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Designing Slow Cities for More Than Human Enrichment: Dog Tales—Using Narrative Methods to Understand Co-Performative Place-Making

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Abstract: Designing for slow cities and the need to design for future urban environments that include the more than human is a major priority for our times. This position paper problematizes the nature–culture divide in research about place and place-making, where place is understood to be about the sense of meaning we layer on locations in the physical world. It emphasizes the importance of narrative identity and place-making in the context of designing for urban environmental futures and creation of slow cities. We present an overview of a methodology to re-empower place-making with animals in the context of slow cities and designing for the more than human. The work discussed here explores the use of narrative inquiry with some early narrative data (in the form of stories) about dog walks and those moments where our companion animals demonstrate agentic place-based meaning-making. The problem of understanding “what animals want” and how they make might “make sense” of an experience is approached via a focus on a rich exemplar case in order to distinguish between emplotment (narrative meaning-making as self) and emplacement (narrative meaning-making as an aspect of place). This is used to create a framework for future evaluation with a view to revealing how “more than human stories”—just like our own familiar human stories—are also about agency and meaning in place. This recognition has import for ways in which we might approach decentring the human when we frame urban design activities.

Keywords: companion animals; co-performance; emplacement; emplotment; place-making; more than human; narrative methodologies; narrative inquiry; slow cities; storied spaces; stories



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1. Introduction

The United Nations New Urban Agenda (NUA) states that designing for environmental sustainability and healthy, community supportive urban environments or “slow cities” is a major priority for our times [1]. In this endeavour it is also critical that our designing for future urban environments includes the more than human, sentient and non-sentient, as vital participants in creating healthy environments [2] and sustainable, dynamic, liveable places [3–7]. However, how we might actually include the other sentient beings with whom we share our places as agents rather than merely subjects, is deeply problematic. We have very little in the way of direct communication with even our closest more than human companions such as the dogs that are the central protagonists in this current discussion. Projects that do have regard to the more than human tend to depend on the pragmatics of measurement as key indicators or depend on the human as a kind of proxy [8]. They maintain the culture–nature divide [9], where nature is forever in the predicament of Spivak’s subaltern [10]: always the subject of the Anthropocene gaze, and always without any voice of her own. As a response to this dilemma, there is a growing interest in ethnomethodological approaches which might reveal inner experiences [8,11]. The discussion in the current paper is in line with these approaches that recognize that

animals do possess sentience and an inner life world. We explore possibilities of going further and propose that if there is an inner life world, there is also a sense of self and identity: an individual narrative. The work presented here represents early reflections and a method to explore the potential of narrative approaches to reveal the experiences, agency, and meaning-making enacted by animals in urban environments. A goal is to see if narrative methodology and methods provide us with a way to better understand how animals make place and emplace themselves. In addition, we suggest that narrative methods can be used to demonstrate narrative meaning-making as self on the part of companion animals.

At a time of major and dramatic climate crisis and ecological trauma, it is increasingly urgent that we consider the more than human in our design work. It is also important that our consideration of the more than human moves beyond the patronizing approaches framed by notions of separation of the human from the natural [9] and predicated on the same western anthropocentric onto-epistemic perspectives that date back to the Enlightenment: presumptions and habits of thinking which led us to the very crisis that we must now address [4,6,9,12,13]. The idea of design for the more than human is about not merely recognizing that we share our worlds with a myriad of other living and sentient creatures, but that we will live and thrive only together. As Clarke et al. [3] observe, what is toxic for the non-human is toxic for us. Perhaps more importantly, we need to be alert to the dynamic and emergent aspects where both human and more than human continuously contribute to the shared environment [2] and the production of place and meaning. This insight frames the importance of designing for the “more than human” in our built environments in particular. We start with the concept of place and place-making as it is enshrined in the United Nations NUA [14] where the announced call for place-making as a vital aspect of creating communities and scaffolding resilience is based on a philosophy of place which is deeply entangled with meaning-making.

