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more-than-human ethnographer**

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# Multiple me, the unfolding ethnographer: Multiple becomings and entanglements as a more-than-human ethnographer

Donna Carlyle

## Abstract

This recit describes the use of visual-material methods in animating, re-enacting and highlighting the significance of human-animal interactions to well-being and flourishing. In employing creative methods and sensory ethnography, the researcher's body is emergent as a vector of knowledge and site of multiple unfolding identities and entanglements. It therefore reveals the embodied and intra-corporeal nature of experience that is often unknown, unthought and invisible. In doing so, new insights and ways of 'knowing' manifest in exciting and original means. Through sketching using a multi-layered technique akin to what is known as "pentimento" brings forth the concept that we are all constantly "becoming" something other and something more through our rhythms of relating.

A metamorphosis  
Like butterfly  
Layers and folds  
Of buds, of sky

A silent dance  
A tale to tell  
A fieldwork note  
I know so well

Entangled, entwined  
Diffracted, aligned  
Caught up in rhythm  
Of body and mind

Transforming,  
Unfurling  
Of that yet to be,  
A two in one multiplicity <sup>1</sup>

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1 Author's poem

My participant-observer, ethnographic fieldwork inside a Primary School with year 4 and year 6 children and their classroom canine, entailed some unexpected transformations when using my own body as a 'tool' and research instrument as part of a multimodal, sensory, visual-material, walking ethnographic process. This betwixt position (between two positions) afforded vast insights. These surprising but highly revelatory space-time-matterings; that is human disruption of conventional ideas of space, time and matter by symbiotic connection with non-human entities, emerged as significant events during the research (Barad, 2007). These slices and cuts of space and time, diffract and disrupt present space and time (through sketching, photography, movement and rhythm) and in doing so they *create* and produce new spaces with shifting forms that blend and (e) merge together. This vastly altered landscape of the classroom was one of embodied, intercorporeal and sensory entanglements with both the children, their classroom dog and myself. Ted is a gentle yet charismatic canine. He is a springer spaniel, now aged 3 years old. He joined the school setting as a puppy following the children voting for him in a mock general election whilst learning about democracy. His carer is one of the teachers and he goes home with her every day. He is now a well-established presence throughout the school, enjoying being part of the school community and culture in a carefully managed way that respects his welfare. My hopes of being accepted into the peer culture of the classroom exceeded all expectations, and in actual and virtual ways I not only metamorphosed into 'becoming-child' but also 'becoming-dog' as I became an embodiment and extension of 'Ted' their classroom dog.

This merging and blurring of body boundaries is described by Deleuze and Guattari (1988) as a 'doubling' and 'coupling' which is a key concept in their philosophy of 'becoming'. Seeing this animated through my experiences of immersion in the field was evident through several intra-actions with the children as follows:

Extract from field note assemblage 27/10/2017 (Observation 25):

*As I am sketching my observations, Billy, who is sitting next to me, reaches out, smiles broadly and strokes my arm then rubs circles on my back saying, "you are Ted." In that moment, I feel profoundly aware of my physical presence in the classroom. As an ethnographer, this was not only significant in terms of my 'position' - becoming an egalitarian figure in my relationship with Billy, but how I seem to have truly become an instrument and 'tool' in the research process through my apparent 'embodiment' of/as Ted. I feel very humbled and moved, but more so, very connected to Billy. I smile back at him and respond by also stroking his arm. The teacher's previous comments now resonate loudly in my head, that she too has felt like an 'extension' of Ted and how he affords her 'permission' to touch the children 'safely'. I can appreciate fully how the teacher (and now myself) experience this as a natural encounter and how Ted and 'multiple me' is affording a different kind of relationship with others in the classroom. It feels hugely monumental.*

My body became a more-than-human vector or 'skinscape' through which the children were afforded tactile connection (touch) and communication in an intercorporeal and intimate way, (Manning, 2007 p112). As Deleuze and Guattari, (1988/2013) assert, the concept of the Body without Organs (BwO) forces us to rethink the boundaries of the body and as such I became 'a leaky body' and an extension or prosthesis of Ted (Manning,

