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# Performance (in) Ecology: A Practice-based Approach

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## Abstract

This thesis develops an ecological performance practice using a practice-as-research methodology. It explores how performance can engage the ecological, where performance (in process and product) is understood as an ecology of diverse humans and nonhumans, which participates within the wider ecology of Earth. Whilst recent publications have given sustained attention to the ways performance can respond to ecological imperatives (Allen and Preece, 2015; Heddon and Mackey, 2012; Bottoms, Franks and Kramer, 2012; Arons and May, 2011; Kershaw, 2007; Bottoms and Goulsh, 2007), there has been scarce attention paid to how performance *practices* and creative *process* can *be* and *do* ecology. In attending to that gap, this research develops a critically-engaged practice of performance (in) ecology, exploring how performance - in its very methods, modes and live moments of practice - can *enact* the ecological.

The project developed an ecological practice through intergenerational and professional-nonprofessional collaboration. It was led by two performance works - *Age-Old* (2013) and *Wild Life* (2014). *Age-Old* involved collaborating with a seven-year-old girl to co-devise a new performance and it formed a developmental period of the research inquiry from which key methods were taken into the more ambitious work, *Wild Life*. This performance explored 'wildness' and was a collaboration with eight professional and nonprofessional performers, aged between nine and 60 years old. It presents the main body of the research. The written component of the thesis frames and elucidates the practice-based research findings. The thesis proposes that involving collaborators of diverse ages and skills presents a dynamic performance ecology through which an inclusive ecological practice can be developed. Its claim is that collaborative practice offers a potentially radical enactment of ecological qualities and dynamics, where this enactment is the 'wilding' of performance.

Conducted through a Collaborative Doctoral Award from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the project was supported by Catherine Wheels Theatre Company. It offers new approaches for practice and scholarship in the fields of performance and ecology, devised performance, movement and ecology, and intergenerational practice. It also contributes to wider meanings of 'ecology' as advanced by scientific views, including posthumanist and rewilding perspectives.

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## List of Accompanying Online Files

### Age-Old Full Length

Clip 1 Enactment and Representation, Animal Improvisation

Clip 2 Immanent Authorship, Mountain Movements

Clip 3 Betweens Leading, Flying with Bags

Clip 4 Nonhuman in Human, Bags and Carragh

Clip 5 Unpredictability, Bags, Carragh and Sarah

### Wild Life Full Length

Clip 1 Practice-as-Research, Issues of Translating Theory into Practice

Clip 2 Wilding Performance Containers, Feeling Faces

Clip 3 Wilding Performance Containers, Playing with Boundaries

Clip 4 Wilding Performance Containers, All Messy Hair

Clip 5 Vibrant Humans and Nonhumans, Water Fight

Clip 6 Working With and As Vibrant Matter, Sliding Stones

Clip 7 The Agency of Practice, Interpretation Practices

Clip 8 The Agency of Practice, Leaping and Being Leapt

Clip 9 Over General Instruction, Bending

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## Introduction

This thesis explores and develops an ecological performance practice. My research responds to my awareness - as performance practitioner, researcher and spectator - of a lack of critical and creative engagement with the complexities of ecology in contemporary theatre and performance. My research is a response to some of the most pressing concerns of our time; it asks how to live as part of ecology and how to develop ecological ways of being and doing. I am interested in how humans can enact and experience - how we can *do* - the ecological through the creative modes of performance process and the theatrical production itself. I also explore how performance ecology might impact on wider meanings of 'ecology' and, crucially, what performance ecology can uniquely tell us about what it means to be part of the diverse ecologies of Earth. In order to find out about the ecological potentials of performance my practice-based inquiry is driven by the question 'how can a performance practice be ecological?'

For the past eight years I have been exploring ecological ideas and questions through performance. In that time I have become aware of how little attention the performance field has given to ecology both in terms of scholarly discussion and creative engagement: indeed, performance scholar Stephen Bottoms asks why the theatre and performance sectors have been 'slow to pick up the ecological baton?' (2010, p. 121). Since Bottoms' observation in 2010 there have been an increasing number of initiatives aimed towards making theatre a greener and more environmentally friendly art form. In the UK, organisations including Julie's Bicycle, the Green Theatres Initiative and The Centre for Sustainable Practice in the Arts have all focused on making theatre more ecological insofar as decreasing its environmental impact. There are also an increasing number of UK practitioners and companies using performance as a way to engage with environmental issues and ecological concerns: Nic Green makes work with an ecological focus including her autobiographical performance *Fatherland, Motherland* (2012) which 'investigates and celebrates the complexity and beauty of ecopsychological and psycho-geographical relationships [and] one's place in the world' ([http://www.nicgreen.org.uk/#!\\_\\_fatherland-motherland](http://www.nicgreen.org.uk/#!__fatherland-motherland), no date); Fevered Sleep, which creates work for children and adults, often deals with environmental concerns, for example the performance installation *Above Me The Wide Blue Sky* (2013) 'explores our profound connectedness to the natural world' (Fevered Sleep, 2016a); Feral Theatre focuses on environmental issues, such as the outdoor performance *Lost Species* (2011), which is framed as a funeral for extinct species (<http://feraltheatre.co.uk/funeral-for-lost-species/>, no date);

and, Whirlybird Theatre Company (formerly Eco Drama) creates theatre to ‘entertain and inspire people of all ages to value and care for our natural world’ (Eco Drama, 2015a). However, despite greater environmental awareness across the theatre sector, and an expanding body of performance work engaging with ecological ideas, there is a scarcity of practitioners experimenting with how performance, in its very processes, modes and forms of creative practice, can be ecological.

This gap is reflected in the critical literature. Whilst recent publications have given sustained attention to the ways performance can explore and respond to ecological imperatives (Allen and Preece, 2015; Heddon and Mackey, 2012; Bottoms, Franks and Kramer, 2012; Arons and May, 2011; Kershaw, 2007), there has been scarce attention paid to how performance *practices* and *methods*, and how the creative performance *process*, can be ecological. There is one study that goes some way in doing this: *Small Acts of Repair: Performance, Ecology and Goat Island* by Stephen Bottoms and Matthew Goulsh, in which the authors discuss Goat Island’s performance work ‘through the critical lens of ecological thinking’ (2007, n.p.) and provide important insights into how the company’s collaborative process is analogous to an environmental ecosystem. My research builds on their perspective by working with performance ecology from the outset and by drawing out the ecological potentials of collaborative devising practices, rather than (only) making reflective analogies between performance and environmental ecosystems.

My meaning of ‘performance ecology’ extends from Baz Kershaw’s use of the phrase to reference ‘performances as ecosystems’ (2007, p. 15). He draws on a general and familiar definition of ‘ecology’ from the sciences, defining it as the ‘interdependence between organisms and environments’, and thus proposes that “‘theatre ecology’” (or “‘performance ecology’”) refers to the interrelationships of all the factors of particular theatrical (or performance) systems, including their organic and inorganic components and ranging from the smallest and / or simplest to the greatest and / or most complex’ (2007, p. 15-16). For me, performance ecology refers to the complex system of diverse humans and nonhumans that materially figure (and emerge) in theatrical performance *processes* and performances themselves. This involves an understanding that any one ‘component’ of the performance ecology is intrinsically entangled with (human and nonhuman) others. This meaning of performance ecology relates to the definition of ‘deep ecology’ as advanced by Arne Naess. In deep ecology a ‘total view’ is encouraged, whereby we ‘arrive, not at things themselves, but at networks or fields of relations in which things participate and from which they cannot be



isolated' (Naess, 1976, p. 49). Therefore, any one 'thing' is always already in relation 'with other things' (Naess, 1976, p. 10). For me, 'performance ecology' means that systems of theatrical performance (in both creative process and public event) are unavoidably interrelated with other ecologies: a performance ecology continuously and unavoidably *interacts* with(in) wider social and environmental ecologies. This develops from Kershaw's conceptualisation that theatre ecology and performance ecology 'refer to the interrelationships between theatres (or performances) and their environments' (2007, p. 15-16). In proposing the interrelation of performance ecology with(in) other ecologies I also draw on the ecologist Gregory Bateson and the political and ecological thinker Félix Guattari. For Bateson the 'mind' or 'thinking' is not limited to humans or culture but is also located throughout environmental processes (1972, p. 488-489). Bateson implies that what we call 'culture' and 'nature' are aspects of the same systemic and material processes. Bateson uses the example of humans dumping pollutant waste into Lake Erie, proposing that you 'forget that the eco-mental system called Lake Erie is part of *your* wider eco-mental system - and that if Lake Erie is driven insane, its insanity is incorporated in the larger system of *your* thoughts and experience' (Bateson, 1972, p. 489-490). This resonates with Guattari's proposal of an 'ecosophy', which involves a concept of the three ecologies: 'social ecology, mental ecology and environmental ecology' (Guattari, 1989, p. 41). He proposes that complex interactions and interconnections exist across all three ecologies such that, for example, species becoming extinct in environmental ecologies are inextricably linked to the ways in which 'the words, phrases, and gestures of human solidarity' are becoming extinct in social ecologies (1989, p. 43). In this sense 'nature cannot be separated from culture . . . [and] we must learn to think "transversally"' across the three ecologies (1989, p. 43). Taking Bateson's and Guattari's complex meanings of 'ecology' into account, to focus on any ecology - whether it is a particular performance ecology or a specific environmental ecology - is to inevitably interact with wider ecological systems and processes. Furthermore, if environmental, social and mental ecologies are interrelated, then to explore a specific social performance ecology (which involves a particular combination of diverse humans and nonhuman materials) is to inevitably engage with (and learn about) wider Earthly ecology.

