

Essay

Deep Canine Topography: Captive-Zombies or Free-Flowing Relational Bodies?

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Abstract: For the last three years I have been making walks with my canine companion as part of an Arts and Humanities Research Council funded fine art practice-based PhD at Nottingham Trent University, UK, which considers walking art as a shared human–canine practice. In this paper I reflect upon the doings of *deep canine topography* as a practice, with particular attention to the ethical questions raised. In the short meditation on the ethics of human animal artistic collaboration that follows, I will wander through the complex web of human–canine kinship, explored through art practice. Joining us on our walk through this tricky landscape are Rosi Braidotti, Jack Halberstam, Donna Haraway, Ron Broglio, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and a host of other actors whose concepts and theories provide a rich source of ethical discussion, which fellow artists might find helpful.

Keywords: ethics; care; situated knowledge; companion species; walking art; multispecies ethnography; nomadism; becoming animal

1. A Brief Introduction to Deep Canine Topography

Late afternoon in November, the closing month of a yearlong human–canine exploration of the meadows, the sun is low, the sky is clear, it is wet underfoot following a few days of rain, not wet in the usual flooded sense, still passable with care, with the right footwear of course, it is surprisingly warm, the slight mist of evaporation, the river is in full flow, heading north as we head south, in harmony, not in opposition, the marshes have been replenished following a dry summer, the leaves are turning russet, brown, red, and gold, yet there remains a surprising amount of lush dark green vegetation, punctuated by the last remaining wildflowers of the summer, water on the ground reflects the sun and the sky creating the illusion that the horizon has been abolished and the ground and sky are one, no up nor down, no land nor sky, we pick our way along familiar tracks, through gaps in hedges, up into the woods, my companion forging ahead, his movements are poetic, balletic, as I pause, scanning for the path through the woods, a vague memory of its trajectory made foggy by leaf fall obscuring the track, he sweeps past in an arc, jumping a felled branch, immediately switching back and jumping again, as if to capture the sheer joy of being in that moment airborne, he stops about 20 feet ahead, looks back, does his playful four-legged stamp, tail raised, head down, beckoning me to join in this chase through the woods and forging his own path for me to follow, he draws a line with his body, poised and athletic, weaving through trees up to a path beyond a path, sweeping round to the open field where he meets another much smaller dog, engaging in a playful chase, sometimes stumbling, obviously the older of the two, I worry that such playful energetic adventures may be numbered as time collapses, the last 12 months of walking the meadows becoming a singularity, one event constructed of many moments and memories.

The prose which opens this paper, and the following image are taken from a work in progress film ‘A year with the meadows’, (O’Brien 2021) which explores an edge-land nature reserve through the sensory entanglement of human and canine walking bodies, as an illustration of how the practice is documented and presented (Figure 1).

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Figure 1. *A Year with The Meadows*©; O'Brien 2021.

The familiar stretch of the legs, the downward dog, the wagging tail, all signal it is time for a walk. But this is no ordinary walk. This is an adventure into unknown territory through the unfolding landscape of deep canine topography. Deep canine topography is a practice which connects the human to the feral; a practice which troubles human senses and subjectivity; a practice which reveals and explores how we make a world together as human–canine.

In their 2018 study (*Just a Walk with The Dog*, psychologists Thomas Fletcher and Louise Platt, describe the humble dog walk as ‘... a significant arena where relations of power between animal and human are consciously mediated’, calling for further research into the walk as a space of human–canine relational encounter (Fletcher and Platt 2018, vol. 19, pp. 211–29). The practice of deep canine topography, and subsequent research project, seeks to explore this mediation through the praxis of walking-art. Therefore, by employing the methods and strategies of psychogeography, deep canine topography examines how walking with a canine collaborator enables a deeper connection with place and space and has the potential to trouble human–canine relational encounters.

What started as an experiment in psychogeography and canine navigational agency has, perhaps unsurprisingly, raised a number of pressing ethical conundrums. I find myself constantly questioning my motives as an artist, not just for the welfare of my canine co-author, which is taken as read, but the very troubled history of human–canine relations. So, the central question for me as an artist is, am I adding to the tyranny that binds us, or offering some hope for future human–canine relations, beyond master, slave, human savior logics? Deep canine topography, therefore, explores canine navigational skills as an invitation to follow the nose, to engage in a more-than-human exploration of place, space, and time through sensory entanglement. As a practice it asks that we abandon upright, bipedal ocular-centric, horizon-focused human points of view and embrace vibrant, chaotic space-time-mattering’s of the canine body, through improvisation, immanence, and playful abandon. Deep canine topography ultimately asks us to abandon human modes of walking and colonial traditions of cartography and map making, to follow the senses and desires of the canine, to see where they might lead us. It is no accident, therefore, that I am drawn to Rosi Braidotti’s reading of Deleuze’s theory of nomadic subjectivity, not just in terms of the choreography of relational movement of bodies through space, but as an agile and mobile body of thought, which challenges the very ground upon which our human–