When it comes to evaluating non-human meaning-making and place, dogs are an obvious portal and representative to start with. While we might observe that we have little in the way of shared communication with sentient non-humans, our companion animals, and dogs in particular, can be construed as a special case. We share our lives with dogs as companion animals quite intimately and recognize that the relationship is highly reciprocal and has a high degree of communicative understanding. There are an estimated 5.1 million pet dogs in Australia, that is approximately 20 dogs for every 100 people. The dog-owning population includes 39.9% of households and all demographics and ages. Companion animals are recognised as important for individual well-being [15,16]. The importance of animal companionship is known to have health benefits beyond the immediate emotional ones [15]. Holbrook et al. [17] suggest a range, from the medical (reduction of stress) to the psychological (enhancement of security and well-being, reduction of isolation and depression) and the psychotherapeutic, where animals act as co-therapists. The health benefit of having a companion dog, which requires regular walking, is emphasized. Holbrook et al. add that this is not a merely utilitarian arrangement but, rather, offers additional benefits that are derived from the relationship *between* human and animal companion. More recent studies [18,19] have analysed these benefits and suggested that walking companion animals within communities enriches the community and enhances social capital, particularly aspects such as shared identity and place-based networks: the negotiation and co-performance is enacted at wider community levels. Other commentary on the relationship between companion animals and humans suggests co-agency and meaning-making as an entwined being (e.g., [20,21]). That is to say, dogs and their companion humans make places together, but what kind of place making is occurring here and do our non-human companions make their own places? That is to say, do they layer their own meaning-making on the physical world and emplace their individual identities as we traverse the environment, or is their place-making merely an adjunct to our own?

The research described in this paper started out as an investigation of ways in which we engage with place-making with companion animals as a co-performing pair [22]. This

led to questioning the notion of co-performance, in particular the requirement to position the companion animal as an equal partner in the performance of meaning and placemaking. Thus, the overall project goals are framed by the more than human agenda and the need to recognize that we share our environments with other sentient beings as collaborators and partners. The work represents a response to work on urban environments that refute the nature–culture divide as a problematic construct [5,23–28]. It is sharply focused by calls such as Forlano’s [4] to “decentre the human and simultaneously consider the role(s) and perspectives of non-humans” (pp. 53–54) and Smith, Bardzell and Bardzell’s advocacy [29] when they advise the importance of “adapting perspectives that decentre the human from design practice will promote new conceptions of cohabitation that help both humans and non-humans thrive in the future” (p. 1714). The problem for design, is that the non-humans, or the more than humans, whose perspectives we wish to adapt, do not communicate in our spoken languages. We do all, however, share and inhabit the same places.

2. Background

2.1. Place-Making

The philosophy of space and place has a long history in spatial disciplines, particularly human geography [30]. Most recently, discussions about place are concerned with the making of place and the manner in which this can be used to enhance lives and create communities. A key difference between “place” and “space” is neatly summed up by Dourish and Harrison [31], when they write “it is a sense of place, rather than the structure of space, which frames our behavior” (p. 75). Place, according to geographer Yi-Fu Tuan [32] is somewhere that has meaning, whether it be derived from the physical and through the senses or via conceptual. Tuan offers the example of Kronborg Castle. The building might offer a degree of meaning through its imposing architecture and location on the tip of an island but it is its reputation as the model for Elsinore Castle and the imagery of Shakespeare’s Hamlet walking its halls that bring meaning and depth. Many places have connections deeply rooted in culture and belief. Other places are more personal and subjective: a location where we first met someone; a spot we frequent regularly; where we went to school. That is, our experience, itself constructed through imagination and memory, construct place. Place-making then, is the making of experience and plays an important role in the construction of identity. For the philosopher Casey [33], this meaning-making means that place must exist prior to any abstract notions of space and for other commentators this understanding highlights the importance of place and place-making as a site of contested identities and potential action (e.g., [34]). For anthropologist Tim Ingold, place, once constructed as meaning-making, is not discrete (as in *a* place) but rather continuously enacted through movement between (along and through) places [35]. To be in place, argues Ingold, is to inhabit somewhere. Inhabiting is a process. We do not merely inhabit a home but also the pathways between home and shops or schools and parks. As Ingold remarks (p. 34), “habitation is lineal. That is to say, it takes people not *across* the land surface but *along* the paths that lead from place to place”. This is a richer, hermeneutic understanding of place and place-making in keeping with the philosophies of the slow city where place-making is a grass roots on-going activity and not a top-down technique for gentrification [36]. The process of place-making is one of continuous emplacement: memories and meaning creating place-based narrative moments (this happened here . . . this is where this happened . . .), always in process and always being set in place.