In attending to the gaps in the performance and ecology field, my research is concerned with the modes and forms of *practice which* emerge when performance is treated as an ecosystem that inevitably participates with(in) ecological processes and other ecological systems. It is my view that new approaches to *doing* performance are required in order to account for the reality that performance is always already a system of distinct yet entangled human and

nonhuman parts. I coin the phrase ‘performance (in) ecology’ in order to simultaneously refer to performance as an ecosystem and performance’s interrelations with(in) the wider ecosystems of Earth. Through my practice-as-research approach I explore and elucidate how the methods of creative collaborative practice and performances themselves can be - in their enactments - ecological. I have thus sought to find out how performance can *do* the ecological through its modes of creation, exploring and developing a critically-engaged practice of performance (in) ecology.

### **Collaborative Doctoral Award**

My doctoral project was fully-funded via an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) between the University of Glasgow and Catherine Wheels Theatre Company. As the AHRC describes, CDAs provide funding for doctoral studentship projects which are initiated by an academic institution to work with an organisation outside of higher education (AHRC, 2015). I was appointed to this CDA project in September 2012 and with it I inherited the partnership with Catherine Wheels and a specific research title ‘Sustaining the Imagination: Theatre and learning for sustainability’. My supervisory team was made up of two academic supervisors - Deirdre Heddon and Adrienne Scullion - and two non-academic supervisors - Catherine Wheels artistic director Gill Robertson and company producer Paul Fitzpatrick.<sup>1</sup> There was an agreed partnership with two primary schools - Hillhead and East Linton Primary Schools - in which the anticipated fieldwork would take place. The project was planned to focus on the creative and imaginative ways in which site-oriented theatre can be used to engage children in environmental sustainability. The work would contribute to and extend the fields of theatre-in-education, children’s theatre, theatre and environmentalism and site-oriented theatre practices. I therefore began a studentship which had a pre-established research question, along with a complex set of relationships. This presented a rich but challenging context within which to embark on my research, not only in terms of the diverse resources and knowledges available to me but also the various expectations of the multiple stakeholders - the University of Glasgow, the AHRC, the two primary schools and Catherine Wheels.

When I was awarded this CDA, I brought my own skills, experiences and interests to this existing mix of resources, relationships, expectations and, indeed, research question. Indeed,

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<sup>1</sup> During year three of my PhD, Fitzpatrick became the executive director for the children’s theatre organisation *Imagine*. He left his role as Catherine Wheels producer, but this did not effect his supervisory role and he continued to offer me advice and support throughout my research.

the CDA format demands that the appointed student takes ownership of the project and so I began an early process of renegotiating and refocusing the research. I initially changed the research inquiry in two crucial ways. Firstly, I translated the focus of working solely with children to exploring a collaborative intergenerational practice of working with children and adults and with professional and nonprofessional performers. Secondly, I changed the focus from exploring how theatre can offer imaginative approaches to engaging children in sustainability learning, to exploring how performance practice - in its very process and methods - can enact ecology. These two renegotiations sprang directly from my experiences and expertise as a professional artist working in a diversity of performance contexts.

### **Past Research and Practice**

During my undergraduate degree in Contemporary Performance Practice (CPP) at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS) (2006-2010), I explored collaborative and socially engaged devising approaches and I became interested in working with diverse groups of people that are not normally seen on stage, including children and non-trained performers. As part of that degree I worked with Glasgow-based theatre company Glas(s) Performance, a creative partnership between Jess Thorpe and Tashi Gore who make performance work with a diverse range of people, replacing trained actors with people telling their own 'stories' (Glas(s) Performance, 2016). I worked with Glas(s) on a project which involved 12 performance students collaborating and performing with 12 adults with disabilities. I was inspired by the approach Glas(s) took of working with the participants and their ideas, and I developed a critical concern for the politics and creative possibilities of collaborating with performers who are not trained in performance. However, during my first two years on CPP, I was troubled by the way in which the collaborative devising and socially engaged performance approaches that I learned about, and had first-hand experience of, were focused wholly on the human social realm; the emphasis was on performance as a way of exploring (only) human relationships, identities and stories. Therefore, for my dissertation research project I decided to explore the connections between performance and ecology. I researched the performance practice of Goat Island, proposing that its collaborative approach could be understood as ecological. I explored how Goat Island's process of collaboration reflected the ecological principles of interconnection, diversity and change, rather than exploring whether the subject matter of their work was ecological or not. As a result of that work I wanted to develop my arts practice not so much as a means to communicate ecological issues but as a

means of experiencing, and providing experiences of, our human interconnections within ecology.

Following my undergraduate dissertation, I created *Small is Beautiful* as my final degree piece. In creating this performance I sought to test and develop the desk-based research from my dissertation. *Small is Beautiful* involved a creative inquiry into the question ‘where do we come from?’ I spent time working with my mother in the devising and performing of the piece and I experimented with materials, such as cardboard, moss and twigs. Through the practical process of creating and publicly performing *Small is Beautiful* I developed a notion of the performance process and product as an ecology of diverse parts. The piece involved: performing with my mother; making a miniature landscape using the cardboard, twigs and moss; re-enacting scenes from *The Lord of the Rings* in reference to me growing up in a ‘shire’ (Herefordshire); dressing up as a ‘hobbit’ by taping moss to my feet; movement sequences developed by spending time in Herefordshire landscapes; and autobiographical texts about my mother and my partner at the time. I felt that it was the complex mix of diverse elements, ideas and performance forms that, in part, made the process and performance ecological. I also developed an idea that working collaboratively both with nonprofessional performers and with nonhuman materials was a key part of my ecological approach. On reflection I knew that my collaboration with my mother had not been a full one and there had been little space for experimenting with how she could meaningfully contribute to the creative process and composition of the piece. I knew that I wanted to explore further a practice of working with people (not trained in performance) over the whole creative process, and see whether this kind of work might be a key part of an ecological approach.

After graduating I worked as apprentice on an intergenerational community project called *A Little Patch of Ground* (2011). This project was conceived of and led by Encounters Arts, a company that specialise in designing and delivering participatory arts projects for ‘people of all ages and cultures’ (Encounters Arts, 2011a). *A Little Patch of Ground* is a performance and community project that Encounters continues to deliver in urban and rural communities across the UK. The particular project I worked on involved two intergenerational groups of 25 people between five and 85 years meeting in their respective locations (Toynbee Halls in the East End of London and Dartington in Devon). The project involved the groups growing their own permaculture inspired vegetable garden and, through a variety of media and performance activities, exploring thoughts on resources, climate change and sustainability.

The project culminated with each group performing in a ‘multi-media performance about relationships with the natural world’ (Encounters Arts, 2011b). Through working on the project, I was able to explore and affirm my suspicion that simply focusing on environmental issues is not necessarily the best way to engage with ecology in its complexity, and I experienced the issues and potentials of intergenerational performance as an ecological way of working. I found that when activities were focused on environmental issues, participants became rather disconnected from each other: adults tended to dominate and there was an obvious divide between children and adults. Conversely, when activities focused on creative exploration, strong relationships and connections between different participants emerged. For example, one activity involved participants telling each other personal stories about a moment of connection in nature. During this and other activities I saw the potential of intergenerational collaboration: the talents and unique energies of the participants emerged in unexpected ways and the group ecology became, as it were, more open and dynamic. Unfortunately, the structure of *A Little Patch of Ground*, with its emphasis on exploring environmental issues, meant that there was little opportunity to develop and experiment with these more dynamic collaborative performance activities. Indeed, the final performance did not evolve through a process of collaboration with the participants, but was structured and scripted by the project director, Ruth Ben-Tovim, and then taught to the participants in the final four weeks of the five month project. The performance product seemed to be overlaid onto the group in a top down approach, and I found this method of working very troubling. It resulted in a performance that was not connected to, nor creatively owned by, the performers themselves. For me, this approach disrespected the creativities and abilities of the participants, as well as the complexities and potentials of performance as a collaborative practice. As a result of working on *A Little Patch of Ground*, I was inspired and driven to develop an alternative way of working with children and adults, one that would treat them as full, capable and skilled collaborators who are vital parts of an ongoing, open and dynamic performance ecology.<sup>2</sup>

### **Revising the Research Inquiry**

In light of my dissertation research, *Small is Beautiful* and *A Little Patch of Ground*, I came to the CDA with two research questions in mind. Firstly, I wanted to explore whether understanding performance - in process and product - as an ecology would enable me to develop methods and practices that enact the ecological. Secondly, I wanted to test out

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<sup>2</sup> For documentation of *Small is Beautiful* and *A Little Patch of Ground*, [www.sarahhopfinger.org.uk](http://www.sarahhopfinger.org.uk).

whether intergenerational collaboration would be a particularly dynamic and diverse performance ecology through which to develop an ecological practice. So, rather than investigate how place-based theatre practices can replace issue-based methods for more creative and experiential sustainability learning in schools (as the original brief had proposed), my professional artistic and critical research experiences had led me to see that there was a pressing gap in practice and scholarship when it came to enacting ecology through performance, and this was a gap that I had the artistic expertise and experience to explore. I chose, therefore, not to conduct my research at the two primary schools that the initial project scoping allowed for, as I wanted to focus on experimenting with the creative process of making professional performance and the school context was not necessarily the right one for my revised inquiry. (However, I did stay in contact with both schools and their head teachers in order to share my research with them. I delivered two workshops with a Primary 3 class (seven to eight year olds) at Hillhead early on in my research in order to scope out my methods of working with children. I also brought the first performance I created, *Age-Old*, to Hillhead, showing it to an intergenerational audience of pupils, teachers and parents. The school was an invaluable resource for me in gaining audience feedback from the pupils, and I delivered workshops to the pupils who saw *Age-Old* to get their responses and insights into the work, which I then took on board as my research progressed.) At the beginning of my CDA I was still committed to exploring place-based performance since this was a field that posed relevant questions about how performance can be part of the ecology of a place (see Wilkie, 2002; Pearson, 2010). Grasping the potential of the intergenerational as offering a distinctive and even definitive response to the challenge of ecological performance making I proposed a revised overarching research question - how can a performance practice be ecological? I also formulated three sub questions: what does an intergenerational performance ecology tell us about wider ecology?; what kind of performance practice emerges from an ecological thinking and doing?; and what understandings of ecology emerge through the thinking and doing of performance?