2008 p 33). I walked quietly around the classroom freely exploring spaces alongside him and became an embodiment of his calming presence. This nomadic wandering, wayfaring and walking in rhythm with Ted (McCormack, 2002, 2013; Edensor, 2010; O'Neil, 2008; Ingold, 2016) was also enacted by the class teacher in a similar manner, affording her the empathic and kinaesthetic use of touch. In a landscape and climate which encourages a 'hands-off' pedagogy inside the classroom, this poignant effect of Ted 'becoming-prosthesis' to both the teacher and I, further endorses the need to explore the value of touch and how it can potentially address current concerns around children's mental health and well-being (Carlyle, 2019). Resonating with this notion, I highlight Lupton's neologism and similitude in respect of Manning's 'skinscape' with her suitably termed relational 'skinship' (Lupton, 2013, p 7). This donates an entanglement and connection between bodies that is fundamental to growth and well-being.



*Figure 1. Ethnographer becoming-child/becoming-pupil/becoming-class mate*

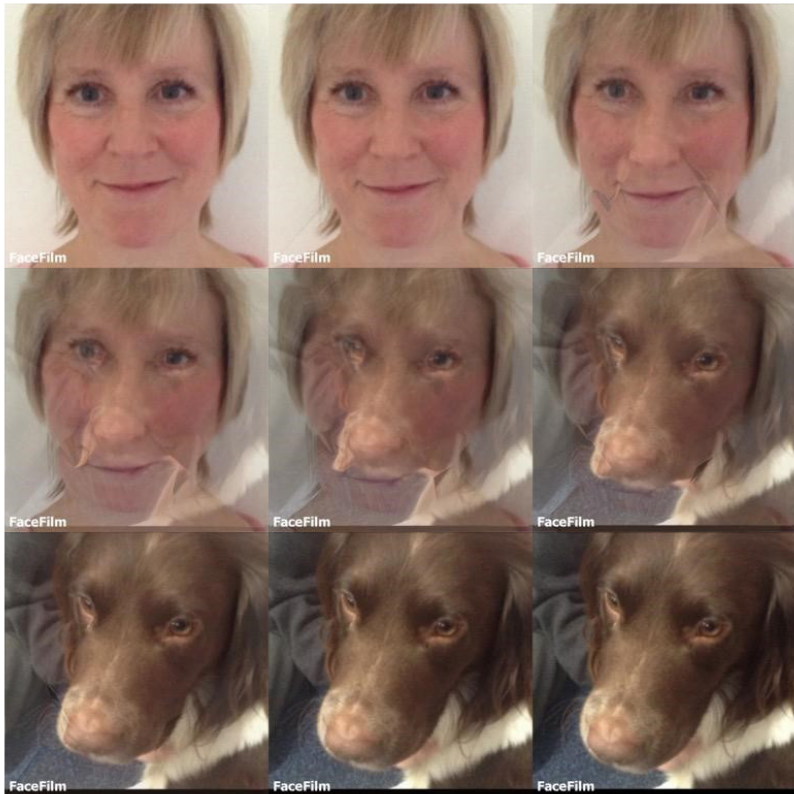


Figure 2. *Ethnographer becoming-Ted/becoming-animal/becoming-nomad*



Figure 3. *Pentimento Drawing 'Becoming-Child –Becoming-Ted'*



Figure 4. Pentimento Drawing "Becoming Ted" walking, wandering and wayfaring (becoming-nomad)





*Figure 5. Depicting ruptures of space and time (virtual) toward a metamorphosis of the body that is a becoming-multiple body, transformative and deterritorialized.*