2.2. Slow Cities

Slow cities are the counterpoint to the idea of smart cities. The notion is in line with similar movements such as the slow food movement or the slow fashion movement. The concept of the slow city, urban environments which prioritize opportunities for placemaking and community cohesion, has its roots in the “cittaslow” movement founded in Italy, which in turn is inspired by the slow food movement. The cittaslow manifesto announces ideals of small and sustainable, eco-friendly small towns which emphasize

“you and me, you and nature”. There is much specificity, as Haraway [37] might observe, about the movement and achieving accreditation as a cittaslow “town” is the result of community engagement with the process. While cittaslow is an organization with a mission and accreditation procedures, the idea of the slow city as a design parameter or intent has grown in recent years. The slow city concept is often associated with the agentic aspects of the cittaslow movement, e.g., the expectation of grass roots, bottom up process and activity. Pink and Lewis [38] emphasize the experiential aspects of slow city making, the manner in which stories act to create the meaning of the place. In this they echo Tuan’s insights into place and meaning [32] as well as confirming the concept of the local, specialness and resilience. In this view slowness arises through interactions with the place and meaning-making, or place-making, as acts of agency [39]. Slowness is about individual experience, stories and memory.

2.3. Story-Telling

Stories are important. We are becoming increasingly aware that we inhabit a profoundly storied world and that our activities, including designing, are story-ing acts. It is urgent in the current time that all designers attend to the more than human context of our being and existence [29] and recognize that design not only “designs us back” as Willis [40] puts it, but re-designs the experiences of non-humans—both sentient and non-sentient—as well as re-designing the place we all share and the planet itself. Acknowledging that we are party to ecologies of knowledge [41] and heeding Escobar’s call [12] to design for a pluriverse or for multiple perspectives and ways of being and knowing is apposite. Designing for a future demands design that attends to questions of environment, and experience; design that is collaborative and place-based. Picking up on this and similar calls, Escobar’s pluriverse is extended to encompass the “more than human”, e.g., for “decentring” the human-centric and the importance of including animals and nature as collaborators and participants in our urban environments [4–6,23].

We are starting to recognize that interaction with place is more than our human interaction and that the separation of urban environments from the natural is at once flawed and disastrous [29]. The eco-friendly desires of the cittaslow movement which include reference to nature, are laudable but limited. They maintain the human as centre [23]. Recent work on design and urban environments refute the nature–culture divide as a problematic construct [5,23–28] but leave us with the problem of how to engage the non-human as the meaning-making agent in our endeavors. Methods to discover place making on the part of animals contribute the idea of “beastly spaces” [25], spaces being distinguished from “animal spaces” or the ordering of animals and their spatial activities from the perspective of humans. In using the term “beastly places” the priority is to understand how animals make places or the nature of animal’s (own) geographies [42], as opposed to human.

Re-replacing animals as agentic place-makers is more challenging. The problem for design is that we cannot ask non-human denizens what they feel about the design work, does it help, is it appropriate, is it what they want? As Mancini’s manifesto [43] for Animal Computer Interaction (ACI) queries: “how do we elicit requirements from a non-human participant? How do we involve them in the design process? How do we evaluate the technology we develop for them? How do we investigate the interplay between non-human participants, technology and contextual factors? In other words, how on earth are we going to develop a user-centred design process for animals?” [43] (p. 69). We are forever positioned as system designers and owners [34]. Forlano’s [4] aforementioned call to “decentre the human and simultaneously consider the role(s) and perspectives of non-humans” (pp. 53–54) is apposite and important, but difficult to attain.