animal relations play out. Furthermore, Braidotti offers a clear discussion of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming animal as an ethical, bio-egalitarian turn, with an enthusiastic optimism, which we will return to later. Jack Halberstam's concept of zombie humanism, on the other hand, offers a more dystopian anti-humanist view, which leads us to question and re-examine the violent origins of our very human–canine shared histories. Whilst Donna Haraway (2003), who lit the touch paper with her book, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, continues to fuel the fire by constantly reminding us of the unavoidably messy, entangled knots we tie with our more-than-human furry companions. With the help of these concepts and from my own perspective as an artist/researcher, I hope to spotlight and discuss some of the sticky ethical questions faced by artists who choose to engage with the animal question through multispecies collaborative art practices that explore alternative ethical positions built on shared vulnerability and reciprocity.

The emergence of posthumanism and the animal turn in contemporary philosophical thought challenges traditional humanist concepts of the animal in which the animal remains effectively corralled and measured against the concept of the human. In the humanist tradition, humans retain their position at the pinnacle of evolution, holders of language, knowledge, logic and reason; thus, limiting the animal's sense of depth, and interiority. In his 2011 book *Surface Encounters Thinking with Animals and Art*, Ron Broglio considers the unique position of artists and their ability to work at the limits of knowledge and the boundaries separating human from animal. Broglio argues that artists engaging in human–animal encounters do so without resorting to languages of representation that assimilate or trivialise animal phenomenology; he states that '*it is [here] in the contact zones, between the outer edge of a human world and the animal world, where exchanges take place*' (Broglio 2011, p. xxiii). It is through contact zones of human–canine bodies, engaged in the action/event of the art-walk, that deep canine topography seeks to explore and trouble human subjectivity. Through our shared walks, bodies become permeable, fluid, and capable of becoming other through relational encounters and subtle gestures of cross-species communication.

A significant moment in the philosophical 'animal turn' is discovered in Jacques Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (Derrida 2008). Here, Derrida invites us, standing naked before the gaze of his pet cat, to consider the limits of the human–animal divide and how the animal's gaze radically complicates traditional human–animal hierarchies and, therefore, human–animal relations (Calarco 2009, vol. 1, pp. 80–83). Matthew Calarco identifies that Derrida offers a perspective through which there is, '*no clear separation between human and animal inasmuch as both "kinds" of beings are irreducibly caught up in the "same" network of differential forces that constitute their modes of existence*' (Calarco 2008, p. 106). Going on to say that Derrida '*makes it clear that animals confront us with as much ethical force as human beings do, if not more so*' (Calarco 2008, p. 106).

My, (our) own practice begins with a speculative question, instigated by the will of the domesticated animal, his call to the wild, if you like, through the simple invitation to "follow me". The resulting practice-led investigation has taken us much further than we might have at first imagined. By highlighting and bringing into question human and canine relational ontologies, deep canine topography seeks to question the very surfaces and boundaries that separate human from animal, built as they are on a complex and contested story of co-evolution. The aim, therefore, is not only to engage in a collaborative creative act, but to critically re-evaluate what both human and canine bodies are capable of, if hybridity, in the form of co-authorship, is our quest.

With this in mind, this paper considers the twin positions of art's ability to engage with the animal in ways that seek to flatten hierarchies and open new lines of escape through a relational alliance and the very real concern that such endeavours might ultimately fail and simply perpetuate the inevitable captivity of entangled human–canine relational ontologies. Therefore, I offer a brief discussion of the texts and concepts that I have personally found helpful when critically assessing my own practice intentions and limitations. As such, what follows is highly speculative and makes no claims beyond my own, autoethnographic account of a practice.

An underlying theme of my practice is the exploration of the rigid boundaries between human, canine and landscape. As such, I work directly with my canine companion to explore zones of contact, which trouble such boundaries and tease out fluid moments of becoming other or becoming hybrid. As the title of this paper suggests, I am constantly oscillating between questions of regarding my practice as a true creative alliance against the backdrop of a continued exploitation and captivity of both human and canine bodies. However, this paper is not a comprehensive review of my research. Although my practice is introduced and discussed as the context through which I explore the question of ethics.

As such, by way of a brief introduction to deep canine topography as a practice and an invitation for others to engage their own human–canine collaboration, I offer the following manifesto:

2. Manifesto: Two Legs Bad, Four Legs Good, Six Legs Better

- Deep canine topography is trusting your senses to take you to new and interesting places, following the tracks and traces left by others, either recently, read in their decay, or in the past through lines of desire and ancestral connections to deep time, long before the taming of the earth by the two-legged folk and our often troubled mutual alliance.
- Deep canine topography requires a direct and visceral connection with the ground unfolding beneath the paw, following the rhythm of the paw and the rhythms and cross rhythms of the land as the beating lines of flights of beasts and humans that crisscross and intermingle in a multiplicity of potential becomings, by embracing the draw to wild spaces, to the river in full flow, to the deep grasses in which you can become lost in a sensory soup.
- Deep canine topography is chasing the ball and running with a vitality that knows no bounds, for no other reason than the joy of running, embracing the art of everyday chance encounters with other bodies and vibrant objects that form the multiplicities of the unfolding landscape.
- Deep canine topography is *never* a claiming and taming of territory, *never* the drawing of the quickest most efficient line between two points and is *never* a solitary act.

