Walking, eating, sleeping. Rhythm analysis of human/dog intimacy

Tora Holmberg
Department of Sociology, Box 624, SE-75126, Uppsala, Sweden

I started early, took my dog
And visited the sea
The mermaids in the basement
Came out to look at me
(Emily Dickinson)

1. Introduction

I walk my dogs and they walk me, interrupted by rare illnesses and occasional work-related or recreational trips on my part – trips to places where dogs are not allowed to follow. What happens then in the void that develops through this break in routines, is a notion of a collective ‘nostalgia,’ an emotion connecting past, present and future to experiences of being whole and of being embedded and contained (Boym, 2001; Johannisson, 2013). Even less disruptive events, like a change in walking habits or digestive issues, trigger emotions. Drawing on animal geographies (Hodgetts and Lorimer, 2015; Philo and Wilbert, 2000), and the genre of academic ‘feminist/dog-writing’ (McHugh, 2012; Smuts, 2006; Haraway, 2003), the present article explores everyday – yet critical – rhythms of intimate dog/human interaction. I approach the geographies of ‘everyday activities and occurrences’ that may very well exist unnoticed or experienced without being understood (Mels, 2004: 3), multi-species social space from the inside, while walking, eating and sleeping together with my dogs.1

The main argument is that the rhythmical analytical approach to interspecies routines, including breaks in them and the emotions these breaks create, contributes with a spatio-temporal understanding of human/animal intimacy. By theorizing auto-ethnographical observations, the article explores how intimacy can emerge from the repetition of routinized experience.2 With Henri Lefebvre (2004) and his seminal ‘rhythm analysis,’ I argue that intimacy is performed in repetitions taking place in everyday life. The relationship between bodies in place and social space that is of importance for intimacy studies, becomes evident in everyday rhythmic temporal structures (Edensor, 2010: 2). It is important to note, however, that habituated routines – how ever stable they may seem – do not reproduce themselves endlessly. On the contrary, all rhythms carry with them the potential to disrupt reproduction when routines are broken. The breakage of repetition through ‘arrhythmia,’ may include mundane pauses like waiting for a delayed bus, or more radical discontinuation such as a plane crash (DeLyser, 2010: 148). The temporary loss of routine can be understood as a crucial ‘moment,’ signifying a brief point in time, as such something easily ignored or overlooked. But it also means a turning effect, a twist that generates energy and makes things happen. In Lefebvre’s work, a moment is a time of crisis that erupts the orthodox and taken for granted, and as such, is considered to have the potential to change emotions, meanings and practices (1991).

The ultimate moment, of course, is death. This unavoidable limit to our lives is always present. As dogs most often have shorter life spans – at least measured in biological time – than do humans, I can expect my dogs to die before I do. For this article however, I highlight the mundane disruptions; sudden stops during walks, indigestion, insomnia and more. In sum, there are multiple rhythms - human, dog, and shared - that intersect in different ways to create meanings. Before turning to dog/human everyday routines, the interrelation of ‘intimacy’ and ‘rhythm’ is laid out. The following empirical part consists of three subsections, which analyze the practices of ‘walking,’ ‘eating’ and ‘sleeping,’ respectively. Concluding the article, I pursue the argument of social forms of intimacy as constituted through moments of interruption, suggesting that intimate bonds across species boundaries take place through low intensive, everyday rhythms.

2. Intimacy in/through rhythm

Reviewing ‘intimacy’ as an increasingly used concept in the humanities and social science, one can conclude that there are three dimensions that are particularly important. Intimacy is regarded as relational and thus constituted in and through social relations of various scales. Intimacy ‘builds worlds’ (Berlant, 1998) in that it creates places. Intimate social relations also transform and get transformed by places. ‘Home’ is the typical example, where the iconic emplaced attachment of intimacy with the family is manifested (Massey, 1992). There are places that are thought of as inherently intimate: the home or the bed. But the
place itself does not create intimacy; instead, it is situationally formed through relations between subjects and spaces. Thus, the relational criterion also includes a spatial dimension (see e.g. Törnqvist, 2013).