My revised questions reflected my creative practice and critical research leading up to embarking on my CDA. Given the research context and gaps I had identified within performance practice and scholarship, I found that my new questions demonstrated a more appropriate and pressing research inquiry than the original brief. My re-negotiations of this CDA project also reflect the needs of the non-academic partner. For Catherine Wheels, a key motivation for supporting a practice-as-research PhD was to open up to new ways of working. My background and expertise in devised non-narrative and movement-based performance and

my experiences of working with non-trained performers, differed from the approach taken by Catherine Wheels: their shows are largely narrative and character based and the company collaborates with playwrights and works with professional actors. These differences in our artistic forms and approaches provided an exciting context within which both partners could gain new understandings and perspectives on performance. By shifting the research to a more relevant inquiry in terms of my professional practice, interests and skills, I could offer Catherine Wheels knowledge in what was, for them, a new artistic approach. This exchange of practice took place through the mentoring meetings I had with Fitzpatrick and through me giving presentations and research updates to the company throughout my CDA.

## Thesis Structure

In response to my new research question I chose to work towards a doctoral project that would consist of a balanced practice-based thesis. For my research I created two performances *Age-Old* (2012-2013) and *Wild Life* (2014): *Wild Life* presents the main body of my research, whilst *Age-Old* worked as a scoping out phase of my inquiry and questions. This written thesis frames, elucidates and extends my practice-based findings. This written component is structured in two sections: the first explains the research context of my new questions and explores the fields of existing work that pertain to my inquiry; and the second describes and analyses *Age-Old* and *Wild Life*, demonstrating my research process and findings.<sup>3</sup>

Section One consists of three chapters. In Chapter One, 'Performance', I discuss the scholarly debates and practices in theatre and performance that are relevant to my work, exploring what I think they mean for my research and how my research contributes to and extends these fields. In Chapter Two, 'Ecology', I contextualise and propose my conceptualisation of 'ecology' as a key word in this thesis, exploring specific ecological theories on matter put

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<sup>3</sup> I have shared my research in various contexts throughout my PhD process. These include two publications: a conference review about my experiences at the ASSITEJ Next Generations programme in Linz, Austria, in the journal *Research in Drama Education* (2013); and an Artist's Pages article, 'Wilding Performance', in the Performing Ecos edition of *Performing Ethos* (Allen and Preece, 2015). I was interviewed about my research and its impact beyond the academy for the University of Glasgow's 'College of Art Engagement Blog' <http://www.keblog.arts.gla.ac.uk/2016/02/10/the-wildness-of-performance/>. I have presented at national and international conferences and performance festivals, sharing my research through critical-creative performance papers, including *Earth Matters on Stage*, Reno (2015), *Performance, Ecology and Responsibility*, Canterbury University (2015), *Unfix Festival*, Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow (2015), *Into The New Symposium*, Arches, Glasgow (2014), *Performance & the Environment: New Perspectives on Ecological Performance Making Symposium*, London (2013), *Creative Carbon Scotland*, Summerhall, Edinburgh (2013) and *Intergenerational Performance*, MacRobert Art Centre, Stirling (2013).

forward by Jane Bennett and Karen Barad. Given this research context, in Chapter Three, 'Methodology', I explore and demonstrate why a practice-as-research (PaR) methodology was the most appropriate and timely approach for exploring my research questions and making an original contribution to new knowledge. Section Two consists of two chapters and my conclusion. Chapter Four, 'Exploring Ecological Performance through Intergenerational Practice: *Age-Old*' and Chapter Five, 'Wilding Performance: *Wild Life*', describe my research process and elucidate my findings. For *Age-Old* I collaborated with a seven year-old girl, Carragh McLavin, working with her to co-create a performance that explored and shared our intergenerational relationship. I wanted to test whether intergenerational collaboration may be a particularly dynamic performance ecology through which to understand and develop an ecological practice. For *Wild Life* I collaborated with eight professional and nonprofessional performers aged between nine and 60 years, facilitating a process and directing them in a performance that aimed to explore and enact 'wildness'. My findings from *Age-Old* were included and furthered in *Wild Life*. With *Wild Life* I sought to develop an ecological practice of intergenerational and human-nonhuman collaboration. *Age-Old* and *Wild Life* are documented on the accompanying online files as part of this written thesis. The online files include full length recordings of both performances as well as specific excerpts from rehearsals and performances which highlight elements of my findings. I direct the reader to watch these excerpts where appropriate. Finally, my thesis concludes with an assessment of what my key findings mean for practices and scholarship within and beyond performance and theatre.



## **Section One**

### **Research Context and Methodology**

# Chapter One - Performance

## Introduction

My arts practice has been inspired and influenced by specific approaches to and modes of contemporary theatre and performance. I create collaboratively devised process-led performance that incorporates a large degree of movement and choreography approaches and involves a diverse range of professional and nonprofessional performers.<sup>4</sup> My practice has been informed by practitioners and scholars working in the areas of performance and ecology, collaboration and directing in devised performance, movement and ecology, and performance and nonprofessional performers. In this chapter I discuss how each of these areas represent the research context of my work and in what ways they inform my practice-as-research inquiry into how performance can be and do the ecological. In doing so, I propose how my research attends to specific limitations and gaps within these areas of practice and scholarship. Firstly, however, I introduce and discuss my key term of this chapter: *performance*.

Throughout my thesis I use the term 'performance'. It is necessary to briefly introduce the ways in which I use this term in order to qualify the different processes of performance engaged with in this thesis. I predominantly use 'performance' to refer to the creative artistic process of making performance and to the theatrical productions themselves, which have been created through that process. Hence, I refer to the performance process or the production itself depending on whether I am discussing the practices of making and creating or the public event of the performance. However, the distinctions between process and performance are not always clear cut and a key idea of my thesis is that process and product are not separable domains of performance practice. I propose that the performance event is a kind of carrying on of the creative process as opposed to an end product of it. Whilst there are no tidy ways of separating out processes and products, I make distinctions between them as much as possible. I sometimes use the phrase 'performance practice' to refer simultaneously to the artistic process of making *and* the performance event itself. Working with the distinctions between, and inseparability of, process and product is a vital part of my reflexive analysis of how performance practice can be ecological.

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<sup>4</sup> For more details about my practice, [www.sarahhopfinger.org.uk](http://www.sarahhopfinger.org.uk).

At specific points in this written thesis I use the term ‘performance’ in a broader sense to refer to the performances of diverse humans and nonhumans - their *performativity*. This use of ‘performance’ extends from the performative turn that has taken place across academic disciplines within and beyond performance studies (a key expounder of this broader notion of performance is Judith Butler who discusses gender as performative (1988)). Since the 1960s performance has come to be understood in terms of all human and cultural activities (see, for example, Schechner, 2006). Under this broad definition of ‘performance’, what and how we (humans) act - how we *perform* - is understood to (re)constitute our various individual and collective identities; identities are *performed* as opposed to essentially existing. Performance, in this usage, is read across all human activity, and so, for example, the quotidian performances of gender are what (re)construct gender identities (Butler, 1988). However, in my thesis I draw on theorists who discuss performativity not only in relation to the human but also to the nonhuman (Barad, 2007 and Bennett, 2010). Extending from this I also use ‘performance’ in relation to ecologies themselves, whereby I contend that any ecology (whether it be an environmental, social or performance ecology) has the capacity to effect and be effected by other ecologies: the ecosystem as a system *performs*. This approach resonates with the idea presented by Baz Kershaw that ‘we are *fundamentally* performed by *Earth’s ecologies*’ (2015, p. 113, italics in original). I return to this idea later in the chapter.

## Performance and Ecology

I have identified two main critical approaches to ‘performance’ and ‘ecology’ in this field of practice and scholarship. The first, led by US scholars Una Chaudhuri, Theresa May and Wendy Arons, focuses on how theatre and performance can ‘represent and thematize’ ecology and ecological issues from a ‘material’ (Arons and May, 2012, p. 2) or ‘literal’ (Chaudhuri, 1994, p. 29) standpoint. The second applies a concept of ecology to performance and can be identified in Bonnie Marranca’s *Ecologies of Theater* (1996) and in the approach Bottoms and Goulish take of reflecting on Goat Island’s performance work through the frame of ‘ecological thinking’ (2007, n.p.). I show that there are some limitations in these two main approaches for my project, and therefore go on to explore the small number of other perspectives in the field that offer more complex treatments of ‘performance’ and ‘ecology’.