3. Becoming Animal

A good place to begin to explore and trouble human exceptionalism is Deleuze and Guattari's notoriously obscure and complex concept of Becoming Animal, which populates and grows through their collective works, and is resolved in their 1984 opus *A Thousand Plateaus*. In order to unpick this concept, we will need the help of those who have walked this tricky path before us. In his 2007 essay *Becoming-Animal (Some Simple Ways)*, Gerald L. Bruns offers a useful definition of the concept follows:

Becoming animal is a movement from the major (the constant) to the minor (the variable); it is a deterritorialization in which a subject no longer occupies a realm of stability and identity but is instead folded imperceptibly into a movement or into an amorphous legion whose mode of existence is nomadic, or alternatively, whose 'structure' is rhizomatic rather than arborescent, that is, restless, insomniac, or in flight rather than settled, upright, at one with itself and at peace with others. (Bruns 2007, vol. 38, pp. 703–20)

Let us consider Bruns' useful summary of becoming animal in relation to the practice of deep canine topography. As we move together as human–canine, two legs bad, four legs good, six legs better, to steal and re-purpose an Orwellian phrase, responding to each other's bodies through playful improvisation, a de-territorialization of subjectivity takes place. No longer fixed to a subjective self or 'I' as 'centre', we enter a rhizomatic, relational mode, in step, through which it could be argued, that we, that is my canine companion, and I (without an 'I') become hybrid. Although the concept of becoming animal is equally relevant to many artistic practices, in which an element of improvisation and trust in the openness of the unknown is at play, it has particular resonance in walking-art. Here,

walking-art becomes a sensory practice of engagement with the world, through relational movement. Erin Manning summarises the act of worlding through movement as that which *'[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 2014, vol. 20, p. 166). The trick is not to seek out or necessarily try to create the conditions for such transitions, where the boundaries of self become slippery, but an awareness of the concept of becoming animal helps to conceptualise otherwise ephemeral moments of becoming. To put it more simply, there is a point in the walk, where the human, myself, and the canine, seem to align in the moment of walking through, or perhaps more accurately walking with the landscape. The human self assumes the position of a point in a network or multiplicity. Each twist, turn, improvised movement, call and response, refrain and so on, constructs the walk unfolding. An unspoken connection is formed as the walk becomes a dance. To speculate further, it is worth pausing here to consider a quote from Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* in full:

Each individual is an infinite multiplicity, and the whole of Nature is a multiplicity of perfectly individuated multiplicities. The plane of consistency of nature is like an immense Abstract Machine, abstract yet real and individual; its pieces are the various assemblages and individuals, each of which groups together an infinity of particles entering into an infinity of more or less interconnected relations. There is therefore a unity to the plane of nature, which applies equally to the inanimate and animate, the artificial and the natural. (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, pp. 244–45)

Here, we can perhaps see Deleuze and Guattari's Spinozian influence, and the beginnings of the new-materialist concepts that inform contemporary posthuman philosophy. For me, this direct quote hints at the possibility for an assemblage of a human–canine–landscape abstract machine, and the beginnings of a radical cartography of human–animal relations. Furthermore, becoming animal challenges the concept of a fixed identity, of the very existence of taxonomies and hierarchies that dominate human–animal relations. Becoming animal also acknowledges such structural asymmetry as a productive, generative force for change. What is at stake here, therefore, is a radical immanence, through which new cartographies emerge. Jim Urpeth reads the same quote as an *'affirmation of "creative lines of escape" from the "human" into the impersonal terrain of material intensities shared with the animal'* (Urpeth 2004, pp. 101–10).

One way in which Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming animal could be described as deliberately controversial or even explosive, however, is in their treatment of the domesticated animal, especially *canis-familiaris*. Deleuze and Guattari position the pet as a commodity, and as a slave to human vanity, stating that they represent *'Oedipal animals each with its own petty history, "my" cat, "my" dog. These animals invite us to regress, draw us into narcissistic contemplation [. . .]'* (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, p. 240). Here, the domesticated canine itself becomes a casualty, collateral damage, caught in the crossfire of Deleuze and Guattari's justifiable attack on capitalism's treatment of the animal. Their categorisation of the pet might, therefore, be read not as a direct attack on the animal, but as an account of what animals have come to represent in the structural hierarchies of predominant Western Enlightenment thinking. Here, Deleuze and Guattari strategically throw a hand-grenade right into the centre of the debate on the animal question, perhaps in an attempt to free the animal from all human categorisations and in doing so free the animal within the human.