Intimacy is moreover connected to subjectivity, as it defines and challenges its subjects, moving the actors involved with its ‘impact on people, on which they depend in order to live’ (Berlant, 2000). As such, it is boundary crossing, constituted by an ‘oceanic’ experience of borders of self being partly dissolved (Mjöberg, 2011). Intimacy is often viewed and defined in relation to its object: family members or sexual partners. The result is that the concept becomes attached to the iconic forms of intimacy that we are so used to: where there is a mother and child, or where there are lovers, there is intimacy. Moving beyond these iconic forms, as in the present article, the research literature is not as clear on how to interpret intimate sociality. Is there any resemblance between the intimacy experienced in erotic relationships and an intense meeting with a stranger on a train? And what about human/animal intimacies?

Animals are no doubt made different from humans; they are the ultimate other, not least in literature, philosophy and science. ‘We’ often constitute what ‘they’ are: language competent, existentially aware, spiritual and intelligent. However, scholars have radically considered the problems involved in the simple dichotomy that builds on qualitative differences between humans and other animals (Agamben, 2004; Derrida and Willis, 2002). Of relevance for the present article, dogs can be understood as liminal – to us, they are both human companions and the ultimate strangers (Fox, 2006; Haraway, 2003; Holmberg, 2015). Thus, dogs inhabit and move between ambivalent positions as same and other, positions that may be understood in terms of domestication. Symbolically and historically, domestication is connected to household and home, and different categories of animals – wild, tame, game – are often positioned differently depending on their proximity or distance to humans. Domestication is, moreover, about developing relationships, ‘an emergent process of co-habiting, involving agencies of many sorts’ (Haraway, 2003: 30). As a relational process, domestication can be understood as an act of power as well as of care (Irvine, 2004).

Donna Haraway (2003) has explored the human/dog interdependences, thinking with cooperation and responsibility in work and sport, while putting the relation between individuals, as well as species, at the center. Humans and other animals are engaged in different but overlapping worlds – where the overlaps make up ‘contact zones’ which constitute each other (Haraway, 2008). These contact zones are not mute external contexts, but effervescent and specifically localized human-animal relations in which we all are complicit (Hinchliffe, 2010). Becoming in this co-evolutionary dance is ‘always becoming with—in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake’ (Haraway, 2008: 244). Becoming with other humans in general and animals in particular has an important corporal, affective dimension: to become is also to become embodied and to make oneself available to the becomings of others, in what has been described as ‘anthropo-zoo-genetic’ practice (Despret, 2004). This attunement to other bodies constructs animal and human, providing new manners of becoming together, as well as new identities.

I want to extend Haraway’s conceptual frame to emphasize the spatial and temporal aspects of multi-species becomings. This extension does not aim at repeating geography’s critique of the missing link between when and where species meet (Hinchliffe, 2010), but to attend to the specific rhythms of everyday life that make up becomings in the flesh. Rhythm offers a way of being human with dogs, and being dogs with human. Learning to communicate, to generously read the other’s bodily gestures and voices, and learn to speak a language that is not mine with persons who are not of the same species, is a time-consuming yet rewarding endeavor. Paying attention to small movements and changes in expression, posture, and more, is to become with individuals who do not precede the ‘nexus of their most important relationships’ (Smuts, 2006: 124).

I choose to put the notion of multispecies becomings in conversation with Lefebvre and his rhythm analysis, in mundane, repetitive everyday situations and in relation to instances when the rhythm is broken. Rhythm can be understood as the outcome of the dialectics between time, space and energy, where the repetition creates difference; the repetitive nature of social interaction is only revealed to us through interruptions. Like the ethnmethodologist, the rhythm analyst pays attention to breaks (Garfinkel, 1967). However, the latter does so primarily by using her situated body in particular timespaces. Thus, the rhythmic ethnography is ‘a practice of wayfaring’ (Vannini, 2015: 323). The body is the tool, ‘the metronome’ as Stuart Elden notes (Elden, 2004: 6), of the first-order perspective from which the social analysis can derive. What this means in terms of analytic value will be discussed throughout the analysis, but one can already note here that making the body the primary metronome and not, say, the clock or the waves, means creating a built-in tension between the body/metronome as enabling and as delimiting rhythm analysis.

