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## Concept-ing with the gift: Walking method/ologies in posthumanist research

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### Abstract

*This article takes off from a project entitled Get Up and Move! which used walking as a methodology to envisage research in higher education beyond the human and outside individual, instrumental and competitive codings. The Get Up and Move! project activated new research possibilities for walking as an attentive, situated, emplaced and embodied practice of posthuman thinking, doing and becoming; it experimented with walking's posthuman generativity as a relational and processual methodology; and it aimed to be inventive, experimental, less elitist, and more inclusive. The project's posthuman orientation was inspired by Donna Haraway's (2016) concept of sympoiesis as a human-nonhuman doing-making-thinking-creating together, which is outlined in the first two parts of the article. This remainder of the article conceptually entangles this initial framing with/ in a further process of concept-ing, which designates a theoretical-creative-speculative doing with the concept to unfold its ongoing potentialities and push its inventive mobilities. The concept we do our concept-ing with is the concept of the gift. Working from Mauss's theorisation of the gift, we practice concept-ing as a means to trace new movements, possibilities and imaginaries for walking sympoietically. Our concept-ings pursue van der Tuin and Verboeff's (2022, 3) suggestion that concepts are "productive and experimental 'doings,' enmeshed in practice rather than fixed, retrospective labels for things."*

**Keywords:** *Concept-ing; Walking methodology; The gift; Processual methodology; Relational*

### Introduction: Movings-becomings-beginnings

Months of Covid-19 restrictions. Confinement and computer-bound conditions. Bodies hunched and crunched into immobility. Anticipation. Liberation. Quick make the most

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of it: Out into the damp drizzle. It feels indulgent! What a luxury to be told to go for a walk as part of a research project!

The litter in the gutter  
The hub cap in the fence  
The cracks in the pavement.  
Wherever I glance, there was  
stuff  
Produced by  
Humans,  
For humans.  
So much stuff!  
And it would all  
Eventually  
Decay  
Decompose  
Become redundant.

Down another path I don't usually walk on ...  
brown gravel, crunchy, scattered puddles,  
rivulets and craters. The path is hard against my  
wellingtons. It feels colder. Here it is—oh yuk.  
Do I really want to go up there? Crammed with  
litter and goodness knows what else. It smells! I  
almost gip.

How inaccessible this  
Walk is to people who are not  
Strong or mobile.  
Soon  
It might be me  
And this walk might get a bit much  
But for now I press on.  
My body  
Moves quicker now  
As the cold comes out of the rain.  
I look for one back lane then another  
Ginnells we call them in the North  
Connecting passages  
Black holes for timeshifts  
Cut throughs  
To take me back down to the river and then home.

As we moved, we noticed, we smelled, we heard,  
we felt, we tasted, we touched in an embodied  
experience of meeting the world differently. A  
sense of 'we' across time-space. Bodies  
becoming-moving in different spaces and  
places. Walking as becoming-relational.



Becomings-with: bodies, nature, matter.  
Processual worldings, whirlings.

Walks together/alone.  
A (Microsoft Teams) team of seven  
Supervisors, students,  
Professor, professionals  
Colleagues, friends.  
We walk together/apart  
Into the not-yet-known  
Movements  
Textures  
Resonances  
Laughter  
Silent musing  
Micro-moments  
Come to matter  
Matterings in all their distinct particularities.

Back inside  
Seven bodiless heads  
Talking, smiling, frowning, nodding, sharing  
On seven monitors  
In seven offices-in-homes dotted all over a map.  
Becoming together/apart  
Research as becoming  
Research as a rebellious intent to notice  
Research as movement  
Research to produce knowledge differently.

### **The *Get Up and Move!* project**

Originally intended as a move against the screen fatigue, isolation, and anxiety caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the *Get Up and Move!* project held open an invitation to do just that: move away from the screen, move the body, go outside, look, notice, attend to, immerse ourselves in and intra-act with nature, the environment and our surroundings. Seven of us—an assemblage of academics and doctoral students from different disciplines, with different educational trajectories, and at different stages in our careers—came together in what unfolded (and keeps on unfolding) as a vibrant research opportunity to put posthumanist theory into relation with walking as a methodological practice to better attend to material matterings. Initially framed by the feminist approach of Collective Biography (Davies & Gannon, 2006), we devised a series of three walkings together-apart in which we walked in different geographical locations at more or less the same time in relation to a pre-agreed aim. The first walk took place in a familiar place and focused on noticing; the second was in an unfamiliar place and was oriented around bodies and bodily sensings; the third was a dawn walk in which we attended to the elements and atmosphere. During and in-amongst the three walkings together-apart, the *Get Up and Move!* project emerged imminently and processually: we walked, took mobile phone photos, recorded soundscapes and short videos, wrote notes of our embodied walking moments, met online on Teams and recorded our Teams talks, talked some more,

shared our writings on an online site, generated data events and material happenings, and crafted collaborate writings. The unfolding series of devisings opened a space for sharing and co-creation in an iterative, collective and collaborative process of thinking-doing-making-inventing and event-ing. What started as an invitation to do something with our bodies out-of-doors led to us walking, working and moving against the discipline of education in its usual outcomes-based and metrics-drives incarnation, as we enacted transdisciplinary experimentations that unfolded in unexpected and surprising ways (Bastos et al., 2022; Cranham et al., 2023, f.c.; Hogarth et al., 2022). We continue our walkings-movings-doings together in new hybrid and face-to-face modes.