Donna Haraway, however, launches quite a robust response to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming animal, describing their theory as a *'fantasy wolf-pack version of becoming animal'* (Haraway 2013, vol. 3, p. 27). She argues that, despite working so hard to move beyond the human–animal divide, Deleuze and Guattari's joint project has a distinct and *'profound absence of curiosity about or respect for and with actual animals'* (Haraway 2013, p. 27). Despite the very glaring problems attended to by Haraway, the underlying concept of becoming animal offers a radical position, which questions human exceptionalism and goes

some way to undoing the human–animal, nature–culture divide. Haraway is right to point us to some fundamental flaws in their treatment of animals, especially the domesticated canine, which is after all our attention here. Interestingly, Haraway contests that Deleuze and Guattari present us with a ‘*philosophy of the sublime, not earthly, not the mud*’ (Haraway 2013, p. 28). Going on to argue that their philosophy feeds off an opposition between the wild and the domestic, the dog and the wolf, as signalling a ‘*symptomatic morass for how not to take earthly animals, wild or domestic, seriously*’ (Haraway 2013, pp. 28–29). Whilst I agree with Deleuze and Guattari’s treatment of the domestic animal as part of a wider critique of capitalism and Freudian psychoanalysis, my own objection is related to the assumption that all human–canine relationships play to a master–slave narrative. I agree that, in Western neoliberal terms, both human and by extension their companion animals are captive, both consumer and consumed, as played out in the commodification of canine bodies, such as *best in show*. I would argue, however, following Haraway, that we are entangled in a complex multiplicity with our companion animals and that the process of becoming animal is relevant to both domesticated dog and domesticated human. As such, we are engaged in a mutual learning to get along together as part of a wider multiplicity of the more-than-human animals and vibrant objects that make a world. My companion is no more ‘my’ dog than I am ‘his’ human. Circumstances have brought us together, and care and reciprocity are paramount. Leaving legal responsibilities aside, ownership is not a construct that cannot be troubled by deep canine topography. Therefore, rather than seeing the domesticated animal and the domesticated human as captive, it is perhaps more helpful to imagine both as capable of becoming animal together. By engaging in a creative collaboration beyond the accepted Western cultural position of master–slave. To use Deleuze and Guattari’s own classifications, the domestic canine, or *Oedipal* animal becomes a *Demonic* animal in the event/action of the walk, proposed by my canine companions draw towards wild spaces on the edges of the city. Such spaces of entropy are engaged in their very own business of becoming. They provide furtive ground for our joint effort of seeking to reconnect and acknowledge our entanglement with wild spaces and with our animal selves, as demonic, free from reason and logic, free to roam and play. Both human and canine bodies, therefore, become de-territorialised through the joint process of becoming. Becoming animal, but also becoming multiplicity, becoming landscape. To simply dismiss the companion animal as an oedipal representation of the human condition misses Haraway’s point, that humans and canines are embraced in a complex dance of getting along together. Where I might agree that the companion animal and the human are locked into a regressive, narcissistic embrace, is if we adopt Haraway’s concept of kinship—we can turn this embrace into a generative dance, as an open opportunity for escape from the constraints placed upon the body by the restrictive flows and structures of master–pet relational ontologies, in what Jack Halberstam terms as ‘zombie humanism’ (Halberstam 2020). If, however, we follow the animal into the wild, we could easily be accused of simply employing or exploiting the animal for our own romantic desire to ‘re-wild’.

Although dogs are a major player in companion animal histories, when Haraway speaks of companion animals, she extends the definition far wider than her own stories of canine relational entanglement. In referencing Karen Barad’s concept of *agential-realism*, what Haraway calls for is a recognition of the many relational encounters, or ‘*intra-actions*’ with more-than-human agents, to propose a ‘*becoming with*’ that reaches further than those companion animal relations that are more visible to us. Essentially, *companion* becomes the catch-all term for all kinds of ‘critters’ biological and otherwise, in a mutual co-existence, from the microbiome that lives in our gut, without which we would not be able to glean nutrients from food, to the people and other animals we share our homes with. Species denotes difference, a specificity of characteristics which sets-apart, but not always in opposition to, the vast categories of ‘things’ that make a world. Haraway, however, utilises species to mean, ‘*the dance linking kin and kind*’ (Haraway 2013, p. 17). In doing so, Haraway reclaims the term species from humanist taxonomies, as exploited by colonialism, arguing that, ‘*The discursive tie between the colonised, the enslaved, the noncitizen, and the animal—all*

reduced to type, all Others to rational man, and all essential to his bright constitution—is at the heart of racism and flourishes, lethally, in the entrails of humanism’ (Haraway 2013, p. 18). So, in Haraway’s definition, Companion Species is so much more than a recognition of our closest animal kin, it is an important critique of the humanist project. Haraway might begin with a deep reflection on human–canine relational encounters, as a model of interspecies becoming, but in doing so, opens an exploration into the darkest corners of the human condition facing the sixth mass extinction, calling for new ethical frameworks based on kinship and mutual reciprocity. Haraway has the knack of bringing us back from these dark corners, safe in the knowledge that we are capable of so much more, if we only embrace our fellow more-than-human ‘critters’ as mess-mates and as kin.