The current position paper suggests that one way of approaching this problematic is through understanding that we have a collaborative relationship with our companion animals and that, while distinct and non-verbal, animals are capable of meaning-making and exhibiting agency, that they too can be story tellers and communicate experience [44]. This has potential to scaffold decentring and designing for more than human futures and

enrichment. As Fenske and Norkunas [45] observe (p. 105): “Even without decentring the human by narrating the world from the perspective of non-humans, storytelling about human experiences with other-than-humans has the potential to change today’s world”.

3. Narrative Methodologies

A narrative approach to research is in essence based on the idea that knowledge can be found and understood in stories told. Narrative methodologies focus on the subjective experiences and are often used in reflective evaluation or contexts where design goals are more evocative. They are used when research goals are about insights and potential to reflect on commonalities [46], rather than aimed at a problem solving. Narrative research seeks to make statements about meaning in order to have something to say about the context. The approach is essentially hermeneutic, qualitative, informed by phenomenological philosophies [47]. The work described here is particularly framed by Paul Ricœur’s conceptualization of narrative identity [48], where he suggests that we situate ourselves in the world and in time through a continuous cycle of narration which is itself entangled in on-going narrations around us. Narrative means more than story in this view. It refers to the way we organise our experiences and construct a sense of temporal self through what Ricœur calls “emplotment” or the collating of events retrospectively to make meaning (1984). Narrative in this sense is bound up with memory [49] and is a composite of the objective and the subjective. That is, we construct a memory of an experience based on what actually might have happened and on a myriad of interpretations of what was happening as events transpired that are based on our subjective meaning-making. Because something happens somewhere, or as Casey [33] says, place must exist before memory and meaning, memory and therefore emplotment is thus bound to place.

Non-human subjectivity is obviously problematic. Nagel [50] argues that it is impossible to understand the experiences of a non-human because of the limitations of our own imaginations. Counter positions might suggest that fiction and the arts deal with this kind of dilemma on a daily basis and the actual problem is not that we cannot image what it is like to be a non-human but we cannot verify in the scientific manner whether or not this imagining is accurate. Other methods to discover how the non-human feels about experience depend on interpretation. Either interpretation of data acquired through measurement of physical responses, e.g., Cristina and Aurélien Budzinski’s “At the heart of the walk” project (At the heart of the walk can be found here: <http://www.dogfieldstudy.com/node/1?>) or ethnomethodological approaches, e.g., [8,11], which interrogate observations. There is therefore always an intermediary between the data and the non-human’s subjective experience. We do now tend to agree contra Descartes’ notion of non-humans as mere biological robots that animals exhibit consciousness and are not “other minds” [51] but those who share the same places as us and are effected by place-based situational circumstances. Additionally, while it may be impossible to understand a non-human’s subjective experience in their terms, the same can be said of understanding a fellow human’s experience beyond a general empathy based on shared biology and assumptions about Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Indeed, for many, sharing subjective experience is problematic, e.g., those in medical, nursing, or even educational contexts, who for whatever reason do not have the capacity to explain themselves. This is where many [52–55] practitioners use narrative methodologies and specifically, narrative inquiry as a method.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry (NI) is a method which acknowledges that human life is both storied and storying, that is, the method is structured by a narrative methodology and that narrative identities are subjectively emplotted through a narrative process [49,56]. Clandinin and Connolly [55] refer to these emplotments as stories and to the inquiry method as narrative inquiry. NI is often found in contexts where the individual in a social context is of interest and the interest is on their subjective experience but for whatever reason they may not be in a position to articulate their agency or explain their experience

(e.g., education and health situations). NI is essentially place-based in the sense that its subjects are researched within their contexts (schools, homes, hospitals etc.) and the process of the research itself recognizes context and place [57]. Ideally, like narrative identity, an NI research project situates its outcomes in time and place thus drawing the researcher's own subjectivity into its purview as well as allowing for other actors to contribute. This means that the outcomes are the stories and opportunities for insights and reflections [46] and that we can focus on single, unique, experience in order to understand that experience with reference to wider commonalities. As Gadamer advises [58], we then have a starting point for further iterative reflection and incorporation of further data.

