

Embracing the Radical Cartographies of the Doggy *Dérive*

A Walk in Three Acts

Darren O'Brien

Nottingham Trent University

HUMANIMALIA 14.2 (Spring 2024)

Abstract: Operating at the intersection of fine art walking practice, psychogeography, and critical animal studies, the practice of *deep canine topography* seeks to reframe the humble act of the walkies as a co-authored, multi-species act of making and performing together. This essay offers a snapshot of my current research, drawing on Erin Manning’s concept of relational movement, Andrew Goodman’s gathering ecologies, Tim Ingold’s meshwork, Deleuze and Guattari’s twin concepts of becoming-animal and nomadic subjectivity, as developed by Rosi Braidotti, alongside Roberto Marchesini’s theories on animal creativity. In the process I consider the potential of the ubiquitous dog walk as the site of creative co-becoming. This essay comprises three elements: 1) A photo-essay, mapping a typical daily walk from the canine point of view; 2) Creative writing, in the form of short passages of prose as imagined from the canine perspective; and 3) The main body of the text, which explores the practice of deep canine topography, or the doggy *dérive*, in relation to theoretical discourse. In addition, short descriptions of our human-canine artistic experiments are offered, along with hyperlinks to the Research Catalogue, where the reader can encounter the works described in the text.

Keywords: *deep canine topography; walking-art; psychogeography; animal geographies; nomadic subjectivity; becoming-animal*

Bio: Dr Darren O’Brien (He/Him — Ki/Kin) is a UK-based artist researcher, working in video, sound, text, and photography. His current practice-led research explores extended concepts of landscape art, through generative multi-species co-production and human-more-than-human contact zones.

Email: darren.obrien.art@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0002-0629-6469

*We are part of the same shadow in the stone,
appended in motion and space by more than the
leash that allegedly holds us together. We are
dog-human.*

—Alexandra Horowitz, *Our Dogs, Ourselves*

In their 2018 study “(Just) a Walk with the Dog?”, 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.”¹ They go on to propose that the dog walk should be fully considered as an important zone of shared human–canine ontology. Scholar of canine cognition Alexandra Horowitz suggests that human–canine relational ontologies are built on a complex interplay between history, science, law, and culture, hinting at the potential of the walk as a site for exploring new ways of being and becoming human–canine.² Andrew Goodman writes that “with a child in tow, or towing us, our walk can never be simply a blinkered move from A to B. Instead, [...] it splits to become multiple: consisting of many foci, intensities, and heterogeneous singularities.”³ The same can certainly be said of walking with a dog “in tow, or towing us”. It is clear, therefore, that the humble dog walk forms a central pillar of everyday human–canine relations. But what happens when we frame the *walkies* as an act of multi-species artistic collaboration? How might this reframing redefine human–canine relational ontologies towards new radical cartographies? This question formed the basis of an extended period of artistic research undertaken as part of my PhD. This essay represents a snapshot of our research and invites you to join us on a walk through deep canine topography and the doggy *dérive*. It is presented in three acts. Act I explores the origins of the *dérive* as a playful creative strategy and applies this to the walkies as a multi-species artistic process. Act II examines the fluidity of bodies in motion and the potential of co-becoming offered by framing the walkies as a collaborative act. Finally, Act III explores the

1 Fletcher and Platt, “(Just) a Walk”, 213.

2 Horowitz, *Our Dogs, Ourselves*, 6.

3 Goodman, *Gathering Ecologies*, 111.

complex contested cartographies of both landscapes and identities which shape our human-canine co-becoming. Our walk is guided by my canine companion, messmate, or kin, whose navigational desires shift human subjectivity and offer a deeper connection with the more-than-human landscapes we walk through and with. We will also be joined by others, whose creativity, thoughts, and concepts help us to speculate on the mechanisms at play in the doggy *dérive*.

Critical theorist Ron Broglio highlights artists' unique ability to redefine the surfaces that separate human and animal as sites of creative exchange. He proposes that, as animals challenge linguistic representations, artists employ non-linguistic strategies to think alongside animals.⁴ I propose the terms "deep canine topography" and the "doggy *dérive*" as an invitation to employ the strategies and techniques of psychogeography and walking-art to form a multi-species alliance that tentatively tests the limits of language and philosophy. I have no authority to speak on behalf of my canine companion, although I attempt to do so in the prose which opens each section of this essay. I do this partly to expose the futility of translating his world into words but also to explore what happens when I enter a hinterland of humanimal hybridity. The best I can offer is to report back from the zones of contact between human-canine and the environments we walk, whilst acknowledging the deep and complex histories in which both human and canine bodies are entangled. Throughout this paper I deliberately position my canine companion as artist, collaborator, and co-author. As such, I will often refer to "our" practice or "our research", and use "we" instead of "I" to reflect our mutual collaboration. I have always felt uneasy about imposing a human name on my canine companion within the text, but conventions in the UK require that his name appear on his RSPCA adoption certificate and official veterinary and insurance records as: Dexter O'Brien. Therefore, in line with both academic and artworld conventions, all artistic-walking outputs, photographs, video, sonic, and GPS drawing works, composed by both human and canine bodies, are credited to O'Brien and O'Brien. This is also designed to challenge

4 Broglio, *Surface Encounters.*, xxxi, 107.



Fig. 1

Adventures in Deep Canine
Topography, O'Brien and O'Brien,
2019–2023

such conventions and to begin to tease at the idea that subjectivity, creativity, and the generation of knowledge are exclusive to the human condition. Each section also ends with a brief, selected account of our creative experiments. These examples are hosted by the Research Catalogue and can be encountered via the hyperlinks provided.⁵

Act I: Defining the Doggy *Dérive*

Humans are drawn to semiotic patterns, written in lines and sharp geometric points, plotted with laser eye accuracy, drawn out in blueprints, forming hard edges, erected by soft tissue and grey matter, that constitutes this urban space. I am drawn to lines of another kind, scent lines, tracks and traces, invisible clouds of vibrant particles, overlapping and engulfing the sharper forms of this constructed landscape as they hit my olfactory bulb, evoking a desire, a drive, a pull towards their origin, a chicken bone, a cupcake wrapper, a urine trail, forming a map of those who have walked this path before and those yet to come.