In her essay ‘There Must Be A Lot of Fish in That Lake: Towards an Ecological Theatre’ Chaudhuri poses the rhetorical question ‘are we human beings - and our activities, such as

theater - an integral part of nature, or are we somehow radically separate from it?' (1994, p. 27). Her question implicates theatre events, and the creative practices of making theatre, as inevitably part of 'nature'. She proposes that theatre can demonstrate its integral part in 'nature' by doing away with natural 'metaphors' and making 'a turn towards the literal' (1994, p. 29). Arons and May follow suit, calling for performance practice and scholarship to take a 'material-ecological standpoint', rather than reduce ecology to a metaphorical 'aesthetic systems theory' that describes relations between 'production and reception, actors and space, or theater and its social context' (2012, p. 2-3). Their notion of involving ecology in material rather than metaphorical ways can be identified in theatre companies who aim to bring greater awareness to the environment and environmental issues. Whirlybird Theatre Company uses both manufactured and 'natural' materials in their performances (in their production *The Worm - An Underground Adventure*, a wormery with real worms and soil was part of the performance).<sup>5</sup> In my reading of their work, the actuality of 'natural' objects onstage is part of their aim to bring attention to the 'natural world' (Eco Drama, 2015a). In a different but related vein, Sue Palmer discusses the solo show *Let's get some weather in here* by performance artist Mary Southcott: Palmer reflects on a moment in the performance where Southcott switches on a fan that blows the real daffodils that are onstage, describing it as a moment where 'the outside is suddenly on the inside . . . The daffodils have performed for us' (Palmer, 2015, p. 60). In both of these productions the emphasis is on bringing the more-than-human onto the stage. Arons and May imply that by representing 'ecology' through literally including the more-than-human onstage, a greater awareness of the materiality of ecology and of ecological issues can be achieved for an audience. These critical perspectives and performance practices seem to usefully challenge anti-ecological presumptions about the separation between inside and outside and culture and nature. By avoiding the reduction of 'nature' to metaphor through literally bringing objects from 'the outdoor environment' onto the theatre stage, practitioners may indeed draw attention to ecology as a material reality. Focusing on these material-ecological representations, as opposed to rendering 'ecology' merely as a conceptual idea that we can apply to a performance system to better understand its relations, may indeed challenge the 'binary thinking' that is 'carrying us to the brink of ecological collapse' (Arons and May, 2012, p. 1). This focus on ecology in literal and material terms is something that my practice-as-research projects tested out and expanded upon, wherein I explored how theatrical performances may succeed in being ecological inasmuch as they can demonstrate how we humans and our cultural practices of performance are inseparable from the wider ecologies of

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<sup>5</sup> I saw this performance at Paisley Arts Centre, February 2014.

environment and the more-than-human. However, upon further examination of these artistic and scholarly approaches to performance and ecology, there is a risk that the complexity of ecologies is ignored due to underlying presumptions about 'ecology' being some 'thing' that needs to be *brought* onto the stage.

Whilst Arons and May emphasise ecology as materiality, they also call for practitioners and scholars to find ways to *represent* and *thematise* the 'more-than-human world on stage' (2012, p. 1). Their proposal that the 'material-ecological' should replace the 'metaphorical' draws metaphor and material as dichotomies, which is limiting when it comes to my inquiry into developing an ecological *practice*, where performance might enact the ecological through its very structures and methods of creative practice. In my research I found that ecological enactment inevitably involves representation, metaphor, the literal and the material, where these are impossible to disentangle. Indeed, in response to Arons and May, Bottoms helpfully questions whether 'nature and metaphoricity are in any way separable', asking '[i]sn't the human relationship with nature always already performed and performative?' (2007, p. 19). By focusing only on *representing* ecology in the theatre I think that Arons and May risk reducing ecology to a 'thing' or object, and a singular one at that. By calling for the materiality of the more-than-human to be brought 'inside' onto the theatre stage in order to be better represented, they presuppose that ecology is in the first place 'outside' of theatre spaces and performances. Furthermore, by claiming performance should focus on *representing* ecology - by arguing that performance should be *about* ecology - they do not pay attention to how performance can *be* and *do* the ecological. Thus, and somewhat ironically, they seem to favour a representational over an actual engagement with ecology.

Arons and May also demonstrate an over-simplified treatment of ecology through proposing that performance should (merely) engage with 'material-ecological issues' (2012, p. 2). This attributes a rather limiting and instrumentalist identity to performance, reducing 'ecology' merely to 'issues'. They problematically assume that 'ecology' has to (and can) be *brought into* performance practices by humans in the form of materiality and thematic issue. As such, their critical approach reframes ecology as a material reality that is separable from the social and cultural, whereby they largely exclude any complex understanding of 'nature' and 'culture' as mutually constitutive and co-produced (Szerszynski, Heim and Waterton, 2003, p. 4). I think that Arons and May risk reinventing the issues that surround the concept of 'nature' through their reductive treatment of 'ecology'. 'Nature' is a concept that has been recurrently criticised for reinstating 'the environment' as outside of, or the background to,

human endeavour (see, for example, Morton, 2009; Bennett, 2010 and Barad, 2007). Whilst Arons and May deem metaphorical usages of 'ecology' as serving only to 'sanitize' the term (2012, p. 3), I propose that, in fact, they enact their own sanitisation of 'ecology' by reducing the ecological to representation, theme and issue, and by reinstating it as separable from 'performance'. By arguing that the material-ecological must be brought onto the theatre stage they (inadvertently) assume 'ecology' is in the first instance outside of, and separated from, theatres and their 'performances'. In this way I find that their approach limits and even inhibits the scope for a complex treatment of performance (in) ecology and my proposition that performance (in process and theatrical event) is an ecology that continuously and inevitably participates within the wider ecology of Earth.

The idea that performance is ecological when it represents 'ecology' through works that are *about* 'the natural environment' and 'ecological issues' is reflected in many performance approaches that claim an ecological or environmental focus. Whirlybird Theatre Company engage with the 'natural world' as a topic and theme: its work aims to allow audiences to 're-imagine our relationship to the natural world' (Eco Drama, 2015b). Scottish company Feral Theatre creates theatre shows that are *about* environmental issues - its current piece *Freaks of Nature* is, the Company's publicity states, 'about extinction' (<http://feraltheatre.co.uk/past-productions/>, no date). Puppet State Theatre Company produced a children's theatre show, *The Man Who Planted Trees* (2013), which is described as 'environmental' in that it retells the story of 'a shephard who plants a forest' (<http://www.puppetstate.com/shows/the-man-who-planted-trees/>, no date). Puppet State used real branches to represent the trees planted by the shephard: I felt that this use of 'natural' materials to represent 'the environment' risked objectifying ecology.<sup>6</sup> Whilst the show may have told an inspiring environmental story, the production's purely representational approach seemed to me to reinstate 'the environment' as something 'out there' beyond the here and now of the live performance. I am not suggesting that ecological performance should avoid being about or representing ecology and ecological issues. Rather, by merely focusing on and representing 'ecology' as theme and issue, scholarship and practice neglects the ecological potentials of performance *forms, practices* and *methods*. My research shows that the ecological-ness of performance is not necessarily in its subject matter or thematic content, but in what performance *does*. I set out to explore how performance process and public event might, in their very doing, enact our unavoidable entanglements with each (human) other, the more-than-human and other ecologies(including environmental / 'natural' ones).

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<sup>6</sup> I saw this performance at the Scottish Storytelling Centre at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, August 2013.

There is a real risk that the very thinking that artists are often aiming to change - that 'the environment' or 'nature' is separate from 'humans' and 'culture' - can be inadvertently reinstated by the theatrical methods and forms of the work. That is, when theatre practices treat 'ecology' merely as thematic content, or as something 'outside' to be brought into the theatre in the form of 'natural' objects, they risk drawing the inside (theatre) and outside (ecology) as separable domains, as initially fixed dichotomies. The referenced companies and artists do not, I am sure, assume this dichotomous relation, and indeed it is important to note that these cited theatre works are not critically-informed research practices. These types of practices play an important role within the diverse field of ecological performance, yet what my analysis of them illuminates is that the ecological potentials of theatre and performance are missed when 'ecology' is reductively treated only as representation, theme, issue or 'natural' material. I have thus found there to be more possibilities for developing an ecological performance practice in the second approach I have identified in the field.

The second predominant approach is to *apply* concepts of ecology to performance practice. Bonnie Marranca interprets Robert Wilson's Gilgamesh play *The Forest* as an 'ecology' because he 'chooses all manner of species of texts and images from the world archive, then stages their fertility and adaptability in new environments' (1993 p. 78). She implies that performance can be ecological in its *form*, where the theatrical form can embody the ecological principles of, for example, adaptability. My research tests out and extends this approach by exploring how performance can *enact* the ecological through its very practices and forms of doing. Goulish articulates Goat Island performances as ecologies on the grounds that they are 'closed systems' where 'each moment in some way points equally to each other moment' (in Bottoms and Goulish, 2007, p. 178). This idea relates to Marranca by further implying how performances themselves can act like ecosystems in terms of the form and structure of the production itself. Goat Island performer Karen Christopher suggests how, in the collaborative working process of Goat Island, 'we try to ensure that the elements and ideas that come in . . . are as interconnected as the elements of a complex eco-system' (in Bottoms and Goulish, 2007, p. 119). For Christopher, the collaborative *process* is ecological because it is sustained by the diversity of and interconnections between the human collaborators and their different ideas; the process of creating performance works like a complex environmental ecosystem. Such perspectives, taken together, suggest how collaborative performance - in process and product - works like an ecology. I have tested out and extended these ideas by exploring how performance practices might *enact* the ecological.