Additionally, NI takes a reflective hermeneutic approach to experiential data which is both made up of stories and articulated through story telling. It prioritizes subjective experiential meaning rather than seeking any universal application and so is very intimately entangled in time and place, as well as allowing for relationship between the researcher and subject. As Clandinin and Connelly say NI is "collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (p. 20). NI is a method to explore subjective experience that allows for an interpretive channel. That is, NI differs from traditional qualitative research in that it allows for the researcher to be an active presence in the findings and the interpreter. As a holistic approach NI focuses on the experience from the perspective of the research subject, e.g., "what matters to them". The goal is to explore the narrative from a temporal, social, and place-based point of view in order to facilitate multiple levels of inquiry and multiple meanings. Where these multiple layers and multiple meanings "bump and collide" or evidence tensions and disjunctures is where NI finds moments to highlight. In this sense the method seeks revelations and insights.

The idea of narrative methodologies and narrative inquiry as a method of research for slow cities and designing for the more than human is particularly apt for those non-humans with whom we share both time and experiences as we move through the urban environment making place through linear progression as Ingold remarks [35]. The non-humans who have a visible presence as co-participants in urban life and who are accepted as co-performers in our daily experiences from the personal [21,24] to the wider community [19]: our dogs.

4. Materials and Methods

The research discussed here focuses on dogs and their walkers in urban and suburban environments with the intention of gathering place-based stories which can then be interrogated for signs of emplacement and plotment on the part of the animal companion. In order to do this, we set up a small pilot survey to see how well questions worked to elicit answers about the companion animal's experience. Even a cursory glimpse at forums and groups using social media platforms shows that people who live with dogs will chat about their lives with them quite happily and we hoped to capture the same enthusiasm. As well as testing our questions, we wanted to find a single or exemplar "persona" or strong character with a rich story who could provide us with a tale to explore deeply. This was in addition to the usual tenets of Gadamer's hermeneutic dictums. Moreover, in Animal Computer Interaction studies, we find in-depth focused work with "just one" animal, such as the work of Fiona French et al., with one elephant [59] and Mancini and Lehtonen [60] with one dog. As a new and relatively underexplored area, this in-depth work needs to be done before larger generalisations can be made.

The pilot survey invite was distributed to Australian and New Zealand urban, suburban and small-town dog walkers via social media. Respondents were invited questions about their dog walking habits, experiences and stories about their understandings of the companion animal's experience during the daily walk. The questions were mixed forms, both open and closed. We used direct questions such as "do you let your dog lead the walk" against indirect questions "does your dog have any preferred walks". Altogether the pilot involved 30 questions organised in three sets, e.g., 5 general profile questions about the

walker and the dog, 20 general walking habits questions and questions about negotiation between the walker and their dogs during the walk and a final set of 5 questions to ask about other people who might take the dog out for a walk—this latter was based on an idea that dogs might behave differently with a different walker. The main set of questions about the general walking habits and questions about negotiation between the walker and their dogs during the walk consisted of the following:

1. How often do you typically walk your dog(s)?
2. When do you usually walk? (Select any relevant to your walks).
3. Where do you generally walk your dog(s) for their regular walks?
4. Do you use off-leash parks?
5. Could you tell us a little more about your off-leash dog park experience?
6. Do you travel for your regular walks?
7. Do you have any reasons for the walking area preferences?
8. What is your favorite walk and why?
9. Do you have “adventures” with your dog/s?
10. Do you usually encounter the same people during your walks?
11. Who do you typically meet during your dog walks? (Select any relevant responses)
12. Have you made any “dog walk” friends? E.g., people who have become friends because you meet frequently during your dog walks.
13. Who makes decisions about dog walking friendships?
14. Do you vary your walks?
15. Do you let your dog(s) “lead” or choose which walking route you take?
16. Who sets the pace (speed) of the walk?
17. Are some walks different paces to others?
18. Are there any aspects of your regular walks that you think your dog(s) enjoy?
19. Are there any repeated behaviors that your dog(s) engages in during your walks?
20. Do you and your dog have any “disagreements” about places during your walks?