Diving deeper into the tricky territory of human–canine relations, Jack Halberstam builds on Deleuze and Guattari’s account of the domesticated animal by offering a harsh but pragmatic account of the concept of the pet, summed up in their following description of the Western neoliberal economy and its impact on human–animal kinship:

In this zombie economy, the pet occupies a high place in the hierarchy of liveliness—it is not living dead like the cattle we slaughter or the chickens we raise; it is warm, real, and alive. Its liveliness depends absolutely on its being tethered to us, its “species companion,” and its survival depends on its ability to please us or to answer to our anthropomorphic call for companionability in the forms we mandate—a pet can nip and chew but not bite and scratch; it can whimper or purr but should not bark or whine; a pet must learn obedience and eat and shit when we say, and it must adapt to a carceral reality in exchange for not being eaten. (Halberstam 2020, p. 199)

One could justify my (our) project by remembering that my canine companion is a rescue dog, an ex-street dog, destined for euthanasia had we, as a family, not agreed to take him into our home. However, Halberstam has an answer for this justification by suggesting that,

Within zombie humanism, all wildness—human/animal/vegetable—becomes fodder for an economy of voracious human consumption. And, so, the human tells herself she is saving the animal as she enslaves it; she tells herself that she is most alive when she makes death a distant reality. (Halberstam 2020, p. 119)

Such accounts of human–canine relational entanglement raise the following ethical questions for the practice of *deep canine topography*:

- Does this position render our human–canine psychogeographic endeavour as simply another act of zombie humanism?
- Is positioning the canine as artist, as co-author, as instigator in the walk, simply another way of exploiting the canine body, no better than the vanity project that is best in show?

Although Halestorm’s position is hard to argue against, I re-assert that I am not responsible for the state we find ourselves in when it comes to the complex history of companion species relations. Although I accept my part in the risk of perpetuating the status-quo, safe in the knowledge that I am just as conscious of my own captivity as that of my canine kin. I would rather justify this as being complicit in nothing more than the reality of the here and now, repositioning the animal as artist in an attempt to trouble human exceptionalism. I state this whilst acknowledging the violent history of colonialism and my responsibility as an artist/researcher to bring to the fore and keep alive critical debates on how we have come to be and what we might be capable of becoming. But equally, by positioning the dog as co-author I may well be digging an even deeper hole, full of bones, for us both to fall into. An ethical trap of my own making. I find that where I can agree with Halberstam is in their analysis of Rosenberg’s essay on meat production and bestiality, which align animal welfare laws not with multispecies compassion, but with the protection of livestock as a commodity, stating that, ‘*And once we begin to acknowledge the tangled relations between pet owning and meat production, it will be much harder to claim that the*

cat or dog we saved from the animal rescue centre confirms the good intentions of the pet owner' (Halberstam 2020, p. 122). Thus, highlighting the very complex position of the animal as meat, flesh, both dead and alive, both wild and domesticated, in which our own canine companions take on a Schrodinger's cat-like positionality. Furthermore, Halberstam draws on a wider discussion by queering the very human concept of wild and wildness, which lies at the heart of human–animal relations, and indeed, the human–human and nature–culture relational encounters that dominate colonial histories.

So, how might art, in the form of a multispecies collaboration, begin to move us away from humanist ethical constructs, trapped, as Halberstam suggests, in a cycle of justification of human violence against the more-than-human?

Collectively, Deleuze, Guattari, Haraway and Halberstam all offer a critique of the ethical position of the animal, which is simultaneously uncomfortably disturbing and hopeful. One thing that unites them is their radical and incendiary desire for a new ethics, based on human–animal relational equality, rather than the current and historical, colonial, structural frameworks. Taking up the baton of becoming animal, Rosi Braidotti considers its relevance in building a new form of multispecies ethics, stating that *'Becoming Animal [consequently] is a process of redefining one's sense of attachment to a shared world, a territorial space'* (Braidotti 2011, p. 94).

4. Becoming Nomadic

In their paper, *Posthuman approach to human–animal relationships*, Lindgren and Öhman, bring together Rossi Braidotti's concept of 'nomadic subjectivity', with Val Plumwood's concept of 'studying up' to offer a new critical pluralism. Their approach both acknowledges difference, by problematising human subjectivity and superiority, whilst attending to animal and material agencies (Lindgren and Öhman 2019, vol. 25, pp. 1200–15). Lindgren and Öhman advocate for approaches that avoid anthropomorphising, by critically positioning human subjectivity as a process of becoming through our relational engagement with non-human others. They argue that a 'critical pluralist' position asks us to consider who we will become in relation to the animal-other, whilst acknowledging the structurally inherent asymmetry in human–non-human power relations. Thus, they suggest an approach that offers a critical dialog on the very complexities raised by a posthuman approach. *'In line with our recommendations to 'study up', an immanent critique could be used to accentuate resistance to narratives that mask political, ethical, and ecological dimensions when it comes to human–animal relationships'* (Lindgren and Öhman 2019).