Our walking adventure began when my canine companion discovered a body in a local suburban park. Squeezing my way through a thicket of bramble and hawthorn, into which my companion had disappeared, I was suddenly struck by a powerful shift in atmosphere as he slowly circled the remains of a dead fox in an advanced state of decomposition. It was in that moment that I became aware of a deep connection to place, and the liminal quality of domesticated and wild canid essences combined in a single moment. It was as if my canine companion had crossed an invisible line separating his domestic and feral character and in doing so invited me to test the limits of my own animality. What I witnessed that day was a quiet mourning for a distant wild canid kin. A rare moment of care and

5 Research Catalogue, International Database for Artistic Research, <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/>

stillness in an otherwise playfully animated body. What followed was a number of walks stretched across three years of research, in which my canine companion's navigational agency was privileged. Our walks ranged from 15-minute block walks to 16km explorations of the semi-wild spaces on the edge of the city, always following his lead as he set the time, pace, direction, duration, and distance.

Our artistic research project is, to some extent, informed by psychogeography and its methods. Psychogeography emerged in the mid-1950s, developed by the Marxist revolutionary group of artists and activists, the Situationists, and their previous incarnation, the Letterist International. Spokesperson for the Letterist and Situationist groups, Guy Debord, defined psychogeography as “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether unconsciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals.”⁶ Based in Paris, France, the Situationists became specifically concerned with the critique of post-war consumerist structures and flows of urban geographies, which sought to tame and civilize space, time, and the individual. To this end, the Situationists developed and employed the technique of the *dérive*, or drift, as a walking strategy that exposed unseen power structures of urban space. Debord defined the *dérive* as a mode of experimental behaviour linked to the conditions of urban society: “a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances.”⁷ The *dérive* utilized strategies of chance and playful improvisation, in order to resist the order imposed upon the body in urban space and disrupt assumed ideas of the journey.⁸ Alongside late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century Romanticist explorations into walking as a creative act of union with nature, Psychogeography has informed a wide range of contemporary artistic-walking practices. Walking artist and researcher Blake Morris argues that artistic walking represents its own distinct artistic medium which offers “opportunities [...] to creatively imagine the world through slow, detailed engagement with the contours of the

6 Trier, *Guy Debord*, 17.

7 Trier, *Guy Debord*., 17.

8 Richardson, “Schizocartography”, 182.

landscape”.⁹ Stephanie Springgay and Sarah Truman, of the Walking Lab Research Centre, extend contemporary walking-art’s potential to engage with the more-than-human world in ways which reach beyond the human as the central subject, suggesting that sensing bodies in motion become nodes in a rhizomatic network, connected to a multiplicity of human and more-than-human geographies. Here, Springgay and Truman signal a significant departure from walking art’s romantic philosophical humanist origins towards more relational and affective posthuman walking strategies.¹⁰ Furthermore, in a direct critique of psychogeography, Springgay and Truman suggest that “Liberal humanism presumes that psychogeography is an activity of paying attention to the corporeality of walking in space, casting off usual relations, to become more ‘enlivened’ by walking and place.”¹¹ Their critique acknowledges psychogeography’s historical relationship to the *flâneur*, as a nineteenth-century urban explorer and observer of modern life. First appearing in Charles Baudelaire’s 1863 essay, *The Painter of Modern Life*, the *flâneur* conjures up an image of an often white, male, in this case Parisian figure, free to observe from a safe distance and of seemingly independent financial means. The playful act of walking exploration embodied in the figure of the *flâneur*, and by extension early psychogeography, places certain assumptions on the freedom of the body of the walker. First, it assumes a free-walking spirit, capable of transcending normative flows, breaking the spell of urban space, and opening new lines of flight. Second, it assumes a freedom of movement which remains problematic for many people and as such represents a privilege often associated with whiteness, masculinity, able-bodiedness, and higher social class. In a much-needed feminist critique of psychogeography, Deirdre Heddon and Cathy Turner argue that “the reiteration of a particular genealogy—or fraternity—which includes Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Henry David Thoreau, André Breton and Guy Debord generates an orthodoxy of walking, tending towards an implicitly masculinist ideology.”¹² Whilst Heddon and Myers also

9 Morris, *Walking Networks*, 169.

10 Springgay and Truman, *Walking Methodologies*, 95.

11 Springgay and Truman, “Methods beyond Proceduralism,” 210.

12 Heddon and Turner, “Walking Women”, 224.

argue that such conceptions of walking-art are framed by two enduring historical discourses: “the Romantics, tramping through rural locations, and the avant-gardists, drifting through the spectacular urban streets of capitalism.”¹³ In highlighting a lack of attention to gender, predominant in the historical discourse of walking-art and psychogeography, Heddon, Turner, Myers, Springgay, and Truman, alongside other contemporary radical walking-art practitioners, continue to challenge and critique historic conceptions of psychogeography. My intention, therefore, is to examine how the disruptive nature of my canine companion troubles preconceived ideas of walking-art and psychogeography, towards a more-than-human walking methodology. One which is neither steeped in the ideals of romanticism, nor overburdened with the baggage of psychogeography’s masculinist origins, but is more attuned to contemporary posthuman discourse.