These walkings together-apart aimed to produce knowledge otherwise—as embodied, collaborative acknowledgement of human-nonhuman relationalities (Cranham et al., 2023, f.c.). Barad (2007) draws attention to posthuman knowledge as an onto-epistemological-ethic of worlding, while Braidotti (2019a, 9) emphasizes posthuman knowledge as a critical “displacement of anthropocentrism” and a critique of “the discriminatory aspects of European Humanism”, with its violences, exclusions and marginalizations (Braidotti, 2019c; Taylor & Hughes, 2016). Braidotti (2019a) notes that posthuman knowledge is about developing modes of criticality which attend to the new techno-bio-philosophical ways in which humans are materially embodied and embedded in differential and evolving geo-political relations. Posthuman knowledge is an unsettling, complex multiplicity. We acknowledge the various roles played by technology in our walkings-together-apart and the project more broadly. Technological possibilities via phone and computers enabled a means to connect and share experiences of walkings and sensings together-apart that would not have been possible otherwise. The initial impetus for the project came from the desire to resist impoverishing and ossifying our bodies through the technological acceleration experienced during the pandemic. We wanted to ‘get up and move’ to move against the increasing use of established and new online platforms to enable ‘business-as-usual’ to continue tightening its capitalist grip on us: at work, always another Zoom or Teams or meeting; at home, online shopping and playing; in leisure time, online social media communications. This incessant online, albeit from the safety of our homes (but only, we know, safe for some), engendered a physically dissipating atrophy. We agree with del Val (2022, 6) that “the culture of immobile bodies creates a radical narrowing of perception so that bodies cannot see beyond their narrow tunnel vision, [and that the] increasing spiral of reduction and dependence on [...] unsustainable machinery that keeps them [us!] immobile” (del Val, 2022, 6) effects a narrowing of sensoriality which disengages thinking-feeling from bodily experiences. The *Get Up and Move!* project aimed to work with techno-bio-philosophical modes of knowledge that inhere in movement and mobility—where this orientation would take us, we did not know.

Conceptually, our walkings aimed to activate sympoiesis (collective making), a mode of doing that Haraway (2016) contrasts with autopoiesis (self-making). Autopoiesis figures the ‘I’ as a bounded, separate and human intentional subject. Sympoiesis, in contrast, is about what emerges from what ‘we’ do, in concert: sympoiesis “situates the ‘I’ in relation with—in entanglement with—human-nonhumans” (Fairchild, 2021, 131). Sympoiesis is a posthuman invocation of a participatory ‘we’—the ‘we’ that does not exist prior to but emerges as a collaborative force when making and doing something together. While autopoiesis relies on separation, self-authorship and self-direction, sympoiesis activates tentacular connections and human-nonhuman confederations.

Methodologically, *Get Up and Move!* deployed walking as a processual methodology—as a sympoietic practice—to create conditions for doing knowledge otherwise in higher education research. This processual methodology enabled a collaborative, co-creative and conceptual unfolding of walking methodology as a thinking of-and-with the gift so that better relational, care-full naturalcultural



futures become thinkable. Knowledge creation through walking is a slow, emergent, processual encounter-ing which offers a critical push back against extractive (masculinist, colonialist) knowledge logics (push and pull, smash and grab, hit and run) around which so much of higher education research is still so sadly and unproductively orientated.

The project opened up many unforeseen and rebellious opportunities to produce crack(l)ings and spark(l)ings to contest research as business-as-usual. Our walkings, thinkings, concept-ings, writings and doings generated insights to envisage education beyond the human and outside the individual; it produced research practice that was affective, attentive, situated, emplaced and embodied, leading to more life affirming and yet also humbling relationalities.

*These insights felt like a gift.*

Becoming-‘we’ opened possibilities for exciting some-things—unknown, unforeseen and happenstance—to emerge, as resonance, trust and collaboration moved us as becoming-‘we’ toward a more joyful approach to research.

*Becoming-we felt like a gift.*

This article therefore contributes to an elaboration of affirmative *zoe*-inflected posthuman knowledge practice which undoes the normative chronometrics, foundations and strictures of research-as-usual. The *Get Up and Move!* project provoked many undoings which became gifts as timescapes slowed, and intimacies, encounters, choreographies, and human-nonhuman connections were made.

*So much of this felt like a gift.*

Together, we lingered longingly and lovingly in the doubts, disjunctures, darings, questions, intensities, affects and joys that we became collectively entangled with.

In this article, we continue moving with the *Get Up and Move!* project via the concept of the gift. This ongoing moving with the gift is done as a mode of concept-ing and unfolds below as our continuing attempt at staying with the trouble that the refusal of methods ossification in critical posthumanist and feminist materialist research requires (Murriss, 2021; Fairchild et al., 2022). If walking as process methodology is a gift, then what sort of gift might it be? What does it enable conceptually? What does it produce? How does it matter? Our concept-ing with the gift which unfolds in the remainder of this article is a theoretical-creative-speculative doing with the concept to unfold its ongoing potentialities and push its inventive mobilities.