Of the 20 experiential questions, only questions 2 and 11 were direct questions with a set of closed options as we wanted contextual data only. For example, questions about walking frequency and encounters are to contextualize for the respondent. Other questions were open with opportunity for longer responses. These were the ones that generally elicited the stories we were actually looking for. A number of the pertinent questions were repeated in a slightly different way to try and catch moments of Clandinin and Connelly’s [55] bumps and collisions and revelation of extra data as our participants rephrased comments and stories mentioned in other responses.

The project is still ongoing and about to move into its second phase (a wider spread of participants) but even this small pilot generated some interesting results in terms of stories that can be interrogated through narrative inquiry methods. For the purposes of the pilot, only 10 respondents were collected as the intent was an instrument test in preparation for the full survey and like other forms of similar qualitative methods, even a small amount of data can yield rich insights. Thus, even this pilot provided us with some rich stories and a chance develop a framework for reflection. In keeping with the NI approach which requires narrative to be interrogated in the form of stories, a single story has been selected and the following story about a single dog’s experience was created by putting the responses from his human walker together as a loose story in its own right. Much of this was also corroborated with the walker (also in keeping with NI). Interrogation evidences multiple layers and reveals co-performance and negotiation on the part of dog and human as a co-performing partnership [24] or dyad [61] (emplacement) as well as what might be called emplotment on the part of the dog. That is to say, evidence of memory and resultant meaning-making in-place.

Dexter’s Story

Dexter, or Dex, is a rescued de-sexed male Greyhound. He and his human live in an inner urban area within 2 kilometres of the city centre where houses occupy small blocks

of land with front fences or hedges and small garden areas, most streets boast trees and there are a number of local parks. He gets walked twice a day (mornings and evenings), the typical before and after work pattern of many dog walkers in urban areas. The pair's walking routes tend to be local streets and parks with occasional visits to the local off-leash dog park if there are no other dogs there. His walker describes him as "very stubborn" and 'sometimes reactive to other dogs. The commentary on the choice of walking paths is about nature of neighbourhood, e.g., preference for "friendly" neighbourhood areas with trees and shade and not much traffic. Dexter's morning walks are shorter and quicker due to work commitments; afternoon walks are much longer. The pace is often dictated by the temperature with slightly slower pace on the warmer and more humid evenings (another common comment in the particular sub-tropical locale where many of the pilot study respondents live). According to the walker, she and Dex only disagree about the length of the walk, with Dex normally wanting to keep walking. He also sometimes forgets his road rules and tries to walk across a busy road.

Dex and his human walker have many dog walk friends. Some have dogs of their own, others do not but always stop for a "pat'n'chat". As Dexter is his walker's only companion at home, she reports that she finds these interactions delightful, making them feel a part of a community. Dexter's walker appreciates the community contact mentioning specifically that: "They are also happy to help in times of need as they understand the love you have for your dog". In response to the question about favourite walks (question 8), the answer is framed from the dog's point of view and Dexter's human says that Dex "is in charge of our main afternoon walk. He spends his day planning the route which now always consists of checking on a neighbourhood hedge".

A response to the question that asks about aspects of the walk (question 18) that the dog enjoys is even more revealing of intent: "Dex always sets out with a sense of purpose and knows where he wants to go which makes me think he plans his route during the day. He enjoys sniffing and leaving his mark on as many trees and shrubs as possible and has favourite trees on each of his routes".

The question about repeated behaviours (question 19) reveals more information about the hedge that is referred to in the response to favourite walks. "Dexter always checks under cars in case there are cats lurking about. He is also obsessed with a hedge in the neighbourhood and must always sneak up and stealthily monitor what is happening in and around the hedge".