However, by proposing that performance process and product are like ecosystems, there is a risk that ‘ecology’ is deployed in the critical literature merely as a useful analogy for the human activities of performance. Treating ‘ecology’ as a systems concept to be mapped onto performance processes and products may epitomise the metaphorical usage that Arons and May claim serves only to ‘sanitize’ the term and eschew ‘its political as well as its material-ecological implications’ (2012, p. 3). However, this critique ignores the nuances entailed in what it means to treat performance as an ecosystem. What this second approach (which is largely characterised by the work of Goat Island) may actually do - or what it can lead to - is a more complex treatment of performance ecologies: this approach paves the way for me to explore and coax out the ecological potential of collaborative devised performance practices (which is what I do in the following section of this chapter). In taking this approach, it is vital to consider what conceptualisations of ‘ecology’ are being used in relation to performance. In my reading, the risk with the analogy-based applications of ecology to performance (as I identified in Marranca, 1993 and Bottoms and Goulish, 2007), is that ‘ecology’ is collapsed into simple interconnections: ecology is used predominantly as a concept for describing connections between elements in (human) performance systems. Anthropologist Tim Ingold challenges the concept of connection, accounting for ecology not as ‘a network of connected points, but a meshwork of interwoven lines’ (2011, p. 64). He argues that to propose connections between one thing and another is to assume a prior separation between them: ‘things *are* their relations’ he writes (2011, p. 70). Ecologies are, in Ingold’s view, inherently open because they are ‘a proliferation of loose ends’ and so the continuity and sustainability of life depends on ‘a world that is not fully joined up, not fully articulated’ (2013, p. 132). If an environmental ecology is fully joined up, with each element pointing equally to every other element as Goulish suggests with Goat Island performances, then it cannot sustain itself.<sup>7</sup> In terms of Ingold’s implication that ecology is an open, ongoing and dynamic ‘meshwork’, to describe a constant state of equilibrium and (complete) interconnection is to describe a dead ecology and therefore not an ecology. By conceptualising ‘ecology’ reductively as a closed network this critical approach risks merely drawing analogies between ‘performance’ and ‘ecology’ and thereby (and in a different way to the first approach I identified) reducing them to separable domains.

The two main approaches in scholarship and practice I have outlined risk (in different ways) reducing ‘ecology’ to something we can bring into performance from the outside, configuring

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<sup>7</sup> Interestingly the new company that has replaced Goat Island is called Every House Has a Door: perhaps the ‘door’ implies a more open practice than the closure suggested by the symbolism of an ‘island’ in ‘Goat Island’?



'performance' and 'ecology' as separable. With the first approach we humans bring the material reality of 'ecology' into our 'performances' through ecological representations, themes and issues. In the second, we analogously apply the concept of 'ecology' as a network in order to critically understand 'performance' as an interconnected system of diverse elements. Both of these approaches inadvertently imply that 'ecology' is something to be *used* by humans, which could even (re)instate 'ecology' as a resource for humans to take from. Both approaches seem to assume that we can somehow view 'ecology' from a distance and at a remove, implying that we have a choice about whether to include 'ecology' in 'performance', and whether 'performance' participates in 'ecology'. This assumption is also evident in the way that Giannachi and Stewart discuss the 'interface between ecology and arts' (2005, p. 20): an 'interface' implies that 'art' is initially separate from 'ecology'. Timothy Morton proposes that all art is 'ecological insofar as it is made from materials and exists in the world' (2010, p. 11). He implies that ecology unavoidably figures in all art and all art unavoidably participates in the wider ecology of Earth. I think that to treat ecology as something we can choose to represent materially in our performances is to presuppose performance is *different* from ecology, and to use ecology as an analogy of performance supposes that performance is merely *like* ecology. I argue that there is no choice about being in ecology and I take as reality that we are always already acting *in* and acted *upon* by diverse ecologies: performance is (in) ecology. From this standpoint, my research builds on the two approaches I have identified, and I develop the ecological possibilities of performance in a different direction by asking: what might an ecological practice *do*? I think that working with binaries between 'performance' and 'ecology' is, however, unavoidable across all artistic practices that engage with ecology, and my research is of course no exception. For me, the question is whether and how scholars and practitioners are reflexive in their thinking and doing of performance and ecology, and how the paradoxes that will inevitably arise are taken into account. Indeed, some thinkers in the field propose that it is by theatre working with and exposing the binary thinking - in particular that binary divide between culture and nature - that theatre can disrupt and refigure binaries.

Kershaw proposes that theatre has played a key role in upholding the 'disastrous opposition' that modernist traditions of European 'enlightenment' pitched between 'culture' and 'nature' and 'man' and 'environment' (2007, p. 15). He discusses how theatre has, for the most part, attempted to 'hold a mirror up to "nature" ', which has tended to 'hermetically seal it off from the "natural world" ' (2007, p. 7). He suggests that, if performance exposes this complicit role it has played in upholding the nature / culture binary, it could offer

revisions to that binary. He draws on Chaudhuri's proposition that, by 'making space on its stage for ongoing acknowledgements of the rupture it participates in - the rupture between nature and culture . . . - the theater can become the site of a much-needed ecological consciousness' (1994, p. 28). By 'rupture' Chaudhuri is referring to the part that theatre has played in the nineteenth century humanist tradition of constructing 'nature' as dichotomous to 'culture' and 'society': she argues that 'humanism located its shaky foundations on the growing gap between the social and natural worlds' (1994, p. 23). Kershaw suggests that postmodern performance, in particular, may be 'a strong arena for such revisions, because its reflexivity may most crucially challenge the dualisms of modernism' (2005, p. 79). He argues that the paradox and irony of 'postmodern pastiche' are well-suited qualities for revising the culture-nature divide (2007, p. 273). To illustrate this, Kershaw uses the example of an activist performance by Earth First in Yellowstone National Park in 1985, where a man dresses as a bear in order to draw attention to the ecological damage caused by logging (2007, p. 268-272). Kershaw discusses the paradox of a human protester 'taking over' nature (dressing up as a bear) at the same time as he is 'taking the side of nature' by using 'anthropomorphism to attack the Forest Service for the ecological damage it condones' (2007, p. 270). Kershaw argues that this action, that draws on 'postmodern performance art in its playing with the pastiche sham of dressing up as a bear', is an example of how 'performance ecologies [can] generate a more hopeful prognosis for nature' (2007, p. 271; p. 272). He suggests that this performance by Earth First is successful in ecological terms because it 'transformed the *contradictions of its practices into paradoxes*' (2007, p. 272, my italics). He implies that paradoxical postmodern performance can enact how we and our practices *are* nature, as opposed to separate from it.

This idea of paradox is explored by researcher Lisa Woynarski. She offers a critical account of Fevered Sleep's *The Weather Factory* (Wales 2010), a piece that could be considered postmodern pastiche. A house in a Welsh town was 'installed' with 'weather' - the bathroom was covered with growing moss and it was raining in the basement - and so the 'weather' was ironically 'brought indoors' and human audiences were 'implicated in a relationship with [it]' (Woynarski, 2015a). Woynarski argues that immersing audience members in the installation served to reveal 'the way the weather shapes human action and identity and the way humans shape the climate' (2015b, p. 25). The performance installation reflected the 'paradox of performance and ecology' because it simultaneously embodied and disrupted 'binary thinking' between inside and outside, and the piece could open up 'an affective space in which to interrogate our relationship to the more-than-human world' (Woynarski, 2015a).

This resonates with Kershaw's suggestion that theatre can be used as a tool of communication to dismantle and reshape itself, or to half repeat an error in order to know how to avoid it (2007, p. 18). Through her example and analysis, Woynarski demonstrates the potential of performance to both embody and revise culture / nature and inside / outside binaries through turning its contradictions of practice into productive paradoxes. Kershaw argues that performance, in its various manifestations within and beyond the theatrical frame, is a 'paradoxical affair' since it is both real and not real and ephemeral and durable, and performance 'exists always in an ontologically subjunctive mode' (2007, p. 25). These paradoxical aspects of performance make it a potentially powerful way to engage with ecology (2007, p. 25). This approach seems at odds with theorist Brian Massumi who, in his preface to philosopher and choreographer Erin Manning's book *Always More Than One, Individuations Dance* (2013), argues that even if we seek to transcend binaries, by working with them at all we inevitably evoke habits of thinking that are difficult to 'shake off' (in Manning, 2013, p. x). He discusses how Manning's ecological practice and theoretical writing take the non-binary notion of 'reciprocity' as her 'launching pad' (in Manning, 2013, p. ix). Whilst Massumi and Manning demonstrate a healthy suspicion of binaries, their approach seems rather simplistic and idealistic in its outright dismissal of binaries. It is arguably impossible to ever fully avoid using, and thinking with, binaries. Perhaps supposing that we can fully jettison binaries is to ultimately enact a fixed binary approach, in that the options are presented as either to work or not work with binaries? A more realistic approach emerges when the inevitability of binaries is taken into account such that through working and experimenting with them we might - even momentarily - transgress their rigidity, limitations and dangers. This resonates with how Morton describes what he calls the 'ecological thought': he suggests ecology can be encountered through even the most anti-ecological ideas and so even 'at the limit of dualism, we [can] encounter ecology' (2010, p. 95).