### **Concept-ing with *Get Up and Move!* via the gift**

In considering our walking project as gift, our concept-ings are inspired by the work of Bal (2002), Manning and Massumi (2014) and van der Tuin and Verhoeff, (2022, 3), who suggest that concepts are “productive and experimental ‘doings,’ enmeshed in practice rather than fixed, retrospective labels for things.” In line with this, our practice of concept-ing refuses ‘representation’: it does not seek to define the ‘reality’ of the project, or to capture and relay a ‘truthful’ account of findings. Rather, concept-ing with the gift is a means to trace new movements, possibilities and imaginaries for walking sympoietically and (perhaps/we hope) for processual research practices more generally. As such, concept-ing is a situated, relational, performative and emergent endeavour of knowledge-ing, which is Taylor’s (2021) phrase for practices of knowledge-making that continue to proliferate meanings, activate new understandings, and produce new arguments. As a processual instantiation

of knowledge-ing, concept-ing is an ongoing release of critical potential inherent in the further unfoldings of *Get Up and Move!*'s thinkings-doings.

Gift practices have long been a central theme in anthropological and sociological literature. Gift hierarchies (Bourdieu, 1977), gift as commodity (Belk, 1993), and gift as individualisation of expressions of taste (Featherstone, 1991) have been explored. Many of these understandings, including Hurdley's (2007) consideration of gift practices in relation to meanings of home, family, memory and a feminised ordering of the space of the domestic economy, draw on Mauss's (1990) anthropological thinking on the gift as a powerful mechanism of exchange that ties the parties involved into social conventions of obligation and repayment that entail temporal and spatial dimensions. Sherry (1983) draws attention to the psychological dimensions of gift-giving in relation to internal motivation and socially approved behaviour. Mauss contended that gift-giving was about giving a part of oneself, which also brings to the fore the affective aspects that flow between people as a result of the exchange of material objects. Mauss's work on the gift has been central to understandings of how people are connected in webs of kinship, affect and relation, through the symbolic and structural power of gifts (Holmes, 2019).

In what follows, our concept-ing via the gift presses on, rubs at, contests and pushes these understandings with a posthuman sense/ibility. Our desire is to make new movements possible in response to the question: what does concept-ing with the gift enable? We attend to the gift as movement, not exchange. The gift as concept is hospitable. Concept-ing with the gift with posthuman theory as a thinking-knowledge-ing opens up more possibilities and moves with more imaginaries from-with-by-through the *Get Up and Move!* project.

### **Gift as encounter**

Encounters involve a meeting with unknown possibilities, some of which may create serendipitous opportunities, while others may entail unsettling conflict. In this unpredictability, there is potential for encounter to be produced as a gift. The *Get Up and Move!* project evolved through a series of encounters: an invitation as encounter, becoming 'we' as encounter, meeting the world as encounter, knowledge-ing as encounter. The first encounter materialised when the email invitation arrived on a darkening October afternoon and for the seven of us who responded, a surprising cascade of gifts as encounter unfolded.

We are "produced through encounters, rather than preceding" them (Ahmed, 2000, 143–144). In accepting the invitation to *Get Up and Move!* we encountered an opportunity to be transformed, to transgress boundaries, to become someone/something else (Clifford Simplican, 2021). The encounters that ensued involved an opportunity to discharge from the virtual worlds that we had become so familiar with, and to build and attend to relationships that had come to be neglected, not only with others, but also with our own bodies, and the material world away from our desks. The invitation to engage in walking, sharing, and creating became a series of encounter-ings in a collegial community of experimentation, with no discrimination on ability or expertise, from which new less hierarchical relational configurations emerged (Wilson, 2017). The slow transformational becomings and emergences the project engendered was undergirded with a supportive feminist relational ethics (Cranham et al., 2023, f.c.) that we opened ourselves to being disturbed and transformed by.

Encounters, however, are not without conflict, and not all our encounters were overwhelmingly positive. In the *Get Up and Move!* project encounters invited the unknown, and meant accepting risk and vulnerability. Arriving to the project from disparate disciplines and differing onto-





epistemological starts produced fears and anxieties as we worked out how to navigate new paths to unclear destinations and negotiated with the meanings of participation. Renold & Iverson (2022, 122) discuss posthuman co-production as a problem space oriented to “inviting, enabling and creating space and time for the multiplicity of what matters to unfold and become materially realised.” Conflict materialised as we encountered each other in the contacts zones of thinking-doing-making. We dealt with insecurity and guilt arising from transgressing the boundaries of our known worlds and grappling with new conceptual languages and meanings. In this sense, then, the *Get Up and Move!* project was shaped, in Braidotti’s (2019a, 17–18) words, as a “workable framework to assist in the elaboration of alternative forces and values” than the “burnt out core of the old schemes and mind-sets”.

