spatial and temporal ideals framing the domestic. More than simply controlling dogs, these were subjectification practices in which dogs as 'embodied subjects found themselves more able or less able to do particular things' (Holloway 2007, 1046), and which, to some extent, depended on the ability and willingness of dogs to self-regulate their bodily practices, for example through toileting activity. The performance of respectability through the presentation of a clean and human-controlled home was central to these practices.

House training was a key way that domestic ideals were enacted. It was an attempt to discipline canine bodies to the material, temporal and spatial structure of the household so that they would not toilet inside, but would wait until they were let outside. Puppies and newly acquired adult dogs often caused stress because they had yet to modify their bodily rhythms to these patterns. House training was time-intensive, as Lana described:

> It was more a case of actually getting her out every hour and maybe even half an hour. I'd walk out with her when I was here [. . .] and we'd walk up to the back sort of thing and I did that every half hour at night, every night, so when she went she felt comfortable going out there and she'd come back in.

This took weeks or even months, depending on the age and willingness of the dog, but was essential in ensuring the maintenance of home as a clean space in a culture where dogs are commonly kept inside.

Practices around sleep were similar. While a small number of dogs readily integrated into household rhythms of sleep and activity, the majority were initiated over time through routines involving exclusion from the house, 'comforting' items such as ticking clocks, and feeding/toileting immediately prior to bed time. In most cases, as for Jayde, this process went smoothly:

> the first three nights she slept in the laundry with a clock and her Winnie the Pooh toy [. . .] and she slept in there and was content because she was in a small space with these few things on her bed which we bought from the breeder and she whinged for like 20 minutes the first night and then went to sleep because of the ticking of the clock, and then the second night she whinged for 10 minutes and the third night she didn't make a sound.

In initiating dogs to the space–time rhythms of home through house training and sleep, householders were not simply dealing with canine excess, but were making dogs that performed domesticity. For participants, 'positive' training techniques involving ignoring (or not reinforcing) negative behaviours such as whining at night time, and rewarding positive behaviours such as toileting outside, underpinned successful initiation of dogs into household regimes.

However, some dogs resist and challenge domestic routines throughout their lives. Issues around house training, sleep and activity levels were of greatest concern to participants for their disruptive potential. Disliking their allocated sleeping spot, Beth's active dogs jumped against the barrier that prevented them accessing the house, creating a reverberating, crashing sound, while Lucy's dog scratched and rattled the laundry door, destroying it in the process. One of Kim's dogs, Linda, woke at 7am every morning and barked until she was let outside. In the early days when Kim ignored this behaviour, Linda would toilet on the floor. Tess's previous dog, Beau, was also disruptive, waking early and demanding attention. Tess describes her strategy for mornings when she wanted to sleep in:

> My last dog, if I woke up in the morning, he slept on my bed, I'd have to lie there really steady, pretend I was asleep, because the second I moved he'd be off the bed, run through the house, come back, jump on my chest, throw the ball in my face, want to play, and sometimes it was really tiring.

Although Tess preferred that Beau slept in a kennel outside, he would not settle while on his own and howled and barked for hours, keeping her son awake, and forcing her to allow Beau inside. Such stories of disruption were common: efforts to re-shape dogs to domestic spatial and temporal expectations were not straightforward or guaranteed. Success often lay in accommodating the needs and space–time preferences of canine cohabitants. Through these practices dogs exerted a form of disciplining power over human cohabitants, their failure (or perhaps decision not to) conform to human disciplinary expectations resulting in the un-making and reconstitution of domestic practices in decidedly 'doggy' ways.

Processes of house training illustrate these complexities. The process Lana describes (above) appears as a

unidirectional process in which dogs adapt their bodily rhythms to domestic space–times. However, in practice it is much more collaborative and less human-centred, requiring that people recognise and work with dogs' bodily rhythms, including recognising when dogs need to toilet. This means observing and responding to dogs' routines. Participants necessarily became adept at recognising this need, for example Lana explained: 'They get a funny sort of look in their eyes and they get up and they kind of wander a bit in sort of circles.' Different dogs exhibited different behaviours and communicated in different ways at different times. To effectively house-train, participants had to learn and then promptly respond to these signs. The process exhibits a complexity where the timed activity of the human carer is initially shaped by the dog's rhythms, but where over time the dog ideally modifies its rhythms to the temporal and spatial routines of the household. A toilet trained dog means a clean house.