Kershaw discusses his own critical approach of writing about performance and ecology. Part of developing healthier 'ecologies of performance' is, for Kershaw, a question of wrestling with the 'dominant meaning of key words bequeathed by modernism' such as 'nature' and 'culture' as oppositional entities, wherein all discussions of ecology have to engage with the 'game' of linguistic challenge and transformation (2007, p. 17). He implies that by embracing binaries as productive paradoxes, rather than treating them as contradictions to be transcended or ignored, we can engage with the complexities that are required in engaging with ecology. This is because ecology, in its very definition, is arguably a paradox. Kershaw explores the etymology of 'ecology', explaining how the word 'derives from the Greek οἶκος

(*oikos*, “household”) and *λόγος* (*logos*, “study”), which implies *both* “study of the house” and “study *in* house” of nature’ (2007, p. 16). So, when humans name, study or explore ecology we can paradoxically only do so from being *in* it as we are always already *part of* Earth’s wider ecologies no matter what we are doing or where we are. Through his concept of ‘performance ecologies’ Kershaw usefully shows that performance can never *not* be in ecology, implying that ecological performance must begin from the reality that we are exploring something (ecology) that we are always already part of. Along my research trajectory, an underlying question emerged: how can performance engage with something - ecology - that we are always already living, thinking, doing and performing in? This question challenges those general trends I identified in the theoretical approaches which bring or map ‘ecology’ in / onto ‘performance’. I suggest that ecological performance is neither about bringing ‘ecology’ into my work nor bringing my work ‘outside’ into ‘ecology’, but instead is about embracing the paradoxes of my work in order to practice the inevitability of performance as an ecology that is always already participating *in* wider ecologies: culture and nature, human and nonhuman, and inside and outside as inseparably involved - and implicated - in performance. Kershaw draws attention to homologies, rather than analogies, between ‘cultural’ and ‘natural’ ecologies (2007, p. 22). For Kershaw, performance is not merely ‘like’ an ecosystem, but *is* one: performance ecologies are not analogies of environmental (or other) ecologies but are homologous to them. In this sense, there is no given or fixed separation between human and nonhuman, culture and nature, and performance and ecology. A key aspect in my research approach was the necessity for, on the one hand, a continued suspicion of and challenge to binary thinking and doing and, on the other hand, an embrace of the inevitability of (re)using and (re)constructing binaries and the useful paradoxes that can be evoked through them in practice and critical reflection. Indeed, the reflexive accounts of my research projects (Chapters Four and Five) demonstrate how separations and binaries are an inevitable part of the performance process and analysis, where ideas of culture / nature, inside / outside, performance / ecology and human / nonhuman are implicitly used throughout my work. What became key during my research was how to resist both fixing these binary categories down and being fixed down by these categories, so that whilst binaries may inevitably be (re)used they are unable to override the ecological complexity and potentials of the practice-as-research projects. Transforming the contradictions of practices and theorisations into productive paradoxes enabled me to explore how performance can *do* the ecological in terms of the devising process and the performance event.

Kershaw argues that ‘theatre and performance in all their manifestations always involve the interrelational interdependence of “organisms-in-environments”’ (2007, p. 16). He introduces the terms ‘ecologies of theatre’ and ‘ecologies of performance’ by proposing that they reference ‘the study - and the knowledge it produces - of theatres and performances when they are considered as ecosystems’ (2007, p. 16). I want to build on Kershaw’s approach through exploring the questions: what kind of performance practice emerges from an ecological thinking and doing; and, what understandings of ecology emerge through the thinking and doing of performance? This latter question demonstrates that if performance *is* an ecology then performance may have a lot to tell us about other (actual) ecologies.

I can identify Kershaw’s notions of ‘performance ecology’ and ‘ecologies of performance’ in the approach taken by performance practitioner Nic Green.<sup>8</sup> Green describes herself as an artist who ‘remains committed to developing creative work which can be named as ecological in it’s nature, in the sense that her practice focuses on the study of relationships’, and it is stated that the ‘political aim of this work is to (re) understand and (re) present the narrative of the individual as a part of a mutually dependent ecological paradigm’ ([http://www.nicgreen.org.uk/#!\\_\\_about](http://www.nicgreen.org.uk/#!__about), no date). My project both resonates with and extends Green’s approach of creating performance that is ‘ecological in it’s nature’ in that I explore and develop a critically informed practice that might *do* the ecological through its creative modes and artistic forms of process and product. Interestingly Kershaw does not offer any sustained discussion about the creative *process* of making performance. My research attends to these gaps in practice and scholarship. I explore what is at stake when we attend to performance as an ecosystem that itself participates within the wider interdependencies of diverse ecologies. To do this, I attempted to devise and develop practices that could account for, and emerge through, human-nonhuman and performance-ecology inseparability. I now turn to those perspectives that offer insights into how human and nonhuman actants are implicated in performance processes and products.

Artist and scholar Minty Donald draws from Jane Bennett’s concept of ‘vibrant matter’ (2010) to demonstrate how process and performance involve, and emerge through, human and nonhuman vibrancy. Donald reflects on her site-specific work *Bridging* (Glasgow, 2010 and 2012). The piece involved working with a boat crew to thread rope repeatedly across the River Clyde in an act of ‘bridging’ (Donald, 2014, p. 118-121). She discusses how the tide,

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<sup>8</sup> Nic Green is a colleague and friend who I have worked with on a number of occasions as a student and artist over the past nine years (including her feminist performance project *Trilogy*).

river, rope and weather were unpredictable agencies effecting the process and performance: ‘the messy and unplanned emotions and actions of the boat crew, ourselves [the artists], and the spectators’ became ‘potentially disruptive and uncontrollable forces, intermingled with those of tide and weather.’ (2014, p. 124). Donald articulates an approach to performance that understands process and product as a complex and inclusive ‘interplay between human and more-than-human agencies’ (2014, p. 121). She also demonstrates a performance practice which *enacts*, as opposed to merely represents, human and nonhuman vibrant matter.<sup>9</sup> My research builds on Donald’s notion of the ‘interplay between’ humans and nonhumans through developing practices that can enact the inseparability of humans and nonhumans. Whilst it is impossible to avoid using the binary terms and concepts of ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’, my research finding, *just doing-ness*, captures how performance might demonstrate human-nonhuman entanglement as opposed to only demonstrating human-nonhuman connection or interplay (where these notions presume an initial separation between humans and nonhumans).<sup>10</sup> Through my invention and use of *just doing-ness* I demonstrate the way my ecological practice was able to, at times, embrace the complexity of how ‘humans’ and ‘nonhumans’ are constantly constituted through intra-activity: how ‘we’ and ‘others’ are always already intra-active and intra-acting. ‘Intra-activity’ is a concept put forward by Karen Barad, which refers to how all (human and nonhuman) ‘phenomena’ are constituted through the entangled dynamics of matter (2007, p. 139). For me, entanglement is not a case of humans entangling with nonhumans: that is, entanglement does not refer to the knotting together of originally separable humans and nonhumans. Rather, I use the notion of ‘entanglement’ to reference the ways in which all ‘humans’ and ‘nonhumans’ are continuously produced through, and participate in, the ongoing and dynamic entanglements of matter.

Battista explores German artist Wolfgang Laib’s work through the lens of Barad’s concept of ‘agential realism’, a philosophy that Battista frames as a posthumanist perspective for problematising the privileged human position in the world (Battista, 2012, p. 67). Laib is a visual artist who collaborates with ‘natural’ materials, such as pollen, wood and beeswax, and whose artwork is underpinned by the intra-active *process* between him and the material (Battista, 2012, p. 67-8). Battista proposes that Laib’s method of working with pollen embodies a posthumanist vision of the human as entangled in a web of relations and as not

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<sup>9</sup> As already argued, representation can be part of enactment. I do not wish to construct representation and enactment as binary oppositions.

<sup>10</sup> I discuss *just doing-ness* in Chapter Five.

the ‘only agentic actor’ (2012, p. 67). Battista describes Laib’s action of collecting pollen from a field, where his artistic process becomes part of that ecosystem: according to Battista, Laib ‘collaborates in a continuing creative process’ with ‘the plants producing the pollen’ (2012, p. 71). Laib removes the pollen from its context of plants and puts it into an arts space, which Battista proposes is a ‘strategic choice that sets a local structure for the pollen, its new boundaries, allowing its properties to emerge and become differentially manifested’ (2012, p. 71). She suggests how the rectangular shapes of pollen that Laib creates ‘acquire value and meaning in themselves, for the pollen is not there to communicate something more or different from the physical performance of its own materiality’ (2012, p. 72). Battista argues that the nonhuman (pollen) can, as it were, speak for itself, implying how art might resist an anthropocentric narrative of us humans choosing to use or represent ‘nonhumans’ and ‘ecology’ in our work. Battista’s account suggests how the creative process and art piece emerge through human-nonhuman entanglement, which resonates with my claim that performance practice - in process and product - is an ecology of diverse human and nonhuman collaborators. Furthermore, Battista implies how agency emerges in the enactment of intra-activity: rather than attributing agency to the artist or the pollen, this account reveals what I chose to describe in my research findings as the *agency of practice*.<sup>11</sup>

However, Battista seems to reconfigure a rather reductive human-nonhuman relation when she claims that the artist ‘is transformed into an instrument for the material to become and express itself’: Laib, she proposes, finds ‘the right conditions for the actor / pollen to stand out and flare into visibility on *stage*’ (2012, p. 72, italics in original). Battista inadvertently implies that Laib, the human, disappears from the art, to be replaced by the pollen, the nonhuman. This demonstrates a tendency in ecology-based arts practices to render the human invisible. Instead of ‘an anthropocentric drama’, with the nonhuman as ‘scenic backdrop’ (Bottoms, Franks and Kramer, 2012, p. 1), the nonhuman takes centre stage and the human is somewhere in the background. By focusing on the nonhuman over the human, I think that Battista reinvents an anthropocentric approach: in her account the human is *the* instrument that allows the nonhuman to ‘stand out’ and be ‘visible’, implying the human still has ultimate agency. In my research project *Wild Life* I sought neither to foreground the human nor the nonhuman but to allow the performance to emerge through their entanglements. This may be an impossible task since arguably we cannot escape our human (centered) perspectives. However, I found that my paradoxical attempt to foreground neither human nor nonhuman allowed a nuanced practice to emerge, a practice which was attentive

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<sup>11</sup> I discuss this finding in Chapter Five.

to the performance ecology of distinct yet entangled humans and nonhumans. Furthermore, I developed a practice where humans are not rendered as instruments for nonhuman agency but rather humans *participate* in agency, where agency is always already a matter of dynamic and ongoing human-nonhuman entanglement.