Multi-faceted power relations affectively shaped our online dis/embodyed and moving bodies’ encounters. In our walking, talking, and writing encounters we traversed spacetime (Barad, 2007), reliving in the present the losses of Covid-19 and speculatively tracing colonial injustices and misogynistic pains which continue to affectively shape the past and inform unknown futures. As we ventured further from epistemological and methodological safety we once knew, and embraced the risk and vulnerability of each encounter, conflict itself became something of a gift. We slowed, we stayed, we remained: uncomfortable silences sometimes spun out. We sat with them. We worked on how to work out the conflicts that arose.

As we walked, talked, made and re-made together, we encountered the world differently. Familiar walks became alien spaces. Trees were reimagined as co-conspirators. Things became allies and friends (wheelie bins, for example). Posthuman knowledge-ing encounters provoked new ways of thinking and responding (Geerts & Groen, 2020), and our encounters became imbued with an ethics of responsibility and accountability as we wove our walkings with colonialism, ecological crises, and theories which challenged human exceptionalism and misogyny. This co-productive coming to know the world differently became a gift of encounter in which not simply “knowing more matters” but knowing *differently* matters because “it draws us into new understandings, relationships, and responsibilities” (Rose & Van Dooren, 2017, 125). Mauss suggests that the idea of a gift is about giving a part of ourselves. In posthumanist research enactments, we propose that the gift is a becoming by attending to, rather than being defined by, differences when encountering the world, others and ourselves, which opens the potential to trace new movements, possibilities and imaginaries by and for walking sympoietically.

### **Gift as dare to commit**

Moving with the concept of the gift invites us to explore the ways a command, a meeting, a question or a workshop might be gifts that open spaces to do and think and dare to commit to research otherwise.

How might a command be considered a ‘gift’? The project began with an invitation to ‘Get up and Move!’—a dare to do a meeting differently. It involved us leaving the safety, discomfort, isolation of our desks and a traditional verbal sharing of ideas in order to (re-)animate and revitalise and feel “impressions of life-in-motion” (Carlson, 2021, 13). The project involved intentionally “doing something less intentional” (Koro, 2021, 1), opening ourselves up to new ways of researching, working and committing to sharing our data and our walks, gifting one another with a commitment to doing, thinking and writing together. By daring to do a meeting differently, we opened up to question the “diversity of existing understandings: of research, of knowledge, of the world” (Rautio, 2021, 228).



The gift of the project and its walkings and doing was a “dare to commit” (Rosiek, 2021, 240), a processual and ongoing invitation to commit again, and again. At the end of the first meeting a-buzz we asked: Do we want to meet again? What would we like to do next? We decided to create co-relational-co-creative invitations for future walkings and writings including ‘walk at dawn’, ‘in an unfamiliar place’, ‘attend to bodily affects’ and ‘focus on elements and atmosphere’. These commands became our “enabling constraints” (Manning & Massumi, 2014), encouraging us to walk differently to our ‘walking as usual’ and thus creating shared threads through our experiences. Leaving our houses at dawn (for some of us) felt dangerous and reminded us of the underlying threat of male violence that women experience when walking alone and to consider the bodies most at risk of this violence. Walking in an unfamiliar place led us to think with different histories and theories, to getting stuck on a frozen path and cracking through ice.

In committing ourselves, we did not know where it would take us or even whether an ‘us’ would emerge or how, but we asked questions and continued to ask questions and these questions became generative gifts.

How might questions be considered ‘gifts’? In doctoral studies and normative research, questions drive inquiry. A qualitative research textbook will have advice on: types of questions, open questions, closed questions, double questions, ground mapping questions, leading questions, narrow questions, questions as probes and prompts. They will provide advice on asking clear questions, avoiding leading questions or theoretical questions or questions which are too abstract. The most effective questions are those that elicit rich data (which begs the question about in what way is some data ‘richer’ than other data?), to which the interviewee can easily understand and respond (in words or gestures?) and which enable the researcher to ‘answer’ the questions posed at the beginning of their study. Traditional research, in essence, abjures us to find methods that will ‘deliver’ data to answer questions. Nice. Neat. Linear.

**Figure 1.** Grass-lane-rubbish



**Figure 2.** Ice-boot-foot



Questions in posthuman inquiry differ; they aim to produce difference, provoke resonances, generate affects, suggest traversals of bodies that end who knows where. Questions in posthuman inquiry enact a mode of becoming-undisciplined (Truman, 2022). We asked: “How can walking as an embodied mode enable us to attend to the more-than-human?” We walked attentively, noticing tinsel, cracks in pavements, car tyre marks, knotty bark, plantar fascia (the part of your foot connecting your heel bone to your toes), a runny nose, fingers red with cold, memories of children at a school gate, wheelie bins, a robin. Our questions created “obligations to answer to a chorus of pervasive community needs, to respond, to act. But you have no answers. And how do you act without answers? You take a slow breath” (Rosiek, 2021, 241).

Koro-Ljungberg (2016) argues for a reconceptualization of qualitative inquiry, such that, following Derrida, questions becoming ‘welcoming and interactive’, such that questions are not about that they produce but about the ‘productive failure’ to re-produce what we already know. Posthumanist research, in this invocation, is about responding to the potency of the unfinished and unfinishable. Daring to commit to this way of questioning is risky and requires courage.

Koro-Ljungberg suggests the need for research practices which enable us to live with “unanswerable questions” (ibid, 107).