Although the ideal outcome is a dog that works to 'human'/domestic times, success relies on the dog's bodily capacity, and indeed willingness, to temporally regulate its toileting activity. Numerous dogs demonstrated a general capacity yet periodic unwillingness or failure to perform this way. This could have large material costs for people. On moving out of a rented property, Kim, for example, needed to replace the extensively soiled carpets. Dual income households found this process most challenging. Concerns that dogs would become anxious and escape, or bark and disrupt neighbours, meant that many did not want to leave a new dog outside. However, the absence of a human presence meant that house-training was negatively reinforced: toileting inside was not disciplined and therefore became more likely. In response, dogs were often contained within a tiled section of the house during the day, such as a bathroom, laundry or kitchen, and the mess cleaned up on returning home. In some households this resulted in an extended and frustrating period of house training that resulted in six participants considering giving their dog away. These relations point to the importance of ongoing surveillance in everyday practices of domestication. Disciplining dogs to reflect and embody domestic norms is not a straightforward practice or one with a clear end, but rather is an ongoing relation that is dependent on the self-regulatory behaviour of dogs.

Conclusions

Home is a key space and powerful imaginary shaping human–dog relatings. Ideal dogs are those that readily embody the space–time expectations of home: that perform the domestic. Contrastingly, dogs whose bodily rhythms conflict with household space–times are likely to have their presence questioned. This points to the reassertion of home in the biohistories and biogeographies of canine domestication, impacting home (cf. Franklin 2006; Gregson 2007; Power 2008), and marking a new stage in domesticatory relations. Everyday efforts to train dogs, and preferences for breeds imagined to mirror these values, are emblematic of this shift. These practices build on historic notions of home as a site of safety and security, as well as mobilising contemporary constructions of home as a lifestyle and consumer space (Blunt and Dowling 2006). These values are strongly classed: informed by middle-class practices of home and bound up with the performance of particular, (middle)classed identities. Where existing research highlights the importance of a tidy house, garden and disciplined children in maintaining these identities, this paper shows that the appearance and behaviour of dogs is also increasingly embroiled in these cultures. Broader economic and urban geographies consolidate these trends: dual income and car-oriented households experience lifestyle pressures that magnify the importance of a disciplined dog.

Yet dogs are a domestic item that is far from secure. Despite the ideal of the carefully chosen and disciplined lifestyle dog, canine bodily boundaries are subject to fissures and cracks. In the research, dogs that were not supposed to shed, did; dogs that were supposed to be smart were, but applied this to the unhomey tasks of furniture chewing, hole digging and toy destruction. These are normal canine behaviours, but drastically contrast with the normalised discourses and expectations that circulate the ideal dog, and particularly the 'designer dog' (Haraway 2008). It is in the gap between expectation and experience that the greatest friction and breakdown in these relations occurred, challenging the cleanliness and respectability of home with two key outcomes: continued re-disciplining or removal from home. In this way normalised expectations of dogs as companion species provided an evaluatory framework through which dogs were judged as normal (docile and obedient) or abnormal (messy, disobedient, undisciplined), factors that set the parameters of 'appropriate' canine behaviour and subjectivity. Dogs were particularly vulnerable in early stages of cohabitation as people were still adapting to the significant impact of a dog on their lifestyle and home. These relations intersect with the growing scripting of dogs as a malleable, disposable commodity (Haraway 2008; Nast 2006) and have significant implications for canine futures. More broadly, they speak to a broader literature concerned with nonhuman subjectification (Holloway 2007). While there are ongoing debates about the capacity of nonhuman animals to exhibit reflexivity and self discipline, the practices outlined in this paper go some way to highlighting the dependence of domesticatory relations on some form of nonhuman self-regulatory activity.

Finally, the gendering of human–dog relations is of note. The practices in this paper were those that women house-holders, often mothers, were predominately responsible for, reflecting not only the gendering of pet-care (Fifield and Forsyth 1999), but also broader cultures that position women as homemaker. Women are responsible for making the house-as-home, culturing and domesticating children, and disciplining pets: in other words, for drawing, and keeping, dogs within the bounds of the respectable. As dogs are increasingly drawn into the home and family, this role – its expectations, and the broader social negotiations and conflicts that it entails – will become more significant within women's everyday lives.

Acknowledgements

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