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

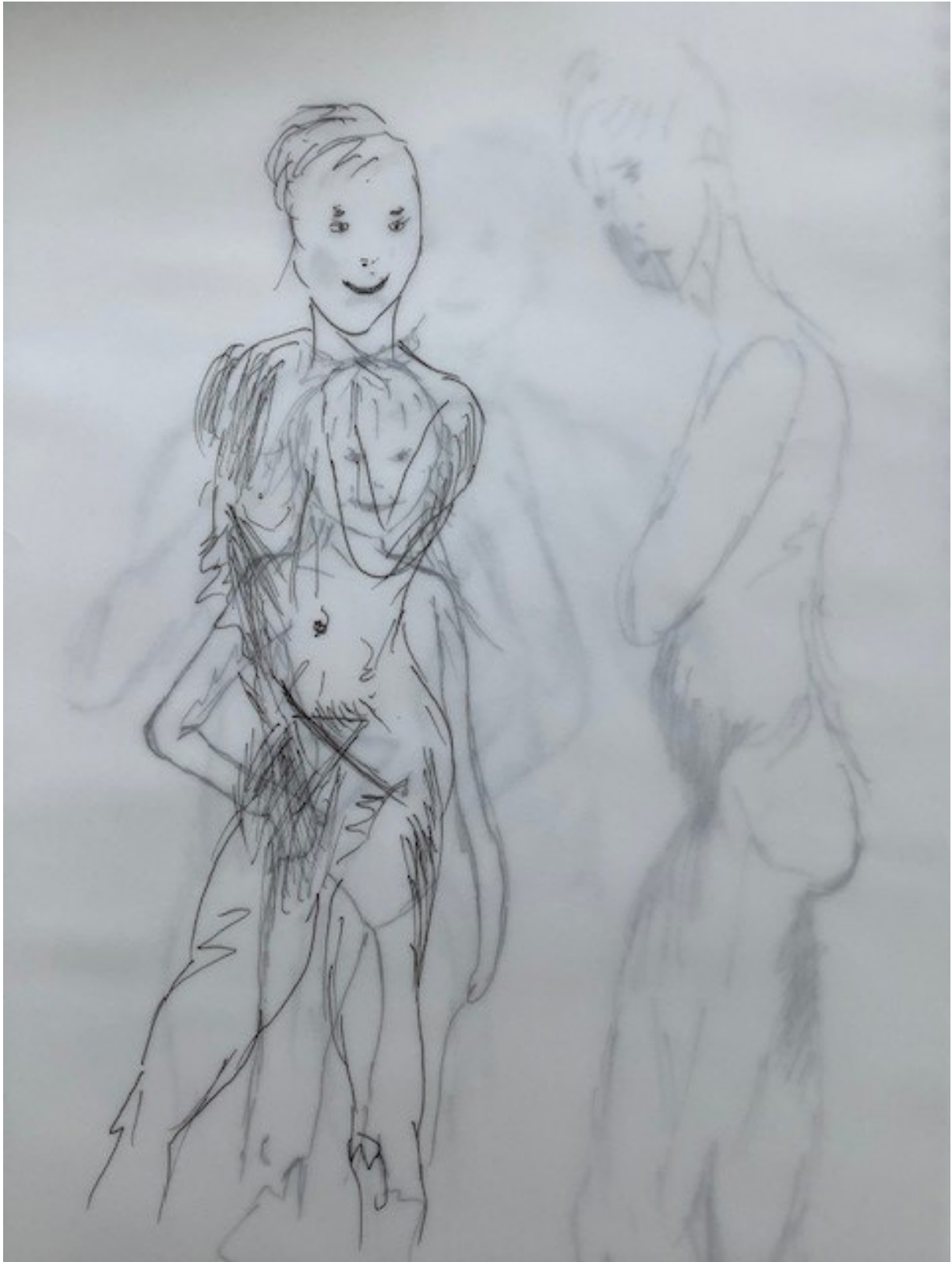


Figure 10 *Figures 6-10 Pentimentos. A virtual unfolding and renewal of body rhythm, becoming-other following surgery: transitional multiplicity of ethnographer's body in-between the personal and cultural blurring of self (adult-adolescent-child).*

In addition to thinking 'what can a body do?' I had a major pause in the rhythm of my research through having to undergo major surgery and a radical hysterectomy/oophorectomy in 2017. This distance (temporal, physical) and absence from the field became a non-conscious, significant factor in my reflexivity as a researcher-participant on (and in) the field in relation to my own role and position. This break allowed new meanings to emerge and materialise, enabling a new and informed positionality to manifest. What I initially found frustrating and stressful became of great relevance on my return to the field. As I contemplated this return, after a four month absence, I used this way of seeing (paying particular attention to my body) having a heightened attunement and sensitivity to the children's and Ted's bodies in what Lefebvre (2004), terms becoming 'rhythm analyst'. At this juxtaposition, I was aware that my body became a 'metronome' and a way of recording the affections on my own body and that of the participant's (Lefebvre, 2004 p 19). This also played a fundamental role in my analysis, in effect becoming the unit(s) of my analysis.