As Lefebvre advocates, the auto-ethnographic account requires that, ‘to grasp a rhythm it is necessary to be grasped by it; one must let oneself go, give oneself over, abandon oneself in this duration’ (2004: 37). In a sense, succeeding as a rhythm analyst means embracing intimate sociality. How is this done? The rhythm analyst engages, as already mentioned, with repetition. He or she also pays attention to movement and difference, as will become evident in the analysis below. The body/metronome records both overlapping, consonant rhythms and dissonances. It might even be relevant to speak of ‘auto/biology,’ since the approach places the body and its rhythms, emotions and experiences at the center (Hemmingson, 2009: 32). To be clear, rhythm analysis is not so much an analysis of rhythms as such, but more about using rhythm as an analytical entry point – a matrix – to social relations and phenomena, in this case, to social forms of intimacy.

In order to get at this social form of intimacy, auto-ethnographic observations are analyzed from a hybrid between animal ethnography and critical biography. As any other ethnography, it is a method that places the ethnographer in a social context. In addition, it is also a text, a self-narrative that reflects on its own conditions (Red-Donahay, 1997: 9). But it is ultimately an unfaithful narrative, in that it questions the anthropocentrism inherent in auto-ethnographic history. It also questions the notions of ‘self’ inherent in auto-ethnographic traditions, by stressing the process of relational becomings in ‘multispecies codependence’ (Bull and Holmberg, 2018: V). Inspired by Hayden Lorimer’s narration of a reindeer herd, I seek to map out the microgeography of our codependent human/dog nexus, while individualizing the participants (Lorimer, 2006: 6).

The main actors in this staged drama are, beside myself – a middle-aged sociologist - the dogs I live with: Ronja and Rocky. Ronja is a 12-year-old Staffordshire terrier. No doubt an alpha bitch, she leads when there is a ball around. He is also the police and tellingly reacts when even more playful, barking and jumping from excitement whenever she can take on hikes and makes sure that everyone is on track. Nevertheless, she can take off, sometimes for hours, if she finds something more interesting than her pack to attend to – for example the scent of a deer. She loves to play with other dogs (including puppies) as much as to cuddle in the sofa. The 10-year-old Border collie/Labrador mix Rocky is even more playful, barking and jumping from excitement whenever there is a ball around. He is also the police and tellingly reacts when other dogs or people do not behave according to norms.3 Let me give you a glimpse of our life together through this trivial, yet illustrative example: When we have gone to bed at night, each member of the triad has his or her place. While Ronja and I share the master bed with my human partner, Rocky prefers to sleep in the room next door. One late

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3 They have come to me through a Swedish rescue organization called Hundar utan hem (Dogs without home). This means that I adopted them – first Ronja and then two years later, Rocky - when they were already adult dogs with a history, and that I do not know much more about their previous lives than the country of origin: Ireland.
evening not long ago, Rocky walked downstairs, and I could hear him moving around back and forth. I could tell from his movements – breaking with the common pattern – that he probably needed to go out to relieve himself. After I had, half asleep, stumbled down to the hall, his postures and his look at the door confirmed my suspicion. My partner, sitting on the sofa downstairs, looked up in surprise; he had not noticed anything out of the ordinary. Taking note of such ethnographic moments of disruption led me to consider the taken-for-granted nature of our life together.