5. Discussion

Dexter's survey responses provide a useful model for construction of a framework that will help us evaluate the multiple layers and multiple meanings in the quest to discover the non-human's point of view and their agentic meaning-making associated with place and what kind of place-making is going on. Where these multiple layers and multiple meanings bump and collide is where NI finds moments to highlight. In this sense the method seeks revelations and insights. A particular delight in Dexter's story becomes visible in the tensions and distinctions between activities in place-making terms. For example where can we see Ricœur's [56] emplotment or calculated, plotted meaning-making? What about Ingold's [35] lineal, processual inhabitation or emplacement? Dexter's story is also valuable as there was opportunity for follow up and direct conversation (e.g., multiple levels of collection) as well as enabling both the researcher and the walker to become a participant researcher to be an active presence in the findings and the interpreter. This latter active presence of the researcher as participant and relational collaborator in the story telling is an important aspect of NI. It arises in NI's roots in Ricœur's hermeneutic approach and is stressed by practitioners [52,54,55] as a factor that facilitates valid interpretation of meaning and narrative intent. In this case, facilitating an understanding of meaning-making and agency during the walking activity and differentiating between the human walker as meaning-making agent, the dyad of walker and dog as a co-performing pair, and the dog

as a meaning-making agent in its own right. Those activities which seemed to demonstrate these three different agents are discussed below and listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Dexter survey responses categorized in terms of agency spectrum and place-making activity.

| Agent ¹ | Events | Activity |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| Walker | Morning walk—choice of directions Crossing roads | Emplotment (on part of agent) Emplacement |
| Dyad (co-performance) | Going to the off-leash dog park Afternoon walk—apparent intent | Emplacement Emplacement |
| Dog | Looking for cats under cars The hedge | Emplacement Emplotment (on part of agent) |

¹ The agent in this table is the one that is understood as making some kind of meaning through actions.

In Dexter's case, some of the responses firmly place his human walker as agent and meaning-maker. The brief morning business walk seems to be based on decisions made by the walker. The same is true for the length of the morning walk and dictating boundaries such as crossing roads. The next part of the story made visible through Dexter's walker's response to the survey is very much in keeping with other work on dog walkers. The comment about dog parks and the walker's reluctance to go to an off-leash park if there are other dogs present is a fairly common remark about dog parks in the specific Australian urban context as the density of dog ownership means they are often busy places. In addition, dog parks are problematic and often contested spaces for many [62]. The attitude visible here is very much the result of a co-performance and negotiation between the walker, who might find the park an extension of the same community encountered in the streets and the mentioned generation of social capital and community [19,22], and the dog who might be dog focused (e.g., liking the company of other dogs) or reactive (e.g., not liking the company of other dogs). Gaunet, Pari-Perrin and Bernadin [61] suggest that this is dyadic behaviour, that is both the walker and the dog are acting in tandem. The responses to questions about pace and choice evidence a different depth of negotiation. For Dexter's walker the afternoon walk is clearly announced as Dexter "is in charge". Agency here is attributed to Dexter, although in fact these aspects of the walk are more co-performance as Dexter wears a lead and his walker must exert some control to stop him crossing busy roads. In spite of this, Dexter is permitted agency and choice about directions and pace.