This new fragile and delicate bodily state during my recovery phase particularly sensitised me to the children's and Ted's bodies as we all navigated new transitions within the space of the classroom, becoming a collective assemblage of energies and entities. This parallel process became all the more significant as the Year 6 children prepared for moving to secondary school and into a pre-pubescent stage of physical development. Uncannily, this also coincided with Ted's third birthday in canine years-reaching adolescence in terms of his human equivalent years. As ethnographer, my own abrupt lack and loss of bodily organs and hormones (akin to a Deleuzian BwO's) also catapulted me into a new life stage in which I negotiated a sense of feeling child-like mixed with that of maturity and a shift into a mid-life change. This 'back and forth' alteration of my identity unfolded as shown in pentimentos *figures 6-10* in what can be viewed as Deleuze's key concept of always becoming something other and something different.

My broad range of human and more-than-human experience was enmeshed and entangled with that of the children and Ted, as we formed and reformed as an assemblage. By keeping with the beat and rhythm of the research and 'plugging in' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988/2013 p 4) to my body as a research tool and source of intensities and affective forces, as metronome, (synchronising with the movements of the children and Ted). This is also similar to the notion of entrainment, attuning to cues in sounds and movements, (Large and Kolen, 1994). It emphasised the layers of reality (both virtual and actual) where the researcher and participants are intra-active and interwoven through encounters, affecting and becoming affected, and at times being overwhelmed by things that happened. Such instances should not be overlooked or underestimated in their richness of what they can offer research observations and methods. These re-configurations are re-enacted and animated through my ethnographic recording and being 'drawn to see'- using sketching as an embodied process. They can be animated and considered as heterotopic multiple becomings with intracorporeal meanings. Through this intracorporeal experience, my internal and external worlds collided (of actual and virtual processes) – validated and made meaningful in the following fieldwork notes extract:

Extract from field notes assemblage 08/05/2018 (Observation 32):

*The children are having a visitor to class today, a school nurse. There is a hum of anticipation and excitement in the classroom. As I sit next to Scarlett, Kenny walks over and asks if he can show me his book about a puffer fish. I smile and Kenny says, "You look younger Donna". I feel my face go hot as I blush, embarrassed at this lovely, spontaneous and random comment. I think to myself, perhaps the rest and recuperation has made me look refreshed and less tense! Fieldwork can be exhausting and maybe it previously showed in my tired face and body! Then I consider this more than a compliment but that in that moment, for Kenny to say such a thing could also mean I have become-child, and become accepted as part of their peer group. Inside I feel elated. Yes, I have gone native! An ethnographer becoming-native in my immersion in the field and peer-culture as it were. I feel a wave of excitement and accomplishment wash over me. As Kenny points out the characteristics of the puffer fish, bringing me back into the moment through his nature book, the teacher reminds the children they have 5 minutes before their visitor arrives. Scarlett says, "I love Donna. Donna is part of our family, the bestest visitor". Kenny responds to Scarlett and says 'get in!' In these moments, my ever-changing, liminal position is one which feels as if I am being re-configured with multiple identities and multiple subjectivities. Archie comes over and asks if he can give me a hug. Scarlett then tells me her gran died from cancer. My body feels overwhelmed with so many emotions and sensations. I look for Ted and find a space on the floor to sit with him. I find his slow, rhythmic and gentle breathing regulating, as if restoring my body back to a calm state. The school nurse arrives and the children's excitement and curiosity fills the air...*

Within my embodied process of sketching and using the technique of layering (pentimento), I have dismantled, diffracted, re-configured and animated the human and non-human bodies in the spaces with which we moved inside the classroom. By being open as an ethnographer and letting go to this fluidity and emergence of the research with all its enveloping and shifting identities, I not only disrupted my inherent power relations with the children but I became a 'body' with heightened emotions and affections through which new meanings were transmitted. My body became, in itself, a site of knowledge production. As Waquant, (2004, p viii) asserts I was invariably "deploying the body as a tool of inquiry and a vector of knowledge".

I also like to think of this ethnographic wayfaring as Ronsdal, (2018) so aptly describes, as being-and-becoming something like an impressionist painter, producing a type of 'portraiture' and pen portrait of the field. In agreement with Van Maanen, (2011) I explored not just a 'narrative' but a telling of 'tales' both inside and outside of the classroom, thus bearing witness visually for the reader, to an unfolding of the essence of encounters that would otherwise be invisible, unknown and unthought.

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