In the following analysis, intimacy is viewed as a relational, embodied and emotional practice. It is a subjective experience depending on a spectrum of feelings of being safe or at risk, contained or invaded and connected/disconnected with others (human or non-human). Moreover, intimacy has a timespace dimension in that it is something that happens in the contact zones of becoming with, in ‘building worlds’. It is situated in various time regimes - and constituted dialectically with the environment in which it takes place, in turn producing the place itself. It has an immediacy to it, and includes the scales of proximity/distance.

In the following, the everyday multi-species habits of walking, eating and sleeping are analyzed while attending to layers of intimacy.

3. Walking

I walk my dogs and they walk me. Every day at around 7 a.m., we rise and get ready; collars on, trainers, sometimes jackets/coats. Some of us sit by the door, while others run around to collect a mobile phone, water bottle, keys. Then we walk for an hour, choosing from a limited number of available routes. In the afternoon, when returning home from work, or after working from home, we repeat the procedure and walk for another hour. Sometimes we run instead. This is our daily routine, seldom interrupted by the weather or other circumstances. Step by step, the dogs are connected to my waist by their leashes being harnessed my suspicion. My partner, sitting on the sofa downstairs, looked up in surprise; he had not noticed anything out of the ordinary. Taking note of such ethnographic moments of disruption led me to consider the taken-for-granted nature of our life together.

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The walks are far from as free of interruptions that may have been implied above. When meeting other dogs and their humans, cats, rabbits, the pace is broken while greetings take place. The main cause of halts, however, is the scent of others left on the ground, and its olfactory attractiveness may result in substantial pulling back and forward. Here, the dog-a-doodle enables severe arrhythmia. Another interference occurs when I wish to lead the way, but Ronja, the Staffordshire terrier, wants to decide where to go and when to return home, we often argue about it. That is, I start to move in one direction and she refuses by stopping abruptly and staring intensely at me. But this is only when we get to a crossing. While en route, our walk is path dependent.

Because we live on the countryside, we mainly walk on dirt roads and in the forest. The ground actively paces our walks. When the trails are bare and dry, our movements become swift, harmonious and regular. In the winter, when snow and ice make the roads and paths slippery, our energy is less forward directed, our walk more strenuous, as we need to concentrate on where to put our feet and paws. The landscape is not the passive context of our walks, but an active agent in our walk is path dependent.

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4. Eating

Continuing with the topic of embodied needs, we most often eat at the same time, at around 8 a.m. and at 6 p.m. I sit by the table or on the sofa, while Ronja and Rocky have their meal in bowls on the floor. While I change my diet so to avoid eating the same thing every day, they have the same dry dog food biscuits in the same quantities –

But it is not only the ground that constitutes the basis of our walking practice. In the summer, we walk to the beach to take a swim. Rocky, the furry black Border collie/Labrador, happily runs into the cold water of the Baltic Sea, sometimes followed by Ronja and me. Swimming with dogs is a wonderful, but slightly annoying experience. Dogs move through the water with rapid, circular strokes made by their front legs. And they do not follow conventions, such as not swimming into others. On the contrary, my body remembers countless encounters with quick, sharp claws moving through the water. When we manage to avoid a crash, swimming may become as rhythmical as walking. However, although there are occasional interruptions and we get out of step due to weather and seasonal variation, most of the year, the walks are predominantly monotone, steps followed by even more steps. The walking movements have become habituated and embodied needs. It is a kind of labor that we do, a routine performed at about the same time every day, seven days a week, all year around.