The term “deep topography” first appears in *Scarp*, a 2012 book by writer, historian, and contemporary psychogeographer Nick Papadimitriou. In this book he combines memoir, social history, and a meditation on walking as a sensory practice, to describe a journey through the outer fringes of Northwest London. Papadimitriou’s deep topography requires a communion both *with* and *of* the landscape, its contours, geographies, and histories, beyond the scientific and the romantic gaze. Luke Bennett likens Papadimitriou’s deep topographical methods to Jane Bennett’s (no relation) concept of vibrant materialism, suggesting that both attend to the material vibrancy and agency contained within the multiplicities which make up any given landscape.¹⁴ Both Papadimitriou and Bennett (Jane) ask us to abandon our human-centric worldview in favour of approaching objects, including the objects of landscape, as vibrant, dynamic, and always in formation. In its canine form, deep topography rejects the static representations of landscapes and seeks to explore the immediate sensory entanglement between human, canine, and the environments we walk together.

13 Heddon and Myers, “Walking Library”, 114.

14 Bennett, *Incongruous Steps*, 61.

In exploring affective qualities of such a union, it is worth briefly switching our attention to the field of human and animal geography. Jamie Lorimer, Timothy Hodgetts, and Maan Barua suggest that dogs and wolves have a unique way of tuning into the domestic and the wild worlds we co-occupy, shaping the atmospheres of our shared spaces. They go on to posit that “For a dog (or wolf), the atmosphere of tranquil woodland is probably more lively than for a human given the lingering scent-lines and pheromone traces that permeate the atmosphere, in addition to the visual signs of wildlife presence.”¹⁵ Such atmospheric connections infect not only the practice of deep canine topography, in the act of the walk, but extend to the wider, day-to-day experience of human–canine cohabitation.

In her 2013 book, *On Looking: Eleven Walks with Expert Eyes*, inspired by numerous dog walks, Alexandra Horowitz turns her attention to an exploration of a familiar walk around a New York City block through the senses of eleven expert travellers, such as artists, ethnographers, and the visually impaired. In the process she asks us to consider what we miss on an everyday basis, from the insect eggs on the leaves of a tree to the fossilized remains of prehistoric shellfish captured within the surfaces of sandstone buildings. Similarly, anthropologist Tim Ingold likens walking to the process of weaving, drawing, writing, and storytelling, seeking a commonality within such modes of expression which employ gestures that draw and direct our attention.¹⁶ He reminds us that lines are in constant formation crossing and interweaving with each other to form an entangled interconnected web or meshwork. While discussing the act of travelling through space, or wayfaring, Ingold proposes that “the organism (animal or human) should be understood not as a bounded entity surrounded by an environment but as an unbounded entanglement of lines in fluid space.”¹⁷ We have, in effect, become experts at filtering out sensory stimuli, paying attention to the job at hand and zoning into the minimum information required to go about the business of being human in the modern city. As an antidote to this condition of blinkered

15 Lorimer et al, “Animals’ Atmospheres”, 34.

16 Ingold, *Being Alive*, 178.

17 Ingold, *Being Alive*, 64.

zoning, both Horowitz and Ingold ask that we draw our attention to the things that we habitually pass by. For the doggy *dérive*, the walk is interrupted by the presence of my canine companion, thus shifting my attention between his navigational desires and my own entrenched modes of moving through space. The doggy *dérive* requires an unlearning of such blinkered modes of moving *through* towards a moving *within* a meshwork of interconnected lines.

Employing the deep topographical methods described by Papadimitriou and the more-than-human turn in walking-art practice proposed by Springgay and Truman, we can begin to reframe “walkies”, or the doggy *dérive*, as something more than a set of negotiated power relations. Instead, it becomes a playful improvised dance between bodies and affects in motion. Furthermore, employing Ingold’s concept of the meshwork helps us to deconstruct the boundaries of skin and fur, of surface, of interiority and exteriority. Here, bounded bodies are deconstructed through the event of the walk and become reconstructed within a meshwork of fellow creatures, rocks, grass, dogs, birds, rivers, wind, soundwaves, and so on. Building on such concepts, deep canine topography proposes a collaborative human-canine walking-art practice built around affect, immanence, and playful improvisation.

Experiments in Embodied GPS Drawing

To explore the relational movement of human and canine bodies we now invite you to encounter an experiment in embodied drawing. In this experiment we employed global positioning technology, not as a navigational tool, but as a drawing tool, to track the relative and relational movements between human and canine bodies. GPX files were extracted from two devices, a human carried mobile phone with a GPS app, and a canine carried GoPro camera, with built in telemetry. Both tracklogs were then animated using GPX Animator open-source software. The resulting animated drawings express the vitality of canine navigation, drawn through landscape by sensory stimuli, rather than forging a direct route from A to B. The canine drawn line darts back and forth in a playful dance, following contours, edges, smells, and sounds, always keeping an eye on my



Fig. 2

Two Bodies Drawing
O'Brien and O'Brien, 2023

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/shared/bd990de62ed9423c62512acc528e8b83>

position, checking in every so often, before darting off again in the direction of a new sound or smell. The human body, although following the canine's general trajectory, takes a more direct route between points, whereas the canine body draws an altogether more spontaneous trajectory. Such lines offer a visualization of Ingold's definition of the meshwork as a series of interlocking lines in motion and hints at moving bodies as unbounded, fluid, and permeable.

Act II: Becoming-Animal — Becoming Nomadic

Hard edges give way to softer cultivated contours of the park, constructed by a gentler hand, the smells-scape shifts to a sweeter, more earthy tone, and I am engulfed in clouds of tree pollen, fox, squirrel, and rat trails, guiding me this way and that, time, and space dissolve.

