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Testing Our Mettle: accidental performance and the agency of the non-human (Paper)

We would like to offer a paper to the following question: In which ways can different life forms in their wide diversity enter the scene of performing arts and deconstruct this scene? We have lived with a series of dalmatians since our marriage in 1996. Henry joined us in June of that year, and lived for thirteen years, dying in April of 2009. William arrived in the summer of 2004, with Stephen arriving in the spring of 2014. Without intending to, each of these dogs have found their way into our performance practice over the time they have shared our home. In 2003, we made a performance entitled Mettle. Shown at just two venues in the UK (Manchester and Northampton), the piece was an exploration of the potential for interruption afforded when the non-human presence of two non-specialist dogs are introduced to a tightly scored performance piece of devised performance. These two dogs, one in the eighth year of his life and thus into his middle-age, the other a puppy who was not fully grown, offered a series of interruptions and moments of resistance to the score we were working to. Following these two performances, Henry and William offered a series of workshops at the following institutions: The Place's Choreodrome, Dartington College of Arts and Plymouth University. Following Henry's death, William continued to run workshops by himself, often without any support from either of his human counterparts. Recently, explorations of the idea of the domestic as a locale for performance practice (specifically a four-day workshop exploring the significance of the door within a site-specific performance context), have led to a further consideration of performance interactions with the non-human performer. During the workshop period held within our home, William and Stephen were ever present, and made themselves a part of the exploration simply by their continued presence. There are the attendant ethical implications of working with non-human beings who are, because of the nature of domestication of house pets, unable to give their consent, or indeed refuse the invitations to play. These issues will be brought to bear upon the wider territory of this paper.

Joanne (or '**Bob**' as most people know her) and **Lee** completed the first joint practice-as-research PhD to be undertaken within a UK arts discipline in 2004. As part of that project they began to reflect upon the process of creative collaboration and knowledge production by drawing on the 'two-fold thinking' of Deleuze and Guattari. These processes remain central to their ongoing work together. Alongside their creative practice, they both work in the UK university sector. Their current research includes an exploration of Buddhist, Vedantic and Taoist philosophies, with particular attention being paid to the concept of witnessing. Lee is a qualified yoga teacher, and Bob is a licensed acupuncturist. Bob has recently begun to research in the field of Medical Humanities and is working with a colleagues on a Wellcome Trust funding bid.