Whilst I contend that any performance or theatre practice is an ecology which is inevitably part of the wider ecologies of the Earth, this is an unhelpfully generalist claim when it comes to exploring and actually developing an ecological performance practice. A tendency to be overly broad is evident in other contributions to the performance and ecology field. Sally Jane Norman draws on Barad's concept of 'agential materialism' (2007) but, unlike Battista who applies Barad to a specific example of practice, Norman simply proposes that all theatre is an 'encounter of human and nonhuman agency' and an 'open ended' apparatus that is always in the process of 'intra-acting with other apparatuses' (2012, p. 119). In a similarly generalising way, John-David Dewsbury draws on Jane Bennett (2010) and makes the rather sweeping claim that the 'practiced immediacy of any performance art' can open 'up ways of staging . . . the active lure of material affordance' (2012, p. 81). He implies that any performance might bring attention to the vibrancy of matter. Whilst Norman and Dewsbury provide useful provocations for the performance and ecology field by suggesting that all theatre and performance art involves the human and nonhuman, ultimately they offer little in terms of addressing *how* performance (in process and product) can not only work with, but also reveal and account for, its material human-nonhuman 'intra-activity' and 'vibrancy'. I wanted to avoid such a generalising approach, seeking to develop a more nuanced account of the actualities of a distinctive intergenerational performance ecology and the specific practices which were explored and developed. I explored *how* performance can enact its ecological participation, which meant working beyond claiming and showing that performance is an ecology that always participates in wider ecologies to actually developing practices that - in their *doing* - can enact and expose this participation. I found that part of this ecological enactment involves a practice of attentive listening and responsiveness to, what can be called, the 'feedback' of the performance ecology.

Kershaw argues that, in order to respond to ecological imperatives, we need to attend to what Bateson describes as negative feedback loops (1972). To achieve 'sustainability all [ecological] systems rely on circuits of feedback . . . [and this] is called negative feedback because it prevents the system from running out of control through overproduction in any one or more of its parts' (Kershaw, 2007, p. 52). Kershaw implies that, whether a riverbank or



performance (2007, p. 147), ecologies communicate when any of their parts become too dominant. What matters is whether, and how, negative feedback is heeded and responded to. If we ignore it, which he suggests theatre and performance practice tends to do, then the ecology is 'in trouble' (2007, p. 195; p. 53). He implies that, whilst humans have never stopped being part of wider ecology, we do run the risk of not knowing how to register and respond to its feedback. Heddon implies an approach for registering and responding to ecological feedback through her conceptualisation of performance practice as 'entangled listening'. She describes a 'dialogical listening which stretches a radical openness towards interconnections, "listening with"'. She explores how the one-on-one work of performance artist Adrian Howells cultivated 'a careful attending - a stretching towards' his human participants and the 'objects' in his performances. She proposes that his work was 'an invitation to attend' and to listen 'beyond the human' and it therefore potentially displaced 'the exceptionalism of the human (as) actor' (Heddon, forthcoming). Her discussions imply 'entangled listening' as a practice of participating in, and attending to, the human and nonhuman participants / collaborators of performance ecologies. This frames my proposal that collaboration is a key part of ecological performance practice, where *who* and *what* the collaborators of performance are is questioned, critiqued and reconceptualised. My research thus involved a radical re-conceptualising of 'collaboration' and 'directing', key terms in the field of devised performance. As such, the field of devised performance offers another critical vector to my exploration of the ecological in performance.

### **Collaboration and Directing in Devised Performance**

Devising is a process of generating a performance (Heddon and Milling, 2006, p. 4-5; Govan, Nicholson and Normington, 2007, p. 4). For this project I worked with the definition that devising is a collaborative process of 'creating a performance from scratch . . . without a pre-existing script' (Heddon and Milling, 2006, p. 3). Whilst the history of devising is one of 'exceeding theatrical boundaries' (Govan, Nicholson and Normington, 2007, p. 3), it has become, since the 1990s, a widely used approach in performance making (Oddey, 1994, p. 8) and is often used in traditional theatrical production (Heddon and Milling, 2006, p. 6). Devising is thus not inherently alternative or radical, and locating its relationship to my research involves a sharp focus on specific details of, and tensions around, collaboration and directing that I explore here through references to the collaborative and directing approaches adopted by Forced Entertainment and Goat Island.

Forced Entertainment is a Sheffield-based theatre company, consisting of six artists including the artistic director Tim Etchells. The Company has been making collaboratively devised performance work for 30 years with the aim of exploring ‘what theatre and performance can mean in contemporary life’, and their work ‘is always a kind of conversation or negotiation’ (Forced Entertainment, 2016). Goat Island, which disbanded in 2008, was a Chicago-based collaborative performance company made up of six core artists including the artistic director Lin Hixson. The company created performances that involved ‘a personal vocabulary of movement, both dance-like and pedestrian, that often [made] extreme physical demands on the performers’ (<http://www.goatlandperformance.org/goatland.htm#>, no date).

Collaborative devising practices developed during the 1960s and 1970s and, in many instances, were a response to the political concerns of the time, with non-hierarchical methods of working being employed by companies wishing to practice ‘participatory democracy’ and to challenge societal power structures (Heddon and Milling, 2006, p. 95-100). The structures and processes of creating theatre, as much as the content itself, were seen as politically significant (2006, p. 95). Devising, from this frame of reference, is underpinned by the notion that politics are about *how* performance is made, as much as *what* is made. My research extends this approach insofar as I am concerned with the methods of creating performance as much as with what the performance outcome is: specifically, I aimed to develop a performance practice that *enacts* the ecological, as opposed to one that merely represents, or is about, ‘ecology’. The early collaborative devising companies focused on sharing roles and making decisions through discussion and consensus (Heddon and Milling, 2006, p. 101). Collaboration was largely seen to operate through agreement and unity. Heddon and Milling discuss some of the issues raised by these approaches: dominating and hierarchical relations would often materialise within processes because ‘too much was expected of the structure itself’ (2006, p. 223). So, whilst there was a concern to ‘give voice to the voiceless, and to make new and different points of view heard and seen’ (2006, p. 7), the unquestioning faith in consensus often occluded some rather different and even conflicting perspectives within a group.

Collaborative devising, therefore, developed towards a more explicit focus on the *differences* and individual skills of collaborators (Heddon and Milling, 2006, p. 111). This approach was furthered to emphasise the diversity of participants rather than their agreements and similarities. Alison Oddey discusses how conflict is ‘part of the devising process and creation

of the product' (1997, p. 105), citing how performance company The People Show (1966) 'relied on the differences and conflict between individual artists within the group' (1997, p. 5-6). Harry Wilson, in discussing directing in devising, contends that it is how 'conflicts are navigated that provides the most interesting moments of collaboration' (2012, p. 54). Etchells argues that collaboration for Forced Entertainment is not about 'perfect unity but about difference, collisions, incompatibilities' (1999, p. 55-56). Similarly, Christopher proposes that collaboration for Goat Island arose through the different ideas and elements that collaborators brought in, and thrived 'precisely because of [this] diversity' (in Bottoms and Goulish, 2007, p. 119-20). These perspectives imply that differences might not merely be contained by, and celebrated in, a collaborative process, but that differences *lead* and *determine* the process. I developed this notion by exploring how the ongoing and differential dynamics *between* collaborators can shape and make the process and performance. Specifically, I found that attending to collaborators as differential and dynamic entanglements (rather than fixed and *a priori* separable 'selves') may be the most radical way for diverse 'voices' to be heard. Radically, the 'voices' I attended to in my project were both human and nonhuman (and, more accurately, they were 'voices' that emerge in-between).

There is a preoccupation with interruption and unpredictability in the theory and practice of devising performance. Practitioners often cite the 'mistake and accident' as part of their practices for generating performance (Heddon and Milling, 2006, p. 12). This concern with unpredictability relates back to the 'happenings' of the 1960s, which are a key antecedent of collaborative devising. Artists understood that the unplanned and random in the 'happening' had the capacity to close the gap between 'art and everyday life' (Govan, Nicholson and Normington, 2007, p. 24-5). Deliberate 'chance procedures' were employed to generate the material and structuring of the event, whereby 'new and unexpected meanings [could] arise' (Heddon and Milling, 2006, p. 65). The 'happening' demonstrated a favouring of the unplanned, unknown and unpredictable. Laura Cull describes how, in relation to John Cage's influence on 'happenings', the use of chance was a 'means to expose the ego of the author to the intervention of worldly forces into the art-making process, such that the author is no longer the sole arbiter of events' (2013, p. 49). My research relates to and extends these aspects of the 'happening', whereby I sought to develop practices that displace the artist / director as central and in (full) control of the art work. I explored practices and modes that could account for how the artistic activities of performance are always already acting in (and

acted upon) by the (often unpredictable and unknown) ‘worldly forces’ of distinct but related environmental and social ecologies.