**Figure 3.** Air-weather-skin



**Figure 4.** Colour-wall-path



Do we dare to commit to slow scholarship? We did the project with a commitment to slow scholarship. When it came to writing this paper, we were continuing to commit to slow scholarship BUT things had shifted, roles had changed, there were new demands, while life had not returned to ‘normal’ the pace had picked up after lockdowns and their aftermath, there were many deadlines and new pressures, and we were heading towards the end of the academic year. One of us asked yearningly: “what happened to our slow scholarship?” The spacetime of slow scholarship became mangled in the accelerationist tendencies and practices of performative academic life-as-usual

(Taylor, 2020a). In addition, our different commitments intervened: we were thrown by workloads, caring responsibilities, illness and bereavement. Our dare to commit to the ‘unanswerable questions’ prompted by walking sympoietically and our commitment to posthuman feminist praxis meant we had to navigate care-ful expectations for ‘us’, each of us, ourselves, the things, and nonhuman and naturalcultural matterings we engaged. These various ‘dares to commit’ clashed and entangled us further in new research provocations, writings and imaginings (Cranham et al., 2023 f. c.; Hogarth, 2022).

Concept-ing with the gift as a dare to commit became, for the ‘we’ that we became, a collective desire and commitment to finding a scholarly home together in the often-inhospitable places and spaces of the contemporary university. This gift is a becoming-home we made and continue making together, in the knowledge that we have multiple other scholarly homes too (Bhattacharya, 2018). Concept-ing with the gift, then, was about placing ‘deep trust’ in our “collective ability to constitute alternative human subjects and communities;” it was an experimentation with what ‘we’ are capable of becoming (Braidotti, 2021, 237).

## Relational gifts

Gifts are reciprocal, symbolic and real, they are shared, given-received, involving more than the individual. Mauss’s (1990) ideas about reciprocity in gift giving suggest the gift provokes deeper relational bonding through a continuing (re)balancing process of gift and counter-gift giving. In this way relations are ongoing—building and becoming—cementing solidarity, kinship and affect. Walking as methodology enacted as walkings-together-apart showered relational gifts on us.

*We start our walks together/alone.  
Soon to be joined by  
Robin, cars, tinsel, tree, chainsaw-man, CCTV, fungi, frogspawn, pavement  
Making connections we would have missed if we stayed inside.  
Hiding sun, Georgian houses, suspension bridge.  
Deep purple mud, brown-green-brown-green-brown, rusty rail and creamy stone.  
Turquoise plant pot, not-quite blue, not-quite green,  
Colours in-between.  
Back inside, seven bodiless heads in boxes  
Talking, smiling, frowning, nodding, sharing  
On seven monitors  
In seven offices-in-homes dotted all over a map.  
Becoming together/apart.*

These gifts broke the silence, stillness and apartness of lockdown with its sedentary home working alone. Collective walking disrupted the dulled mind-bodies suffering from isolation, apathy and boredom, and from aches and pains in hips, backs, shoulders, necks and knees brought on by bodies hunched and crunched into immobility. Collective relational walking brought vital gifts of solidarity, connectivity and restoration. Like Degen et al. (2021, 1) we found that collective walking in lockdown acted “to regulate our affect, reconnecting with our bodies, leading to understand and adapt to new meanings of context and ways of coping and healing in this new becoming.”





But Mauss's views of gifts and gifting are largely anthropocentric. Our experience of collective walking tells a different more expansive story, of relational gifts which embrace instances of trans-species symbiosis, kinship, and solidarity (Braidotti, 2013, 2019b).

**Figure 5.** Robin-nearby-refrain



*Now I notice birdsong, so loud, so much, but I'm annoyed by the hedge trimmers and road noise in the distance ... throbbing, whirring, humming, screeching, gears changing. Then I stop in my tracks, a robin, so close, so still, familiar round ball, red chest. Is it the same one - my gardening companion? Seconds pass. Robin flutters away—such a familiar sound, when I'm gardening, I've forgotten the hedge trimmers— still there but faded away, less noticed. Spirits lift.*

In a world of anthropocentric ecocidal destruction, a momentary gift of human-nonhuman relationality—however, fleeting and flitting—engenders trans-species kinship and solidarity: an elusive gift of becoming “neither One nor Other, that is who we all are and always have been” (Haraway, 2016, 98). Like Pillay et al. (2021, 4) “our memories, stories, and ideas become entangled with plants, animals, and the affective flows of our assemblage.” As an enactment of gift-sharing as sympoiesis, Robin, the spirit-lifting companion, seeks the human (and other large mammals) as a way to find food.

Much posthumanist research urges a new, relational orientation to the world, emphasising that by enacting the displacement of ‘Man’ new relational possibilities blossom, multispecies becomings emerge, and new modes of attentiveness disclose new micro-matterings. Attention to relationality indicates how human existence on the planet is tied to webs of multispecies companionship. Our human lives are meshed with, dependent on, and intereconnected with the lives of others.