As mentioned above, in order to understand human/animal relations, movement is crucial: 'Direction, velocity and how various power relations converge to enable or prevent movement, are fundamental to understandings of humananimal encounters' (Bull, 2011: 23). The mode of movement is further thought of as different for different species. While humans are ‘walking,’ the English verb for dog movement is ‘running.’ Animals – including humans – are active, moving creatures that are expected to be mobile, but also to be moved by perception (Ingold, 2006: 14). Indeed, movement is the mode through which we perceive our lifeworld. Dogs, like other hunters, are interesting in this regard; they can spot a rabbit or a squirrel from far away, but only if its movements or scents are coming from the right direction. Humans have a much narrower, close-up perception. While our olfactory capacities are endlessly inferior, our eyes capture the still as well as the moving object. Moreover, to perceive the world is to move in and through it, ‘to engage with multiplicity of things (animate or otherwise) which we call “the environment” and thereby gain the depth of understanding which constitutes and creates subjectivity’ (Bull, 2011: 24, italics in original). Through our material connection – the emplaced ‘dog-a-doodle’ – we adapt our pace as well as our perceptions to each other, in a ‘walk-ish’ mode of movement.

So how does this routinization of walking connect to intimacy? The practice of walking certainly has a certain timespace scheme to it, moving in the forest and through the dirt roads in the morning and the evening, creating an immediate notion of corporal becoming. Erin Manning and Brian Massumi write about movements and the transgression/challenge of the ‘me,’ of a subjective body that comes before a movement. Instead, they argue that,

Movement courses through the me that is in formation: experience, perception, feeling – all of these are movements, and each of them contributes, in an infinity of ways, to what I ‘will become in any given occasion (Manning and Massumi, 2014: 166).

Returning to the analogy of the ethnographer’s body as metronome, we may ask whether the body is really an instrument that paces the movement of bodies. Perhaps the walking can be considered the metronomic activity, which constitutes the rhythmic bodying of the triad as a form of dance, or a piece of music. Through our walking habits, we become bodies, we ‘body’ as Manning would put it (2013). Moving through, and formed by, the seaside forests and village roads which make up our home, the situated routine creates a ‘triadic bodying,’ a becoming with no fixed leaders or followers.

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sometimes topped with some leftovers from my plate. If I ever – Goddess forbid – forget to fill up the bowls, or not give enough to re-energize the walking bodies, Ronja tells me in no uncertain terms. She sits a few meters away from the bowl and whines, while looking straight into my eyes, thereby making me acknowledge the neglect. This causes me to run off to fill her bowl, thus restoring the routine. While Ronja eats once or twice a day until satiated, Rocky is more of a continuous snacker, walking past his bowl again and again through the course of the day, checking it out and occasionally grabbing a bite. Interestingly, they respect each other's eating habits and most of the time do not steal food left in a bowl or on the table.

If I am not at home in time for dinner, Rocky and Ronja will wait for my return, and the minute after they have finished greeting me, they turn their attention to the food, eating away as though they had not been fed for days. When I leave the household for more than a day or two, the dogs' eating routines are severely disturbed. Once, Ronja more or less refrained from eating for almost a week. Rocky is less picky, regarding both the kind of food he eats and the circumstances of the meal. I, on the other hand, need to take walks in the morning, before breakfast, in order to awaken my gut and my appetite.

What is going on when people feed other animals? It goes without saying that I am in a privileged position here, as I chose when and with what Ronja and Rocky gets to eat. While we create a bond of material-semiotic exchange, it is a practice in the context of domestication. Feeding dogs can further be viewed as an act of empathy. As a practice of meaningful care across the species divide, from an interactionist perspective, all the individuals involved must share some common symbols and recognize the interaction as one of feeding. Feeding, in addition to the symbolic interaction between giver and receiver, involves social responsibility and cohesion (Holmberg, 2018: 40). Sharing food is certainly a politico-moral practice. As Haraway points out, ‘companion’ comes from the Latin word ‘cum panis,’ meaning ‘with bread,’ implicating that the deep meaning of companioning may well involve the sharing of food (2008: 17). Collective eating is a ritual of all communities – human and non-human alike – functioning as to knit members together and/or to constitute hierarchies. Eating well together has larger political implications, as a key issue for terran futures; we bring something from the outside to the inside, our bodies have different metabolic paces, our rhythms will intersect or, as regards to meal hours, even become shared.