For the purposes of my practice and research, I hope that I position the canine as kin, as equal in the generation of knowledge, whilst remaining open and critical to the problematic, historical, ethical, and political dialogue surrounding human–animal relations. Deep canine topography, therefore, seeks, in some way, to keep such questions alive, by critically examining human–canine relations through an alliance that troubles human subjectivity, whilst acknowledging critical difference. However, Halberstam again delivers a harsh critical blow to our search for human–canine collaboration, based on a mutual coevolutionary history, in a direct critique of Donna Haraway's positioning of the canine as Companion Species:

Haraway herself talks about a human co-history with the dog and about coevolution that must be written as an "ontological choreography," a dance between and among species and not one that features only human dancers. While Bennett would add that such an ontological choreography would have to recognize the presence of all kinds of vibrating life forms, my emphasis on zombie humanism would also note that the dance is still created, enacted, and performed by humans with animals, pets, and other things as props rather than coplayers. (Halberstam 2020, p. 199).

Here, Halberstam alludes to human exceptionalism as the main driver for an ethics of human–animal relations, arguing that hierarchies are implicitly difficult to relinquish.

Perhaps Braidotti's Nomadism might offer some hope of how such hierarchies might be dismantled.

Despite Halberstam's devastating reality check, and Haraway's critique of Deleuze and Guattari, Braidotti's nomadic subjectivity proposes that the concept of becoming animal underscores an ethical, bio-egalitarian turn. In doing so, Braidotti argues that contemporary posthuman philosophy (after Foucault) follows a non-hierarchical bond between human and more-than-human. Furthermore, Braidotti returns us to a more hopeful and optimistic reading of the concept of becoming animal, acknowledging that, '*Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's theory of Becoming animal expresses this profound and vital interconnection by positing a qualitative shift of relationship away from speciesism and toward an ethical appreciation of what bodies (human, animal, other) can do*' (Braidotti 2011, p. 85).

As a starting point, Braidotti asks us to consider the animal question, as represented through Enlightenment thought, as an ideal, white, heterosexual, male perspective responsible for the origin of the concept of 'otherness'. Much like Halberstam's critique of the definitions of 'the wild' and 'wildness' as an implicit tool in the logics of colonial violence, anything that sits outside of this ideal is rendered as other, as wild, placed at various points along a hierarchy, upon which the ideal 'human' reigns supreme. Such hierarchies are upheld by notions of transcendence as the pinnacle of being, through morality and rational thought. Critiquing the traditional humanist positioning of man as the rational animal, built on Western ideals of normality, Braidotti argues that '*All other modes of embodiment, both in the sense of dialectical otherness are pathologized and cast on the side of normality, that is to say anomaly, deviance, and monstrosity*' (Braidotti 2011, p. 82). This includes the bodies of animal others, and lays ethics open to the justifiably violent exploitation of animal bodies and 'others' who do not conform to such human-centred ideals.

Here, we begin to get to the crux of deep canine topography as a practice that seeks to unsettle the human condition through a de-familiarisation of human subjectivity. The idea that by walking in unison with another non-human body, or other more-than-human entities and essences, requires what Braidotti, following Deleuze and Guattari, refers to as the de-oedipalisation of the animal as requiring a form of estrangement or a radical repositioning of the subject. Braidotti describes the oedipal relationship with animals as based on the '*dominant human and structurally masculine habit of taking for granted free access to the consumption of the bodies of others*' (Braidotti 2011, p. 81). Critiqued in Borges fictional taxonomy of '*those we eat, those we watch television with and those we are afraid of*' (Braidotti 2011, p. 81). In essence, Braidotti is calling here for a radical repositioning of the self, not as defined through Enlightenment's rational thought, but through what she terms 'a bio-egalitarian turn.' This concept of de-familiarisation owes much to Guattari's concept of the body without organs, as a pre-emptive move for becoming other than our structural conditioning allows us to be. Thus, deep canine topography asks that we embrace the moment, unfolding in the walk, in a readiness and hypersensitivity to becomings, or as Anne Querrien, writing on the concept of the body without organs concludes, as '*reconstructing the glimmer of the world from the place where it was discovered*' (Querrien 2011, p. 96). In such terms as a de-identifying, de-familiarising self, a loss of ego, or even a de-composing or, as Haraway suggests, de-composting, read as de-composition, of the hierarchies of the human condition, is a necessary step towards becoming animal. In a re-territorialisation, the body becomes a point in what Tim Ingold would term the '*meshwork*' as part of the '*texture of interwoven threads*' mapped out, in our case, through the interwoven lines of flight of both human and canine bodies (Ingold 2011, p. xii).