Having established the background to our doggy *dérive*, it is now time to explore how human and canine bodies become entangled through the action/event of the deep canine topographical walk. Exploring ways in which walking-art taps into affective forces and connections, Springgay and Truman propose that “Walking also provides a way to open up the non-visual senses, finding ways of knowing and communicating through movement, and helps to de-familiarize everyday actions.”¹⁸ Similarly, Rosi Braidotti describes the process of de-familiarization as a “transspecies flow of becoming by interaction with multiple others.”¹⁹ She goes on to propose that the concept of nomadism renders the subject as constituted in such a way that it “explodes the boundaries of humanism at skin level.”²⁰ It is here, in Braidotti's development of the twin Deleuzoguattarian concepts of the nomadic subject and becoming-animal, that we might begin to gently tease at the boundaries between human and canine bodies in motion.

18 Truman and Springgay, “Propositions for Walking Research”, 261.

19 Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, 221.

20 Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, 221.



Fig. 3

Adventures in Deep Canine
Topography
O'Brien and O'Brien 2019–2023.

To explore this further, we turn our attention to Erin Manning's concept of relational movement and Andrew Goodman's writing on walking as a performative practice. Manning explores how bodies in motion are in a constant state of co-becoming. She suggests that "the body becomes through forces of recombination that compose its potential directionalities."²¹ Such forces, she argues, are relational and therefore we are always more than one, never moving in isolation but in relation to the forces of those around us.²² Goodman expands on Manning's concept of relational movement echoing nineteenth-century naturalist, essayist, poet, and philosopher Henry David Thoreau's invitation to treat every walk as an adventure, suggesting that "every walk we set out on, even the most mundane and functional, is inherently an adventure into the unknown, into improvisation and discovery."²³ For Goodman, walking becomes a site of creative rupture which "complicates and disrupts established spatial relations, multiplying and creating new immanent connections to extend the potential of the body in space."²⁴ He goes on to propose that the act of walking might also allow for a becoming *minor* of a body. Here, Goodman draws on the Deleuzoguattarian concept of the major and the minor. Deleuze and Guattari define the major as representing constant and homogeneous systems and the minor as encapsulating the creative possibilities of becoming minor(itarian).²⁵ Therefore, in revisiting the provocation of the Situationist *dérive*, the minor might represent a radical resistance to the normative structures of constructed and mediated spaces of advanced capitalism and the Anthropocene. In the case of deep canine topography, becoming minor or "minoritarian" is synonymous with becoming animal as a move towards remapping human–canine–landscape cartographies. This move requires the redefining of human and canine bodies as co-authors in the *composition* of the walkies. Furthermore, following Manning, Goodman proposes that the walking body can disrupt and reconfigure relations and extend towards new explorations and

21 Manning, *Relationescapes*, 6.

22 Manning, *Relationescapes*, 13.

23 Goodman, *Gathering Ecologies*, 111.

24 Goodman, *Gathering Ecologies*, 111.

25 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 104–5.

potential connections.²⁶ Human and canine affects radically reshape how we move through and become entangled in the effective forces that surround us. Thus, bodies and objects have the potential to become radically re-mapped through the action of the doggy *dérive*.

Conceptualizing the body in motion as unstable and fluid allows for new ways of thinking and moving through the world in relation to other bodies and objects. Moving bodies create space and time, they are not simply moving through a pre-structured space but responding to and constantly dancing with other bodies and objects. Springgay and Truman suggest that “objects do not exist as discrete entities that come together through interactions but are produced through entanglement.”²⁷ For example, Goodman describes a walk through the city as a bodily composition through chaos, out of which improvisation, in a negotiated response to the bodies of others, helps us to creatively navigate space.²⁸ Similarly, urban walks with my canine collaborator are constructed through an improvised choreography. Head down, intent on following the scent of fellow canine travellers. Always, it seems, in search of something outside of my own limited sensory schema, he will happily pull me in one direction or another, refusing my attempts to lead him otherwise by becoming a stubbornly immovable object. In the spaces designated as either edgelands or parklands, however, such restricting forces are momentarily lifted, and the canine body becomes electrified by a newfound energy. This lifting of restrictive forces is extended to encompass the human body as human and canine senses become attuned to the world. We are no longer connected by the lead but by an unspoken and invisible thread of trust and reciprocity, free to become lost in moments of pure becoming. As a human-canine unit, we are never walking in isolation but as part of a multiplicity of connected bodies and affects. It is important, however, to acknowledge the very personal autoethnographic nature of our research and not to take our own freedoms for granted. As someone who has experienced moments of acute anxiety and agoraphobia, I can attest that the

26 Goodman, *Gathering Ecologies*, 116.

27 Springgay and Truman, *Walking Methodologies*, 6.

28 Goodman, *Gathering Ecologies*, 119.

freedom to walk is never a foregone conclusion. It is, therefore, hard to separate our walking adventures from the complex and nuanced power relations that affect all bodies in motion.

Braidotti describes the predominant Western European relationship with animals as based on the “dominant human masculine habit of taking for granted free access to and consumption of the bodies of others.”²⁹ She also offers a clear discussion of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming-animal as an ethical basis for a non-hierarchical bond between human and nonhuman. In so doing she posits the concept of becoming-animal as an important move towards a profound and vital interconnection, which challenges speciesism and offers an ethical appreciation of what bodies (human, animal, other) can do.³⁰ Gerald Bruns describes the concept of becoming animal as “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.”³¹ In such terms, a de-identifying and de-familiarization of the self becomes a necessary step towards becoming-animal. This goes some way towards helping us to understand how embracing the doggy *dérive* as a strategy might strengthen the human–canine bond and trouble human exceptionalism.