### 5. Sleeping

Sleeping habits extend far beyond the events of actually going to sleep and waking up. When preparing for bedtime, Ronja usually goes to bed before I do. After the last toileting in the garden, she walks upstairs and jumps onto the bed. If I stay awake too long, she sometimes comes down again to stand in the doorway and stare at me, telling me that it is time for bed. When I finally do go upstairs, Rocky follows along and lies down on the floor beside the bed. This is the order of the ritual that we almost always follow.

When I remove the cover and lay down on the bed, Ronja wiggles down under the duvet, from the top of the bed, and finds a spot behind my knees, while Rocky gets up and walks into the room next door. I usually stay awake for another hour or so, reading in bed, while the others – including the human co-sleeper – are sound asleep. In the morning, I am the first to move, and when I do, the dogs instantly come to my face to greet my waking up. Though not always appreciated, Ronja eagerly licks my face, while standing on my chest and arms, and when Rocky tries join the greeting ritual, Ronja effectively stops him by wedging herself between us. Our threesome thus involves an element of jealousy, mainly handled through bodily adjustments: Me trying to be fair by directing attention in two directions, Ronja blocking Rocky out of the physical interaction, Rocky moving away to find a better angle for reaching me. This ritual dance is repeated in the same choreographed way, more or less every morning.

The licking of faces is a dog practice that usually signals submission to a higher ranked individual, and may also be used to knit a pack together (Smuts, 2006: 122). Tolerating the licking behavior means accepting and encouraging the emotional bond. When Ronja licks my face – greeting me when I return from work or wake up in the morning – I usually let her, sometimes forming my mouth and tightening my lips to a kiss. What, then, is an interspecies kiss in terms of intimate sociability? When Haraway speaks of the way in which the Australian Shepherd Ms Cayenne Pepper ‘colonizes’ her cells with bacteria, while touching her tonsils (2003: 1), I can see what she is getting at. While displaying the arbitrariness of species divides, the dog/human kiss transgresses norms and challenges taboos in forming subjectivities (Turner, 2010). Moreover, our kissing rituals are re-occurring moments, forming and confirming our triadic multi-species becoming.

Following the thread of interspecies taboos, the bed has been constructed as an intimate space, especially the parental bed as a space of sexual symbolism, at least in contemporary Western society. ‘Sleeping with’ someone has erotic connotations. This is one reason why co-sleeping with children is a practice that has been rendered problematic. However, until the early 20th century, co-sleeping with others than sexual partners was common practice, at least within the working class. Contemporary social hygiene and welfare politics described risks associated with such close encounters, such as transmission of germs and parasites as well as undesired sexual practices such as incest (Ekstam, 2013). In retrospect, the practice of co-sleeping is considered an unavoidable effect of crowding, poverty or cold temperature. When it comes to human/animal co-sleeping, it is similarly comprehended as either a necessity or a perversity. Sleeping with your pet may also be seen as unhygienic and as proof of an unhealthy attachment to the animal. The reverse is also true, that this practice is discussed as an unhealthy attachment on the pet’s part, leading to confused rank ordering and problematic behavior, such as aggression or separation anxiety. But actually very little scholarly attention has been paid to why, how and with what effects humans and companion animals sleep together (Thompson and Smith, 2014).

Although Rocky, Ronja and I have somewhat different sleeping preferences, patterns and cycles, it seems difficult to sleep without one another. Our cycles intersect. The practice of sleeping is highly affective, experienced in the flesh (Dewsbury, 2009). When I am away from my dogs, I wake up cold. And when I am not at home, their sleep is constantly interrupted by any noise that may indicate my return home. Interruptions of rhythm thus create insomnia, which again points at the stable rhythm of co-habitation and bodying. Sleeping with other beings is one of the intimate practices that is full of ‘empty gestures,’ and thus, in Goffman’s sense, totally meaningful. These connective forces allow for ‘being human together’ (Skatvedt, 2007: 17), or in our case, for multi-species becoming.
umbrella of non-representational ethnography. The challenge is to depart from the ethnographer’s microgeographic accounts, while simultaneously telling a story of more general value. In other words, it ‘attempts to grapple with the challenge of sharing empirical narratives that make sense – or that, in other words, are inspired by and feel coherent with the world as encountered – while simultaneously underscored the situatedness, partiality, contingency, and creativity of that sense-making’ (Vannini, 2015: 318). Through vignettes from our dog/human life world, multi-species becoming has been explored. The conceptual lenses of ‘rhythm’ and ‘intimacy’ have guided this exploration. In the introduction, I stated that the social forms of intimacy investigated consist of three layers: practice, subjectivity and timespace. What I have done, is to analyze how these play out in the everyday interspecies routines of walking, eating and sleeping.