It is from this position of becoming, after Haraway, that we can consider an ethics in which artists approach the animal, not as object, artefact, or muse, but as a co-author entangled in a multispecies becoming, through a relational practice, or what Broglio might term '*thinking with*' the animal (Broglio 2011). Braidotti directly challenges the very frameworks through which human and animal relations are conceptualised, arguing that we need to lift such relations out of the dominant Western oedipal narrative, '*As a nature-culture compound, a dog—not unlike other products of techno-science—is a radical*

other, albeit a significant other. We need to devise a symbolic kinship system that matches this complexity' (Braidotti 2011, p. 93). My (our) own practice seeks an alliance with the desires and navigational imperatives of my canine companion as his body leads us to seek out wild and edge-land spaces where our difference becomes a generative zone of contact. My navigational imperatives, for example, are dominated by an ocular-centric, bipedal, horizon-focused sensing of the world, whereas his senses are dominated by the olfactory sensorium. As such, the walk becomes a moment of creative alliance as our combined synaesthesia seeks a deeper communion with place and space. Therefore, I hope that deep canine topography seeks, in some small way, to reframe human–canine relations, acknowledging the deeply problematic histories that bind us but seeking to redress this by positioning the canine not only as companion but as artist and co-author. This position, however, continues to raise a number of ethical questions. As such, artists often seek advice from the writings of fellow artists and theorists well-versed in multispecies and more-than-human ethics.

One such example is artist Mark Dion's, *Some Notes Towards a Manifesto for Artists Working With or About the Living World*, in which he proposes a set of ethical considerations and radical approaches available to the artist, which may not be available in specific academic fields, such as zoology. In short, Dion argues that artists are free to use their creativity to develop new ways of seeing and being in the world, whilst at the same time upholding their ethical responsibility towards multispecies life-worlds (Dion and Marbury 2000, pp. 66–69). Of particular interest, in this twenty-point manifesto, are the following two statements:

13. Animals are individuals, and not carbon copy mechanistic entities. They have cognitive abilities, personalities, and flexible behaviour, which is not to suggest that they exhibit distinctly human characteristics.
14. Anthropomorphism has long been guarded against in the field of zoology as an impediment to understanding animal behaviour in their own context. While a pitfall in ethology, artists may find the rich tradition of anthropomorphism too powerful a tool to surrender, particularly when probing the boundaries between humans and other animals. (Dion and Marbury 2000)

Both points go some way to address the structural foundations of the animal question, and the role of art to imagine otherwise. The central concern, however, when considering more-than-human ethics, lies with the concept of ethics itself. That is to say that the position of the human as the logical, civilised animal, leads to a particular kind of ethics, one which dominates Western knowledge and human rights and responsibilities. Therefore, troubling or uncoupling the human from a static ideological form towards a more nomadic subjectivity allows for the exploration of new multispecies ethical positions. Cary Wolfe offers a discussion on one such alternative position. Wolfe proposes a post-human ethics of *trans-species affinity* to argue for a moral obligation towards non-human animals, which, rather than being built on the foundations of human rights and responsibilities, considers a multispecies shared vulnerability (Wolfe 2009). Here, Wolfe redefines the human not as imbued with exceptional status but rather as a human-animal whose defining characteristics are part of the generalised animal sensorium (Wolfe 2009, p. 134). Returning to my (our) own practice, I argue that it is possible to arrive at a sense of sensory entanglement, through defining and activating the walk as a shared collaborative, human–canine co-authored event. Within this moment of entanglement, both human and canine sensory apparatus are equally employed through what I term as human–canine hybridity. This sense of hybridity might also be harnessed through the document of our walks, presented as multi-channel visual and sonic installations, which have the potential to evoke a visual–olfactory synesthesia in the viewer.

Wolfe argues that an ethics founded from a liberal humanist rights-based position conceptualises the animal as other and, therefore, only worthy of human-rights when somehow elevated to the position of, or alongside, the human. This can be seen in the

distinction between canine (dog) as ‘man’s best friend’ and, therefore, availed of certain ethical obligations of care, and bovine (cow), which ultimately, however humanely cared for and euthanised, still have the status of protein to be consumed. Wolfe argues that in order to fully explore and formulate an ethics based on *trans-species affinity*, one must also radically unsettle human subjectivity and he offers a complex analysis of an ethics based on our shared experience of being in the world. Similarly, as we have seen, Rosi Braidotti’s nomadism utilises Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of radical immanence to present a version of the self as embodied within a wider network of forces, ‘*against classical humanist denials of embodiment, matter, and the flesh*’ (Braidotti 2011, p. 303). Here, Braidotti presents an ethics that embraces feminist, queer and anti-colonialist ethical concerns whilst proposing, ‘*an embodied and connecting form of relation over and against the hierarchical forms of containment implied by Kantian forms of universal morality*’ (Braidotti 2011, p. 304).

Stephanie Springgay and Sarah Truman also argue for a more-than-human ethics in the methodologies specifically employed by walking artists. Stating that it is through sensory and affective practices that, ‘*Sensory Studies, and the various approaches to affect share an interest in non-conscious, non-cognitive, transmaterial and more-than representational processes*’ (Springgay and Truman 2018, p. 34). Springgay and Truman also insist that ‘*Walking methodologies need to account for the ways that more-than-human sensations and affects circulate, accumulate, and stick to different bodies and spaces in different ways*’ (Springgay and Truman 2018, p. 48). Therefore, our accountability is to each other and to those who we touch through our walks, including people, animals, plants, insects, and a whole host of other creatures with whom we share our entangled worlds. To leave no trace, to do no harm, to make meaningful contact with the more-than-human. Here, Springgay and Truman offer a framework that brings together walking-art and the question of a more-than-human ethics. In doing so, they seek to move the medium of walking-art beyond a solitary human act and towards a more relational activity.