Stephanie Merchant also offers an account of becoming animal through the sport of canicross running. She explores moments of becoming which have a lasting impact on human–canine relationships:

I do not claim that we have “become one”, morphed in focus and ability, to reach a singular common goal (although on a good day it may temporarily feel like that for me). However, what I do claim, is that we are no longer what we were before, and that we have become canicross runners together in a powerful cat’s cradle of success and failure, anecdote and routine, frustration and joy.³²

29 Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, 223.

30 Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, 85.

31 Bruns, “Becoming-Animal (Some Simple Ways)”, 703. Italics in original.

32 Merchant, “Running With an ‘Other’”, 21.

Although stopping short of defining their athletic partnership as a human-canine metamorphosis, Merchant seems to describe the same ephemeral moments of becoming that we experience in our own deep topographical walks. Such moments reveal both human and canine as nomadic and capable of becoming entangled through a shared activity. This sense of entanglement seems to operate outside of negotiated power relations and is more reliant on the dissolving of the human ego to enter into a bio-egalitarian union which is *dog-human*. This might also be defined as playful improvisation. As a musician I experience similar moments of becoming when improvising with others. In such moments the boundaries between bodies, instruments, and soundwaves dissolve through a creative union.

Alongside the concept of becoming-animal, Deleuze and Guattari also introduce us to the concepts of the *rhizome*, the *molar*, and the *molecular*. The rhizome is offered as an alternative to arborescent systems and structures. Arborescent systems are hierarchical, with a central trunk, branches, a beginning, a middle, and an end, whereas rhizomatic structures are anti-hierarchical with no centre or periphery, no beginning, middle, or end point and, more importantly, no central privileged viewpoint.³³ Becoming-animal is offered therefore as a rhizomatic move in which the subject gives up their privileged viewpoint and becomes part of the multiplicity or pack. In moments of becoming, Deleuze and Guattari propose that “each individual is an infinite multiplicity, and the whole of nature is a multiplicity of perfectly individuated multiplicities.”³⁴ The concepts of molar and molecular are a little harder to grasp. In simple terms, the molar is associated with the conscious, perceptible, rigid, and organized; the molecular with the unconscious, subtle, and fluid. Here, becoming-animal is offered as a molecular move in which bodies operate as fluid and deterritorialized. Deleuze and Guattari describe this as becoming-*imperceptible*, that is an entry into a zone of imperceptibility, as a de-territorialization, an uncoupling of the self towards an act of communion with the world. Or, as they rather poetically suggest, “to

33 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 3.

34 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 244–45.

be present at the dawn of the world".³⁵ One could interpret this proposition as akin to Papadimitriou's deep topographical communion with the landscape. It also helps define the very deep connection between human and canine engaged in the collaborative act of the walkies. Furthermore, one could read this as the very essence of how the canine body explores and communes with the world through instinct and intuition, responding to each sensory stimulus as a poetic and creative entanglement with and *of* the landscape. The term instinct, however, is problematic, suggesting an automatic response akin to the Cartesian notion of the animal as automaton. Therefore, I prefer to use the terms affect, immanence and improvisation when describing how the canine body becomes in relation to the world. The term affect relates to the affective forces acting on and between bodies in motion; immanence relates to the multiplicity of affects and forces surrounding our bodies as we walk; and improvisation relates to our call and response actions and reactions as expressed in the moment of the walk. Interestingly, Deleuze and Guattari go on to suggest that movement is central to becoming-imperceptible, stating that "pure relations of speed and slowness, pure affects, are below and above the threshold of perception."³⁶ Thus, in the doggy *dérive*, both human and canine bodies enter the realm of imperceptibility, mingling with the multiplicity of more-than-human affects toward moments of pure hybridity.

This neatly circles back to Manning's concept of relational movement through which she proposes 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."³⁷ What I am trying to explore here is the description of the unspoken, the unconscious, the imperceptible connections between human, canine, and landscape which unfolds through the act of walking. It is important, however, to state that we do not seek out or try to create the conditions for such transitions and becomings, where the boundaries

35 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 280.

36 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 281.

37 Manning, "Wondering the World", 166.

separating human-canine and landscape become fluid and slippery, but the awareness of the concept of becoming-animal helps to recognize when it happens, however fleeting and ephemeral. To put it more simply: there is a point in the walk, where the human (myself) and the canine (my companion) seem to align in the moment of walking through, or perhaps more accurately walking *with* the landscape. In such moments, human and canine bodies assume the position of interlacing lines within a multiplicity of lines and trajectories. Our walks unfold through a number of improvised twists and turns, subtle non-verbal communications where lines are no longer defined by the forging of the quickest point from A to B, but as connective tissue between human-canine and a multiplicity of sensory stimulus. Rather than observing the landscape from an ocular-centric, bipedal position, all senses seem to align as an unspoken connection is formed and the walk becomes an assemblage of skin, fur, and mud.

However, despite offering the concept of becoming-animal as an intriguing proposition to navigate the structural boundaries between human and animal, Deleuze and Guattari express some disdain for the pet dog, or *canis familiaris*. They state that pets, in general, represent, “Oedipal animals each with its own petty history, ‘my’ cat, ‘my’ dog. These animals invite us to regress, draw us into narcissistic contemplation”.³⁸ Here, Deleuze and Guattari, perhaps deliberately, wrench us from our cosy idea of companion animal relations to reveal a darker underbelly of the structurally reductionist realities of animal domestication and symbolism. In response, Donna Haraway exposes the limitations of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept, describing it as a “fantasy wolf-pack version of ‘becoming animal’”.³⁹ 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”.⁴⁰ She goes on to contest that Deleuze and Guattari present

38 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 240.

39 Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 27.