First, practice is analyzed here in terms of repetitive embodied routines, habituated through rhythmic bodying. It is definitely a matter of rituals creating meaning; every walk takes place in a certain place, at a certain time of the day, in a specific pace and with different amounts of energy. In this sense, it is foremost a practice of reproduction. But the walk also produces the locations, the timescapes and the affects that take place. This performative dimension is made most visible through interruptions: absence from home or bed, illness, constipation, nightmares. Thus, our movements are dialectically experienced in relation to stasis and stillness. In the introduction, I conceptualized the loss of routine as a ‘moment,’ meaning a time of crisis that erupts the orthodox and taken for granted and that has the potential to change meanings, affects and practices. The moment is something else than an event, although it is built into an event. It is social relationship and individual experience (Elden, 2004: 172). The moment is history and future brought together in present consciousness (Lefebvre, 1991).

Second, subjectivity is analyzed in terms of difference with regard to pace, interests, power and degree of control. The human subject no doubt has the power to decide on when, where and how to walk, eat and sleep. However, understood in the context of domestication, power is relational. The dogs may keep me waiting during walks and prevent me from sleeping at nights. Sameness and difference are at play in the embodied proximity and distance as well as through the emotions created in interaction. The ‘emotional energy,’ to borrow Randall Collins’ term (2004), may be of a negative or positive kind, like boredom or curiosity. The point is that it is a low intensity emotional base, created through ‘rhythmic interaction chains’ – that is, through rhythmic, repetitive practice that forms subjectivity. Using the ritual-like routines of the everyday as an analytical frame, directs the rhythm analyst towards the mundane and profane, rather than the intense and sacred. But if you ask Ronja and Rocky about it, their welcoming me from walking during walks and prevent me from sleeping at nights. Sameness and difference are at play in the embodied proximity and distance as well as through the emotions created in interaction. The ‘emotional energy,’ to borrow Randall Collins’ term (2004), may be of a negative or positive kind, like boredom or curiosity. The point is that it is a low intensity emotional base, created through ‘rhythmic interaction chains’ – that is, through rhythmic, repetitive practice that forms subjectivity. Using the ritual-like routines of the everyday as an analytical frame, directs the rhythm analyst towards the mundane and profane, rather than the intense and sacred. But if you ask Ronja and Rocky about it, their welcoming me back from work, or when I wake up in the morning, involves outbursts of great emotional intensity and symbolic activity, communicating a commitment through triadic bodying. However, to turn the analytical table, it is the predominantly low emotional energy of the repetitive everyday routine that I have conceptualized as intimate, that is building a base for the moments of great joy and intense grieving. The interspecies emotional connection enables one to know and to sense the other.