In the face of what Timothy Morton refers to as the hyperobject of the climate emergency, an existential threat to humanity and other animals, a self-inflicted, paralysing if not fatal wound, art draws attention to and imagines potential alternative futures (Morton 2013). Such imaginaries are presented either in the form of a dystopian warning from the future, or as a hopeful reimagining of human–animal relations. By working, as Broglio suggests, at the edge of human–animal contact zones, artists who bear witness, report back from the edges, explore new relational encounters and, as such, begin to form new languages, new maps, to negotiate our shared vulnerability in the face of a sticky end. It is clear, however, that we have a lot of work to do to establish an ethics in which all animals, and by extension, all habitats, vibrant objects, and elemental forces, are seen as equal. Braidotti’s *bio-egalitarian turn* and Wolfe’s *trans-species affinity*, go some way to establishing a more optimistic ethical framework, and time is of the essence, with the sixth mass extinction just over the horizon and the seemingly slow progress, and often regressive actions, of those ‘in charge’. As Braidotti posits, ‘*What nomadic ethics stands for [therefore] is a re-grounding of the subject in a materially embedded sense of responsibility and an ethical accountability for the environments s/he inhabits*’ (Braidotti 2011, p. 122). Here, the role of the artist cannot escape the gravity of the problems facing our animal kin and by extension ourselves. As such, art takes on an activist position, our minor gestures caught up in a vortex of many voices, in what can often seem like a fruitless task, shouting into the void. But as artists, we should embrace such complex ethical conundrums, as Haraway would state, by, ‘*staying with the trouble*’ and just trying to figure out how to get along together and how to demonstrate other ways of seeing, of being, and of becoming (Haraway 2016).

Writing, in 2018, on the recent histories of human–canine artistic practices, Jessica Ullrich concludes that, despite the efforts of artists and their companion animal collaborators, human–canine art still functions as a critique of the human, based on the same old hierarchies, arguing that, ‘*What one may possibly learn from the artistic creation of dog-human contact zones is perhaps that dichotomous thinking of human-and nonhuman animals should be abandoned because it reproduces claims of authority*’ Going on to suggest that ‘*Human as well as*

dog being is never a static condition but a becoming' (Ullrich 2018, pp. 53–68). Here, Ullrich raises a challenge for artists working with our canine kin. That is, the question of how to avoid exploiting the canine as a metaphorical mirror to the human condition and embrace a true collaborative alliance built on a mutual becoming. Whether such alliances can ever be truly defined as co-authorship is open for debate and there are many contemporary artists that are grappling with this question, myself included. At the very least, I hope that the practice of deep canine topography explores how human and canine can enter into a creative alliance, where bodies become free and fluid in the moment of the walk. However, I (we) undertake this creative alliance against the backdrop of a complex history of human–canine relational ontologies, always in danger of simply constructing new forms of zombie humanism.

Returning to the ethical question posed in the title of this paper, how as an artist do I ensure that my (our) particular creative methods allow for an open, free-flowing relational encounter, whilst avoiding the many anthropomorphic traps that await any attempts at multispecies collaboration? In exploring the distinction between these two positions, perhaps it is worth considering what Wolfe describes as two different kinds of posthumanism. Humanist-posthumanism and posthumanist posthumanism (Wolfe 2022, p. 91). In the former, the human retains a sense of sovereignty from which an ethical consideration of the non-human other is extended. Here, it might be said that empathy is extended like an outstretched arm, embracing the animal by lifting its status to that of the human. The latter, however, acknowledges an understanding of the consequences of a radical redefinition of human knowledge by embracing knowledge not only in the possession of the human but also as situated elsewhere.

Through the concepts of becoming animal and nomadic subjectivity explored in this paper, we can begin to trouble the position of the human as central by embracing knowledge as situated equally across a multiplicity of non-human forces and affects. It is through such multispecies creative alliances that we expose a different kind of ethics, whilst acknowledging that any forms of human–more-than-human alliance will perhaps always inevitably contain an ethical asymmetry. Perhaps any attempt to enter into a multispecies collaborative arts practice, especially when engaged in a creative alliance with our canine companions, must always face this ethical double-bind of captive techno-zombies and free slowing relational bodies as a simultaneous position. Although my hope is that the latter somehow troubles and questions the former and that such practices reveal complex ethical questions that art is uniquely placed to confront.

It is time to draw this walk to an end, to rest our feet and paws and contemplate on how our small gestures as artists might help to enliven the debate on the ethics of human–animal relations and what radical positions multispecies artistic practice might offer.

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