40 Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 27.

us with a “philosophy of the sublime, not the earthly, not the mud”.⁴¹ More importantly she accuses their philosophy of feeding off an opposition between the wild and the domestic, the dog and the wolf, signalling a “symptomatic morass for how not to take earthly animals, wild or domestic, seriously”.⁴² Despite the very glaring problems raised by Haraway, the underlying concept of becoming-animal offers a radical philosophical move which goes some way to undoing the human–animal, nature–culture divide. It might also help us to understand the dynamics of the walkies as the site of human–canine artistic collaboration. This is especially true in Braidotti’s positioning of the concept as an ethical basis on which to redefine human–animal relations.

Embodying the Canine Soundscape

An early experiment in deep canine topography considered the canine soundscape, specifically how experiencing my canine companion’s spatial position, might unsettle my body as a bounded object and bring us into closer sensory union. Using a pair of in-ear binaural microphones, I adapted my companion’s walking harness by positioning microphones just behind each of his ears. I also made a cradle for an on-board digital recorder. We undertook a number of urban walks from our home, usually under a kilometre, recording sound from the canine point of view as we walked. The resulting immersive canine soundscape invites the listener to imagine themselves as canine. The first of the walks was recorded in January 2020, the second in March of the same year, during the first COVID-19 lockdown, with a noticeable difference in soundscape between the two. I presented the first of the soundscape walks at a practice-based research seminar, by installing it in the LiSTEN iN Sound-Cinema booth at the Bonington Building (Nottingham Trent University), just before the first UK lockdown. The LiSTEN iN booth is a small, one-person box, where participants sit in near darkness with sound emanating from stereo speakers just above the head. Seminar participants reported feelings of embodying the canine position,

41 Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 28.

42 Haraway, *When Species Meet*., 28–29.



Fig. 4

Further Adventures in Deep Canine Topography: Experiments in Canine Soundscapes. Attending to Rhythm and Repetition
O'Brien and O'Brien, 2020–2023

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/shared/b13c5fa83b84022ce165a3d94ca7ae27>

creating a powerful minds-eye image of the world at ground level. I became interested in how encountering canine soundscapes might offer a powerful zone of contact, a bridge between embodied experience which enables a kind of human-canine hybridity. More recent sonic experiments include the use of wireless microphones enabling a live blending of human and canine soundscapes creating moments of deep sensory entanglement between human and canine walkers.

Act III: Navigating Contested Spaces and Complex Relations

This is an act of vandalism, an attempt to tame the feral in a futile act of mass domestication, its forces act upon my body, restricted by the lead, unable to follow my nose amongst the busy traffic, all sense of place replaced by stone, all sense of freedom curtailed as my senses become overwhelmed by noxious gasses. I long for the edgelands, the parklands, the wild spaces, to run free and mingle with the multiplicity, as a body without organs, as an abstract machine.

Every dog, as I do, has the urge to question. And I, like all dogs, have the compulsion to be silent.

Franz Kafka, *Investigations of a Dog*

Navigating the hard edges of the urban streets, our pace is quick and rhythmic, as paw and foot fall into step, interrupted only by the crossing of busy roads which become torrents of fast-flowing rapids restricting our path toward the local park. In the park, our pace slows giving way to an exploitative weaving of lines along scent trails. Zig-zagging from lamppost to tree trunk to bin, stopping to investigate the local canine communication network, before leaving a chemically rich response. Snuffling through the longer grasses, head weaving playfully from side to side, my canine companion drops and rolls, wriggling on his back, as if to absorb the essence of the landscape.



Fig. 5

Adventures in Deep Canine
Topography, O'Brien and O'Brien
2019–2023.

A squirrel takes its regular position beside a sheltered park bench from which it shares hand-fed peanuts in an act of human-squirrel co-becoming. Leaving the park, my companion leads me through the graveyard, dipping into the university herb garden to wallow in its fragrant perfume, before venturing up to the higher ground of the castle mound to sniff the air and plot the route home. This familiar walk through our neighbourhood has become a habitual daily routine. Like Kafka's canine protagonist, I can only speculate on my companion's desire to understand the world around him.

This final section draws our attention to the inherent power relations present in the spaces we walk together as dog-human. Throughout our research we have regularly encountered highly mediated and constructed city spaces, suburban streets, public parks, and what might be defined as edgeland spaces. All routes present their own set of complex rules and structures which act upon bodies in motion. Some walks lead us into situations where my own anxieties take over. My companion has no concept of, or respect for, human constructed boundaries and borders. Likewise, he may refuse to take a particular route due to his perception of some kind of danger ahead, exposing the powerful unseen forces which act upon the canine body. This particular walk takes us through an urban landscape, a city park, to a medieval castle mound and a modern university campus. It is rich with historic significance which is difficult to ignore.

In describing traversing urban spaces, Goodman suggests that "in walking, the experience of the city is always an intimate and shifting engagement, as feet selectively prehend the *qualities* rather than the essential *properties* of the street."⁴³ Likewise, our attention in the park is focused on the illusion of wilderness, however cultivated, rather than its Victorian design and problematic histories of social and political control. Whilst the edgeland spaces we walk, on days when time is more abundant, seem to oscillate between moments of wildness and domesticity. Here, the signs and signifiers of colonial expansion are written in the landscape. From the linearization of the River Soar into the Leicester Arm of the Great Union Canal to

43 Goodman, *Gathering Ecologies*, 115. Original emphasis.

aid transportation of coal, and cotton, from the far reaches of the colonies to feed the hosiery factories of the city; to the disused railway built by my Irish grandpa, brought to England as migrant labour, when Ireland was still under British rule; to the undulating pasture of Medieval strip farming; to the remnants of a Roman road which once connected Exeter (Isca Dumnoniorum) in the Southwest to Lincoln (Lindum Colonia) in the North Midlands. All lines and histories converge here. However, my canine companion has little concern for social and political history. He reads history in the scent trails of those who have walked these lines before us and perhaps those yet to come.