Our walkings were a gift in confronting us with our own entanglement with ecocidal, colonialist, anthropocentric activities that are causing daily damage to other species. We were confronted by the noise of chainsaws and traffic, by the ground cleared and turned over for new housing plots, by plastic packaging, cans, bottles, and litter gathering in derelict humps and mounds in streets, lanes and fields. Noticing such was uncomfortable, and deservedly so.

Human expansion over the earth, and human extraction from the earth, have wrought agonising choices, lonely deaths, and stunted lives for our nonhuman kin. Deborah Bird Rose (2013, 21) argues that “Western tradition has long dedicated itself to finding ways to turn our eyes from the death of animals.” For them, as for plants, rivers, air and soil, there is no ‘living comfortably’ with humans. Our current hypercapitalist orientations ensure that our human gift to nonhuman species and the natural environment is destruction, poison, pain and death as we spend time and money disarranging and dismantling the immemorial lifeways and lifelines that existed before us but that are now ‘in our way’ and so must be ‘removed’. Our project confronted us with many such removings in our walks, linking our walks with the quiet and immense mass suffering that goes on at the edges of our noisy human lives, unnoticed in our daily habits. The gifts of nature there for all species, human and nonhuman, we have taken and given only poison back, destroying ourselves along the way and future generations: species extinction; loss of biodiversity; starving bees; the genocides of the factory farming meat industries; fish tangled in plastic fishing nets, baby swallows

dying from being fed on plastic. We walked and speculated: anthropocentrism seems to have constituted humans as villainous parasitoids—a type of parasite that leads to the death of the host.

Deborah Bird Rose (2013, 23) urges humans to appreciate that “no death is a mere death,” that any death of any living creature, is no less than a human death, that both “creates a loss in the fabric of life, a loss that reverberates across other living beings.” Our bodies were propelled by the project to get up and move, and then continuing moving against the dreadful “deathful emptiness” (ibid, 25) of an oncoming anthropocentric future that will destroy us. Instead, we were moved to relationality, to move against the tyranny of dualistic separation.

### **Gift as potential for participation**

Walking as a method of generating knowings and matterings (Taylor, 2020b, 2021) beyond the limits of traditional research methods, also became a gift of potential—the potential of/for deconstructing the normal practice of walking, that is, bipedalism or walking unaided with two legs. How can walking methodology disrupt that orientation? How can walking instead open up the possibility to “celebrate embodied diversity” (Roets & Braidotti, 2012). Thinking walking otherwise than bipedal takes the posthuman deconstruction of the European and able-bodied male (Goodley et al., 2014; Braidotti, 2013) a step further by positioning walking as a practice for movement in many forms. Walking then extends to being variously im/mobile, temporarily or permanently; includes acknowledgement that minds, bodies, senses, and emotions in all their neurodiversity can be differently related to the landscape in time and space; that presumptions that shape ‘normal’ modes of sensing, seeing, hearing, smelling and feeling can be disrupted by age or Covid-19 or prostheses and bodily extensions such as hearing aids. Walking in these more extensive and intensive bodily modes of sensing otherwise appeared in our data with bodies stumbling, adrenaline pumping, ‘legs are floppy, wobbly’, and ‘cold teeth’. Considering walking methodologies not through a lens of inclusion but more as a potential for participation (Norwich, 2013) can, we suggest, open new possibilities for moving in a range of spaces, including rural, city, and on the forgotten edges.

The collaboration that developed through/with our walking practices provided a further gift of potential for methodological participation in research. We were brought together by technology, 2D faces and techno voices on laptops and phones. These were our friends and colleagues, their photos and videos were our reality, geographically apart but emotional connections were real. We walked, we listened, we trusted, then we wrote together-apart. This relationality and interdependence with humans, technology and non-humans opens possibilities for excluded groups: addressing disability “necessarily demands and affirms interdependent connections with other humans, technologies, non-human entities, communication streams and people and non-peopled networks” (Goodley et al., 2014, 348). Walking as posthuman sympoietic methodology has the potential to make explicit the inclusion which is sometimes but not always already embedded in potential research encounters.

But can walking ever not exclude? Cadogan (2016) highlights the problematics of participation when walking as a black male where the joy and freedom of walking in the city quickly morphed into humiliation and fear. His *Walking while Black* essay brings to the fore the racism that shapes walking practices in everyday public life. Likewise, ‘walking while female’ has seen social media communities sharing the dangers of walking alone as a woman in any place. Walking’s exclusions came to the surface during our project. At the time of our venturing, the murder of Sarah Everard, a young woman falsely arrested, kidnapped, and then murdered by an off-duty police officer whilst walking home, created feelings of unease, fear, and trepidation. Our walk at dawn was a stark reminder that walking as a woman can be unsafe. We talked about how, for women walking alone, the affective



anticipation of fear is palpable in our sensing bodies. For us, as for many women everywhere, this is not a new phenomenon; we have carried these fears throughout our lives. We shared stories of walking with keys in hands: 'I do that too!' 'me too!'. Sarah Everard's murder was just one of many misogynist acts of violence against women. In the weeks that followed our Dawn walk, the murdered bodies of Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman, two sisters, were further violated by the police attending their murder scene taking inappropriate photos and sharing them on social media. Violences against women are continuous and ongoing. Karen Ingala Smith's *Counting Dead Women* collects the number of women killed by men in the UK every year. In 2019 it was 117.