Third, attending to the timespace of intimacy, it becomes obvious in my analysis that both cyclical, natural time and linear, social time appear and intermingle. In Lefebvre’s world of ‘rhythmmed movements’ (2004: 16), the natural/social boundaries are neither absolute nor commonsensical. Natural/cyclical time and social/linear time must be understood as intertwined (Jones, 2011). The movement of bowels, the beating of hearts, sleeping cycles, the sound of the sea waves, but also the feeding schedule, the working and walking hours, are socially organized. Moreover, these temporalities are overlaid spatially. The kitchen, the sea, the bed, the dirt road are the places where the ‘rhythmic dialogues between nature and society, symbol and substance, body and culture are staged’ (Mels, 2004: 5). The entanglement of temporal regimes and specific locales, confirms the fact that rhythms are lived in ways that cannot be separated from the everyday experience (Mels, 2004: 26). When the repetition of human/animal encounters and different spatio-temporal regimes intersect, they create multispecies becoming. The bundles of rhythms that make up this intimate sociability could in fact be termed ‘polyrhythmic bodying.’

In the research literature, intimacy is about the intensity of, and emotionality in, the relation to one or more persons, most often described in terms of family- or friendship-based, or one-to-one long-term, relationships. Trust and sameness (symmetry) are central dimensions of intimate relations, but so are control and external boundaries (Ahrne, 2014: 57). But what about human/animal relations? Can there be intimacy in relations that so clearly appear to be all about difference and asymmetry? I own my dogs and can decide over death and life issues. They are in legal terms my property. But my dogs also decide over my life; they are stubborn agents in the ritual dance of everyday life. On the one hand, I get up at a certain time because I need to take them out, and get home from work after a few hours to repeat the activity. I spend considerable resources throughout their life course on dog food, leisure, health care and insurance. I brush their fur and cut their claws, remove tics and rinse ears. I constantly clean the house! And I walk, talk, eat, pet and sleep by their side. They, on the other hand, take me out in the forests, take care of my health and wellbeing by preventing illness, rub and kiss me, let me play and laugh. They make sure I take regular breaks from the computer and do not work too much. Indeed, dog, human and shared rhythms, admittedly different, regularly coincide.

The intimate sociability I have analyzed above is ultimately about sharing dissonant but overlapping rhythms, to become a crowd through triadic bodying. It is what Lauren Berlant calls ‘intensified zones of attachment’ (Berlant, 2012: 18), constituted by moments of disruption.

In our interspecies triad, the cycle of life and death becomes more present than in a human only context. The fact that dogs generally lead shorter lives than humans do creates a certain dynamic. Unless I am very old, my dogs are expected to pass away (such a beautiful, rhythmic paraphrase), before I do. And the memories of dogs who have lived and died are, in a sense, present in our everyday walking, eating and sleeping habits. They make death become present as part of the everyday life (Gordon, 2008: 22). The relatively short life span of many pets can make their lives and their deaths more manageable in relation to the larger perspective of the owners’ life cycle (Redmalm, 2013: 28). The grieving of future absence – the ultimate breakage of the rhythms of the everyday – is built into the nostalgia of bitter-sweet joys of co-habitation, of co-habitation. But the repetitive nature of interaction makes us blissfully forget that there is an end.

Rhythm makes us remember, repeating by route, making habits and routines; but it is amnesiac, making us forget – only to return afresh. As Henri Lefebvre reminds us, ‘dawn is always new’ (Henriques et al., 2014: 4).

Although the threat of death is always present, it is kept at bay by the repetitive everyday rhythms, including the regular and lively outbursts of interspecies play and joy. As mentioned in the introduction, nostalgia and melancholy are emotions central to intimate sociability. Like every day is new while it carries the memories of yesterday, every relational moment, however unique, carries the memories of relations lost.
I wake my human with intense licking all over her face. Sometimes she doesn’t respond, which is irritating. I then sit by the door, while she gets ready. Then we go outside to see what’s happened since yesterday, and I often get to choose the route. Rocky and I are sniffing, peeing, looking for rabbits. My human thinks she’s pulling the strings, but it’s really me. I don’t like to go out when it’s raining, but otherwise I’m always up for it!

Then we get food.

I then roll up on the sofa, or if it’s warm and sunny, outside on the porch.

Rocky chases the cat. My human leaves us sometimes, then we go out to sniff and walk again.

Then we eat. Then we sleep. I make space for her in my bed.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2019.03.002.

References