Jack Halberstam offers the concept of *bewilderment* to rescue the term *wild* from its complex colonial origin. For Halberstam, bewilderment holds within it a trace of the colonial project but also, “refers to an immersive sense of being lost or of standing outside of a system of knowing or of merging with other systems of space and time that linger in the background to those we have selected as meaningful in the contemporary world”.⁴⁴ Through this definition of bewilderment, we are placed within a space of unknowing or enchantment, bafflement, or confusion towards a “becoming that moves in an opposite direction to colonial knowing”.⁴⁵ Halberstam posits that artists and theorists who seek bewilderment as an aesthetic strategy do so against and beyond the cartographic origin of the term to become untethered and adrift. This sense of losing one’s way is another form of nomadic estrangement. Bewilderment folds us back into the concept of defamiliarization, offered by the essence of the *dérive* and Braidotti’s nomadism, where the “self” seeks to become adrift and nomadic as a precursor to entering into moments of human-canine hybridity. This sense of abandon and lostness lies at the heart of our deep canine topographical experiments. However, as with any such aesthetic strategies, we can never fully escape the gravity of the histories that bind us in altogether more problematic alliances. Such tensions oscillate between moments of harmony and the constant weight of human canine relational ontologies.

44 Halberstam, *Wild Things*, 66.

45 Halberstam, *Wild Things*, 66.

Harlan Weaver explores the complexity of shared human–canine histories and identities through a transformative relationship with an American Pitbull Terrier. Weaver states that “in moments when my appearance has been at its most liminal, when I have felt vulnerable as a visibly transgender person, she (Haley) ensured my safety. Concurrently, my whiteness, queer identity, and middle-class status encourage other humans to read Haley as less threatening; in my presence, she is perceived as less dangerous.”⁴⁶ Weaver expresses a human-canine relationship which is predicated on care and negotiated togetherness and defined as a *becoming in kind*. What strikes me about Weaver’s concept of becoming in kind, is that it gets to the heart of how our identity, sense of self, and subjectivity are constantly shaped and reshaped through our relationship with our canine kin. By approaching my canine companion as fellow artist, engaged in moments of creative collaboration, the walk acts as a momentary suspension of normative assumptions through which our dog-human identities become defined. Having said this, tensions and asymmetry, although momentarily dissolved in moments of creative hybridity, remain intact and are difficult to ignore. In addressing such tensions, Halberstam delivers a harsh but pragmatic account of the very concept of the companion animal. In a direct response to Donna Haraway’s definition of human, companion animal co-becoming as an ontological choreography, Halberstam suggests that such a dance “is still created, enacted, and performed by humans with animals, pets, and other things as props rather than co-players.”⁴⁷ Whereas Braidotti, following Haraway, positions the dog as a radical and significant product of technoscience, calling for a symbolic system of kinship which matches the complexity of our shared ontological histories.⁴⁸ My hope is that deep canine topography, as much as it ever can do, moves beyond the canine as a prop towards a true creative alliance. To this end, I deliberately position my canine companion not as the subject of observation, an inspiration, or muse, but as artist, collaborator, and co-author.

46 Weaver, “Becoming in Kind”, 689.

47 Halberstam, *Wild Things*, 119.

48 Braidotti, *Nomadism*, 94.

Our research has been shaped by our creative partnership, but one question it has raised is perhaps destined to remain unanswered. That is, what does my canine co-researcher make of it all? To contemplate this quandary, it is worth considering Roberto Marchesini's recent writing on animal creativity. Marchesini explores the question of animal consciousness through a number of key unifying observations. Firstly, he describes the sensory as that which differentiates between sensibility and agency or what is present in the world and the changes the animal produces in the world. He describes this as constituting the animal's sense of *self*. Secondly, he considers the animal's affective, inherent interests in the world as the *for-self*. Here, the animal's cognitive ability to adapt to any given situation is based on experience and knowledge, rather than automatic responses as assumed in the Cartesian model of the animal. His final observation proposes an awareness of such actions which he describes as the *in-self*, or interiority of self-awareness.⁴⁹ The essence of Marchesini's proposition is that animals respond creatively to the world in much the same way that humans do. They are capable of problem solving, play, and ingenuity. By focusing on creativity as a shared characteristic of all animals, including but not explicitly humans, he problematizes the already shaky ground of the human–animal, nature–culture divide. In applying such concepts to the process of deep canine topography, our shared creativity becomes the great leveller, the common ground on which human exceptionalism and therefore human-canine relational ontologies might be troubled. Framing the walkies as the site of creative alliance renders the traditional concept of the animal as automata redundant. Instead, it proposes a relational collaborative act of world-making which by extension embraces, or gathers, the environments we encounter as part of a multiplicity of bodies in motion.

For our final experimental encounter, we head to the coast to experience the elemental forces of a landscape in constant flux, through the eyes and ears of the dog-human.

49 Marchesini, *The Creative Animal*, 347.



Fig. 6

The Beach Beneath Our Feet
Three channel video and binaural
sound, 9m14s
O'Brien and O'Brien, 2021

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/shared/52256fb154c049df81ee8b7140dcbd21>

The Beach Beneath Our Feet

Using a combination of canine chest mounted GoPro camera and human hand-held points of view, this video work was constructed from several walks along the North Norfolk coast (UK), conducted in October 2020. The resulting ten-minute video merges sound from the canine point of view with binaural sound recorded from the human perspective. The video is quite deliberately edited and the use of three channels reflects experiments with the tryptic as a way of blending rhythms and further hybridizing human and canine perspectives. The Beach Beneath our Feet borrows its title from McKenzie Wark's 2011 book *The Beach Beneath the Street: The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International*, which explores the history of the Situationist's revolutionary art practices, including the *dérive*. The video combines the concept of the *dérive* with Papadimitriou's ideas of deep time through the choice of location, Happisburgh Beach, in North Norfolk (UK), and its association with the oldest human footprints discovered in Europe. This particular landscape is slowly being lost to the sea through erosion, further adding to a sense of wildness and elemental forces as the land clings onto its material form, continually shaped by the elements.