Walking is not homogenous and cannot be taken for granted: race, gender, age, mobility, dis/ability, factors of socio-economic disadvantage shape walking's embodiments and limit the inclusivity walking as a methodology. The *Get Up and Move!* project illuminates walking as a methodology is a gift of potential for foregrounding exclusions as well as reimagining inclusive participation in research.

### Gift of theory

Our knowledge-ings from this project have been inspired by posthuman theory, which we take up as a gift that entangles with our concept-ing to create new insights: sparks of joy, wonder and challenge which shapes our ongoing and emergent productions and knowings.

We did not deliberately prepare for or plan for what would happen in the *Get Up and Move!* project by initially sitting and reading literature about getting up and moving before we commenced the walks—we did not 'review the literature' and 'identify a gap.' Having said that there were theoretical inspirations. Springgay and Truman's (2018) account of walking methodologies as embodied, situated and relational research practice, of walking as a way of attuning and responding to places and landscapes, hailed and pulled us to attend to movement's sensory and rhythmic pulses. Davies and Gannon's (2006, 3) work on Collective Biography, which invites new ways of interrogating "lived experience theoretically, enabling the extension of theory and of ways of knowing and representing memory" was also an important early influence on our collective doings-makings-thinkings. As we went on in the project, our walkings and talkings became entangled with theories we had encountered before the project, and these entanglements then became further entangled with our Microsoft Teams meetings when we talked and explored our data-productions. As our research practice-ings continued to emerge and unfold we read texts that resonated with our doings – an intra-active theoretical assemblage that pushed our thinking, gave us concepts to write-with, and opened out possibilities for concept-ing. The words of authors were gratefully received as gifts of language to help shape and materialise our ongoing and emergent knowledge-making.

Theory is a gift to walk with; theory keeps our thinking on the move. We put theory to work to experiment with the concept of the gift as part of "thinking with theory," a phrase that Jackson and Mazzei (2012) coined to describe how theory becomes a methodological process in which knowledge emerges through enactments of simultaneous thinking and doing. Theory newly encountered exceeds the language we know already, its possibilities give us new ways to (make) sense with and share our research doings. Theorists give us "the magic power of words," unexpected words with propensities for nurturing, "capturing and condensing a lot of processes/feeling/thoughts" (Benozzo, 2021, 168) that we otherwise might lose, or never quite get to. Theory energises us as it oxygenates our practice and gives us tasty morsels to digest; theory keeps our thinking, walking and research nourished. Posthuman theory enables us to see things differently, bringing ideas into focus as well as nudging them out of kilter to invite us to keep

working with them and co-producing new ones. Concepts that others have worked with contour our thinking and invite us to travel pathways that we otherwise may not follow. Concept-ing with the gift as a practice of activating “productive and experimental ‘doings’” opens out spaces for us to be rebellious and go down rabbit holes in good company and in conversation with other authors. Sometimes the rabbit warren tunnels crack through the earth to meet and open out into each other, and the hard work of burrowing – the intellectual, physical and emotional labour that goes into research and writing papers – enables a meeting of ideas as their writings join forces with our own. These meetings continue reactivating our rhizomic wanderings and spark fresh possibilities for building new rebellious roots/routes. Our work is inflected by Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of the rhizome – a non-hierarchical structure with multiple connection points, in contrast with hierarchical tree-like branch and root structures akin to traditional systems of thinking and knowledge production. Rhizomes continually grow and establish multiplicities of connections; their pathways are unfixed and can rupture from any point in response to whatever they encounter. Gifts keep giving. As we encounter theorists in our work, we are gifted with new potential for our thinking to take off in any direction. Putting research into contact with gifts of theory can reconfigure and crack open new possibilities for higher education research.

Walking methodologies, we discovered, help us keep theory on the move. They give us encouragement to ponder the question: how is the moving body itself walking theory and memory? This question continues to move (with) us. Erin Manning’s philosophy offers a way to think with this question. The moving body, Manning suggests, de-linearizes the experience of time: as foot-touches-floor, swish-of-air, movement-of-body, in-breath-and out-breath, foot-touches-floor, we are, in Manning’s (2013, 80) words ‘in-time’ in that we “experience the uncanniness of being with the past in the future towards the present”. The moving/walking body, Manning suggests, occupies ‘experiential time’, a time outside the measurabilities of clock time, in which what matters is the emergence of the event in the doing of bodily movement. The fleeting moment creates vectors of force, energy and felt-expressibility. Walking bodies are a “mobile architecture [...] an architecting of spacetimes of experience” (Manning, 2013, 81). Walking is movement; walking is relational movement; walking keeps the body and theory on the move.

### **Concludings 1: Gift as im/material and im/measurable**

Traditionally gifts are given and received to mark a special time, event, or as a token of appreciation (Flynn & Adams, 2009), thus forming positions and roles for the giver and receiver. In these exchanges the gift as relational object links giver and receiver and becomes infused with intentions and expectations. In traditional accounts, the gift trades expectations, hopes and values. It sets a ‘tone’ and a ‘standard’ for exchange. However, if there is a mismatch between the gift-giver’s and the receiver’s expectations the gift enters a space of disequilibrium, spoiling the relational connections and tainting the gift. Gifts can easily be underappreciated or misunderstood, and the statement “it is the thought that counts” (Zhang & Epley, 2012, 667), implies gifts have other measurable attributes besides value.