Survey responses also reveal either emplotment or emplacement in different degrees (see Table 1). The response which announces intent and planning is particularly interesting as this is where we start to see a high degree of agentic place-based meaning-making on the part of the dog. Much of this is habituation and emplacement, e.g., Dexter's investigation of parked cars in the hope of finding a cat is most likely to be the result of having found cats hiding under cars previously. This kind of place-making is a wonderful example of Ingold's [35] dictum that place is lineal and part of a process: a number of local cats hang about in front yards and at front gates during the popular evening dog walking time (waiting for the return of home owners and prospective feeding) and they often dash to hide under cars parked at the kerb when a dog approaches. Emplacement of this sort is Dexter's version of the very human preference to walk along interesting streets with coffee shops and small stores that Foth and Guaralda [36] recommend in their discussion about creating slower cities. It is also the kind of emplacement and agentic place-making that Coe and Coy [63] advocate in their discussion of enabling agency on the part of confined and managed animals. Additionally, while the notion that Dexter "spends his day planning" reeks of anthropomorphizing, Dexter's walker is not alone in understanding her dog's behavior as plotted and the idea of plotting a pathway is a resonant forward-looking version of emplotment. For example, another respondent reports that her dog displays duplicitous behavior, pretending she is engaged with playing ball but then retracing her steps to a site where she once found a chicken bone as soon as the walker is relaxed about the dog's focus on the game to hand. Or for another, who reports that her dog noted a set of chicken bones just out of reach at the beginning of a walk and proceeded to "sniff-pull

in a series of maneuvers” that began quite some distance from the same bones to bring the walking pair close to those bones on the return journey. Here again, the interlocutor is sure of a high degree of plotting as she says that in this way, the dog some five minutes or so earlier, begins the trajectory that ensures the dog pair walk close enough to the bones’ location to snatch them on the return journey. All this occurs right under the nose of an unaware walker—until the sudden lurching “crunch–crunch” ah-hah moment occurs.

It is a feature of NI that we must essentially trust such insights and intuitions. Whether Dexter really does actively plan to visit the hedge mentioned twice in the survey responses is one thing. The hedge itself is another. Dexter’s walker says: “He is also obsessed with a hedge in the neighbourhood and must always sneak up and stealthily monitor what is happening in and around the hedge”. The walker does not know the exact reason for the dog’s fascination with the hedge. It is a fairly ordinary hedge in front of a house on one of the quiet local streets. She says that one walk not long after Dexter arrived, he stopped at this hedge and would not budge but stared fixedly at it for a good while. She could not see any movement or anything unusual for a hedge but assumed that Dexter had caught sight or scent of something in the hedge. Dexter’s obsession with the hedge has been so consistent that his walker has actually returned to the spot without him in order to investigate. Whatever the original incident, Dexter now seems to have clearly created a sense of place and meaning, very much, as Tuan [32] describes it with reference to Kronberg castle: the hedge now has a story attached to it from Dexter’s point of view. Dexter has created a narrative identity and thus emploted himself, and that identity, in place.

6. Reflections

The highlighting of place-making through agentic emplotment on the part of a single dog (and his supporting cast) opens an extraordinary door to the potential stories of other non-human denizens in our urban environments. The possum that comes to the verandah nightly in order to pick up a piece of carrot is emplacing itself in the same way that Dexter does with his search for cats hiding under parked cars. Whether the possum has engaged in agentic emplotment is unknown, but understanding Dexter as a story teller through narrative inquiry makes it appear highly likely that a storying event could be sourced. Insights generated in this preliminary work also inspire enticing avenues for incorporation of other methods and tools. For example, if we want to experience more of our companion animal’s world during our co-performance, then technologies that allow us to share olfactory points during walk may facilitate this. Not the smells themselves perhaps, but the degree of interest our companion might show in a particular smell. There is a need for time and pace in these kinds of methodologies: particularly a need to “listen” and attend to the subject’s experience as a sentient being. Dexter’s story and this preliminary evaluation is only a beginning, narrative inquiry takes time and patience—we could call it a kind of “slow research” approach perhaps.

When it comes to understanding narrative identities as a part of non-humans, our domesticated mammals are what we could call “low hanging fruit”. This is especially the case in contemporary western urban environments where our long-term associate has become more of a family member. The early research reported here and the use of narrative methodologies and narrative inquiry methods with dog walkers does not solve the problem of communication posed by Mancini [43], but it does offer a way to foster response to Forlano’s [4] call to decentre the human in design, and in particular the design of those urban environments that we share. We recognize that the ability to tell one’s own story is powerful and by recognizing that non-humans also tell stories—and if we are available and take the time to listen—we are opening a portal to designing for the more than human.

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