Coda

Our pace begins to slow as our mini adventure into deep canine topography and the doggy *dérive* is nearly at an end. We began our walk by exploring how psychogeography and walking-art might enable a re-framing of the walkies as an artistic practice. We speculated on how embracing the concepts of relational movement, nomadic subjectivity, and becoming animal might help us to reframe the humble walkies as a shared more-than-human act of co-becoming. We have explored the contested nature and histories of the places and spaces we walk. We have also briefly faced up to our deep and complex human-canine shared histories and the possibility of rewriting such histories and identities through a creative alliance. Finally, we have considered how creativity might unlock new ways of being and becoming dog-human. Now we approach the comfort of home, the key turns, the door creaks, a drink and a

post-walk snack gives way to a light snooze. My canine companion slips into a deep slumber, legs twitching as he dreams of walking, recalling, and reliving our encounters with the world. Our improvised dance has many loose ends and new landscapes to explore as we take our first stumbling steps towards embracing the walk-ies as something other than an arena of continuously mediated relations of power, towards a more harmonious alliance built on affect, immanence, and playful improvisation.

Works Cited

- Baudelaire, Charles. *The Painter of Modern Life*. Translated by P.E. Charvet. London: Penguin, 2010.
- Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Bennett, Luke. "Incongruous Steps Toward a Legal Psychogeography." In Richardson, *Walking Inside Out*, 59–72.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
- Broglio, Ron. *Surface Encounters: Thinking with Animals and Art*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.
- Bruns, Gerald L. "Becoming-Animal (Some Simple Ways)." *New Literary History* 38, no. 4 (2007): 703–20. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20058035>
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.
- Fletcher, Thomas, and Louise Platt. "(Just) a Walk with the Dog? Animal Geographies and Negotiating Walking Spaces." *Social & Cultural Geography* 19, no. 2 (2018): 211–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2016.1274047>
- Goodman, Andrew. *Gathering Ecologies: Thinking Beyond Interactivity*. London: Open Humanities Press, 2018.
- Halberstam, Jack. *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020.
- Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Haraway, Donna J. *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
- Heddon, Deirdre, and Misha Myers. "The Walking Library for Women Walking." In *Walking, Landscape and Environment*, edited by David Borthwick, Pippa Marland, and Anna Stenning, 114–26. London: Routledge, 2019.
- Heddon, Deirdre and Cathy Turner. "Walking Women: Shifting the Tales and Scales of Mobility." *Contemporary Theatre Review* 22, no. 2 (2012): 224–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2012.666741>
- Horowitz, Alexandra. *On Looking: Eleven Walks with Expert Eyes*. New York: Scribner, 2013.
- Horowitz, Alexandra. *Our Dogs, Ourselves: The Story of a Singular Bond*. New York: Scribner, 2019.

- Ingold, Tim. *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge, and Description*. London: Routledge, 2021.
- Kafka, Franz. *Investigations of a Dog*. Translated by Michael Hofmann. London: Penguin, 2018.
- Lorimer, Jamie, Timothy Hodgetts, and Maan Barua. "Animals' Atmospheres." *Progress in Human Geography* 43, no. 1 (2019): 26–45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132517731254>
- Manning, Erin. *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009.
- Manning, Erin. "Wondering the World Directly—or, How Movement Outruns the Subject." *Body & Society* 20, nos. 3–4 (2014): 162–88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X14546357>
- Marchesini, Roberto. *The Creative Animal: How Every Animal Builds Its Own Existence*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.
- Merchant, Stephanie, "Running with an 'Other': Landscape Negotiation and Inter-relationality in Canicross." *Sport in Society* 23, no. 1 (2020): 11–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2018.1555212>
- Morris, Blake. *Walking Networks: The Development of an Artistic Medium*. London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2019.
- Papadimitriou, Nick. *Scarp: In Search of London's Outer Limits*. London: Sceptre, 2012.
- Richardson, Tina. "Developing Schizocartography: Formulating a Theoretical Methodology for a Walking Practice." In Richardson, *Walking Inside Out*, 181–93.
- Richardson, Tina, ed. *Walking Inside Out: Contemporary British Psychogeography*. London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2015
- Springgay, Stephanie and Sarah E. Truman. "On the Need for Methods beyond Proceduralism: Speculative Middles, (In)tensions, and Response-ability in Research." *Qualitative Inquiry* 24, no. 3 (2018): 203–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417704464>
- Springgay, Stephanie, and Sarah E. Truman. *Walking Methodologies in a More-than-Human World: WalkingLab*. London: Routledge, 2017.
- Trier, James. *Guy Debord, the Situationist International, and the Revolutionary Spirit*. Leiden: Brill, 2019.
- Truman, Sarah E., and Stephanie Springgay. "Propositions for Walking Research." In *The Routledge International Handbook of Intercultural Arts Research*, edited by Pamela Burnard, Elizabeth Mackinlay and Kimberly Powell, 259–67. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Wark, McKenzie. *The Beach Beneath the Street: The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International*. London: Verso, 2015.
- Weaver, Harlan. "'Becoming in Kind': Race, Class, Gender, and Nation in Cultures of Dog Rescue and Dogfighting." *American Quarterly*, 65, no. 3 (2013): 689–709. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43822925>