The *Get Up and Move!* project bestowed gifts on us, gifts that we nurtured into possibilities and research practices. Collective processual posthuman gift practices and enactments resist the notion that only some individuals are ‘gifted’ (a selective, elitist and humanist hierarchical construction which individualizes and limits the nature of accomplishments). The education system is replete with instances of being labelled gifted at school or university or for sporting achievement. Such evaluations are imposed as arbitrary measure of performance (Baker & Cote, 2003) perceived as





excellent. The gift as educational excellence is elitism in action, embrewed in competition (Koshy & Pinheiro-Torres, 2013), for status, grandeur and celebrity. These anthropocentric dividing practices of classification and categorisation have material effects: they are oppressive, restrictive and limit the subjected individual's capacity to be other than as named and designated. If the gifted one fails to enact their imputed gift, then criticism and abjection may beckon.

Gifts can be material and immaterial at the same time. Material gifts, like presents, have shape and form; other gifts are almost impossible to measure because their agential nature is aloof, ethereal or ineffable. Such gifts take shape and form once they are noticed, sparking curiosity and wonder; they require commitment and nurturance to be realised, and without ongoing devotion and consideration, will fade and dissipate. During the *Get Up and Move!* project we discovered that such gifts can be cultivated into being through care-full nurturance and, with attention, they take on shape and form which produce new gifts to be cultivated and shared. Within our walking together-apart, many encounters could have sparked the birthing of a gift. For example, this provocative passage could be an embryonic gift - *"It felt like the fox and I were both balancing on the edge of two worlds, him with a foot in mine and me just about to step out of his"*. This moment of noticing and cultivating the emergent wonderings—encounters of balance or transition—entice wonder about relational bridges and merges between nonhuman, and human. Such embryonic gifts are sparks of possibility, material moments which matter and which, if attended to, glow and grow and form new wonderings. There were many such embryonic gifts in in our project—relational human-nonhuman invitations quietly inviting care-full cultivation.

## Concludings 2: Walking-with

To be able to walk  
At night  
Through a park  
In the dark  
Alone  
And feel  
Safe.

To continue to do research  
That moves with the gift  
That feels like a gift  
That makes more gifts  
Walking-in-relation  
Walking-with-care  
A walking human-nonhuman  
Finding  
Of kinship.

Moving with care,  
With nature,  
With memories,  
Birdsong and foxes,  
Creating memories of trust and of friendship over time and space,  
Slow and deep.

Walking with meaning.

The surprise! to be given the opportunity to connect, relate and create together as a collective, was this possible? where/why is/was this praxis hidden? This way of doing research as a care-full scholar.

The opportunity to discover new ways of knowing and doing academia, of doing research.

The wonder of knowings, and knowledge-ing, of the many possibilities that linger with these opportunities for alternative ways of being and becoming.

Today I walk alone.  
Today I write alone.  
But never alone.  
The gift of never alone.  
Always in some way together.  
With theory,  
With histories,  
With pastpresentfuture,  
With robin,  
With tree,  
With tinsel,  
With car,  
With murder,  
With bone, muscle, teeth,  
With companion species,  
With joy,  
With sorrow,  
With...with...with

The gift  
Generous, challenging  
Im/measurable  
Unexpected  
To give  
To receive  
Both, neither  
At the same time  
It's yours  
It's mine  
No, ours  
A gift



### Concludings 3: Concept-ings continuings

Concepti-ing with the gift illuminates the gift's many facets and components. The gift of walking together-apart. The gift to co-produce knowings and wonderings in our writings and data assemblages. This gift as feminist praxis of care and nurturance. The gift of co-relational moving and connecting which altered us as we discovered fresh ways of becoming scholars, authors, and gift cultivators. The gift of new and unforeseen opportunities and new collaborations which kept bubbling, forming and inviting new encounters. The gift emanating from the initial call to 'Get up and Move!' continues to resonate in the AND, AND, AND of our ongoing doings together: pop-up research events, teaching sessions, articles, conference presentations, a Blog, and a book chapter. On and on.

Concept-ing with the gift aligns with nomadic and rhizomic approaches to knowledge-making, refusing normative formulas for writing and research. Concept-ing with the gift is about trying to engage in acts of posthuman hospitality. It does not leave Mauss's theory of the gift 'behind' as in some theoretical parade of intellectual advancement. Rather it takes that theory as an invitation, a question, an open encounter to engage in collective and experimental doings and thinkings (van der Tuin & Verhoeff, 2022). Concept-ing with the gift, as instantiation of knowledge-ing (Taylor, 2021), traverses the terrain of the practical and theoretical in a way that is both critical and affirmative. Concept-ing is not a reflection, representation or a result of *what was done* (past tense). Concept-ing is an act, an activity, an enactment, a processual practice (*in the present*) and a co-creative act (*for the future*) that destabilizes fixities and puts theory and research back in motion. *Get Up and Move! Go concept-ing!*

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