Related to the qualities of the ‘happening’, Etchells discusses collaborative devising as a practice of trusting ‘discoveries and accidents’ and distrusting ‘intentions’, celebrating ‘misunderstandings and misrecognitions’ above ‘clear communication’ (1999, p. 55). Etchells provides a useful touchstone for understanding performance - in process and product - as an emergent and unpredictable ecology. However, he problematically configures a fixed binary by pitting the openness of mistake and accident against the supposed closure of the intended and predicted. This fixed binary thinking is also evident in Oddey’s suggestion that devising replaces the ‘known’ of a play-text with the ‘freedom’ and ‘unknown’ of collaborative exploration (1994, p. 4-6). Whilst distinguishing between the intended and unintended, known and unknown, and predicted and unpredicted is a key aspect of devising performance, these articulations risk occluding the complexities and interdependencies of these (supposedly dichotomous) concepts. By reductively posing devising as a matter only of accident, the unknown and complete freedom these perspectives seem to idealise, and neglect the nuances of, the collaborative process: indeed, Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart suggest there is often a friction between ‘idealised’ methods and the ‘messy reality of process’ (2010, p. 13). The ‘happenings’, however, are useful in reaching for a less reductive notion of working with the unknown and with unpredictability. ‘Happenings’ were actually tightly planned events with, at the very least, implicit instructions for participants to follow, yet they managed to relate ‘a spontaneous and improvisatory aesthetic’ (Govan, Nicholson and Normington, 2007, p. 24-5). Heddon and Milling discuss how even ‘in the most apparently chaotic performance or Happening, there is structural order . . . It is the specific nature of the task, game, rules or structure within which improvisation occurs that conditions the possible outcomes, and contributes to the style of the resultant performance’ (2006, p. 9). This implies a more nuanced relationship between the known and unknown, between control and uncontrollability, which is an aspect of devising that I specifically sought to explore in *Wild Life*. I found that it is by participating in the dynamics between what is predicted and what is profoundly unpredictable that collaborative devising can challenge fixed hierarchical and binary structures between all - human and nonhuman - collaborators. I articulate this key finding through my new phrase: *wilding performance containers*.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> I discuss this finding in Chapter Five.

The director is often conceptualised as part, rather than leader, of the collaborative group. Elizabeth LeCompte, director of the Wooster Group (USA), insists that she only arrives at ideas for the work through the activities of her actors: the work only arises ‘on the stage’ and not ‘inside my head’ she explains (1993, p. 234). Whilst this explanation implies that the director works within, rather than dominating over, the collaborative process, the very idea of a director who makes final decisions and takes responsibility for the performance complicates ‘the notion of non-hierarchical work or democratic participation’ (Heddon and Milling, 2006, p. 5). Wilson explores the tensions and contradictions of directing a collaboration, suggesting that the term ‘director’ may be an unhelpful one and offering alternatives such as ‘enabler’ and ‘validator’ (2012, p. 118). He discusses how the ‘director’ is not a fixed concept that is predetermined from the outset, implying the role as responsive and improvisatory, rather than fully knowable and predicted. Using this open definition, a director may well be able to facilitate a process, and compose a performance, which includes and validates the diversity of (human and nonhuman) collaborators. David Rosenberg, a member of the performance company Shunt (UK) who sometimes takes on the role of director in its devising processes, suggests that the ‘vision that I’m trying to implement is never my own, that vision came from collective creation’ (Rosenberg in Mermikides, 2010, p. 160). Hixson echoes this in her proposition that, with *Goat Island*, she creates the performance ‘not with my singular self but with my multi-headed and many-headed and many-armed *Goat Island* self’ (in Bottoms and Goulish, 2007, p. 122). By being a participant in the collaboration, the director is seen to make decisions on behalf of the collective, where the performance arises out of the collective process, so the performance can never be (only) the director’s vision. The director’s skills are often seen to be in sequencing and structuring the material that group members have created: the director sifts ‘out what is inappropriate from the abundance of material . . . bringing what remains into a coherent form’ (Mermikides and Smart, 2010, p. 155). This implies a hierarchical relationship, even though it may only come in later in the process. The question arises, then, how can collaboration, when a director must take the lead at moments, continue to work with and involve all (human and nonhuman) participants in a process?

Wilson proposes that the ‘hierarchy of the director is diminished as a result of their role as co-learner with the performers’ (2012, p. 121), implying that the collective process of navigating through the unknown and unpredictable enables a non-hierarchical director-performer relation. So, working with the unknown of ‘mistake and accident’ could be interpreted as a means to ensure that neither the director, nor any one human vision, fully

dominates a work. Etchells proposes that his task as a director is to bring together 'diverse creativities' (1999, p. 55). Reflecting on Etchell's mode of working, Mermikides suggests performers must make a lot of choices in the tasks Etchells sets them, which 'quite clearly absolves Etchells from authorship over the material, opening the process up to the operations of chance' (2010, p. 111). In Mermikides' account, the self-determination of each (human) collaborator is seen to arise in their navigation through a task. This implies that the constraints set by Etchells are creatively interpreted by his collaborators, which gives rise to performance material that cannot be fully predicted or authored by him. This has proved to be a useful reference point for my practice of working with diverse child and adult, and professional and nonprofessional, collaborators and in facilitating their active participation in co-determining the performance material. However, there are limits to the utility of Etchells' approach for my project. In his (description of his) practice the creativity and unpredictability of performances are attributed merely to human collaborators and, further, his understanding of unpredictability poses some critical issues. Even if the human collaborators creatively interpret Etchells' tasks, and complete the unfinished ideas he brings to the devising process, these performers may only contribute inasmuch as the directives they are set allow them. In this approach, collaborators share in creating the work but only through the choices of conventions and constraints set by a director. Heddon and Milling discuss how devised work, often proclaimed as intuitively and collaboratively made, may hinge on what is already being looked for. They discuss how one may 'intuitively' feel something is 'right' because 'it fits a model of the already known', whereby supposedly 'original' ideas are only seen because they are already anticipated (2006, p. 198-9). So, whilst setting tasks and embracing 'mistake and accident' *could* be interpreted as a way of being open to the unpredicted contributions of the director's collaborators, what is being seen might only be what fits with an already formed idea, an idea that is iterated in part through the very directives set by the director for the performers. For my research I wanted to explore processes that actively facilitated the unpredictable contributions of my collaborators and, crucially, push directing beyond tropes of viewing humans as the only collaborators in performance.

Certain aspects of Hixson's approach to directing resonate with my intentions as a director. Hixson emphasises that her role as director involves offering 'creative constraints', which are often in the form of 'directives'. Her human collaborators respond to her directives and then, in response to their responses, she offers further directives in a process that is driven by a series of directives and responses (in Bottoms and Goulish, 2007, p. 124). The directives

Hixson provides - such as '[c]reate a shivering homage' - are clearly instructions but they are also articulated in 'a poetic form that leaves them open to multiple forms of response' (Cull, 2013, p. 43). Cull discusses how Hixson has no fixed concept of what a 'shivering homage' looks like, and so to respond to her directive is not to execute her idea but to undertake a creative response to it (2013, p. 43). Working with the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari, Cull describes this kind of approach as 'immanent authorship', which involves 'modes of authorship that are based on the imposition of rules and constraints, that serve to *preserve* rather than homogenize difference within a process of collaborative authorship' (2013, p. 24). Immanent modes of creativity allow, according to Cull, coordination of the performance to come from the 'bottom-up' (2013, p. 25). Certainly, in my research, I wanted to find practices that would allow the diverse child and adult, and human and nonhuman, collaborators to dynamically *steer* the process, whereby the performance could emerge from the processes and activities of the group: from the 'bottom up'. Christopher seems to echo Cull's idea of immanence when she proposes that, in a Goat Island process, the performance material itself 'begins to suggest certain directions' and thus the performance begins to 'make itself' (in Bottoms and Goulish 2007, p. 120). Etchells also gestures towards 'immanent authorship' when he argues that there is an 'ethical need . . . [to] fall into . . . their work . . . to let it take them somewhere unknown, to surrender to that, or to respect that, to go with the work' (1999, p. 62). The implication is that the performance process itself exerts a pull towards certain directions, whereby director and human performers respond to what is *immanent* in the process. Human collaborators are seen to follow and participate in the work, as opposed to the work merely following (from) them, which implies that there are more-than-human 'voices' or trajectories involved in determining the process and performance. This notion of following the process is, however, problematic as it corresponds to the trait that Heddon and Milling were challenging: that one may 'intuitively' feel something is 'right' merely because it fits with what is 'already sought' (2006, p. 198-9). Taking this point into account, I have been able to show collaboration and directing to be a matter of participating in, and responding to, the performance ecology. My research calls into question what I think is an unspoken assumption about collaborative performance practices: namely, that human beings are the *only*, or at least the most important, performance collaborators. Responding to Heddon and Milling's entreaty to practitioners to 'make works for and of their times and places' (2006, p. 231), I found that a focus on both human-human and human-nonhuman collaboration was a radical extension to the extant conceptualisations of 'collaboration' and 'directing' in the devising performance field. There are perspectives in the field of movement

and ecology that offer an account of how the human and nonhuman inform, and take part in, performance practices.

## **Movement and Ecology**

Sandra Reeve, a key dancer-researcher, conceptualises ‘ecological movement practice’ (2008, p. 31) through the notion of the ‘ecological body’, which she defines as a ‘body-in-movement-in-a-changing-environment’ (2011, p. 48). Reeve brings into relief the flow between the ongoing flux of the body and the continuous movement of its environment (2008, p. 70-71). Dancer Paula Kramer explores outdoor contemporary dance through the lens of ‘vibrant matter’ (Bennett, 2010), proposing that ‘dancing among the nonhuman offers an effective space to taste and practice . . . [agency as] confederations between the human and nonhuman’ (2012, p. 85). Arden Thomas, exploring dancer Anna Halprin’s *Still Dance* (which takes place in different locations such as a beach and a wood) suggests that Halprin ‘acts and is acted upon’, revealing not only ‘human agency’ but also the agency of ‘nonhumans’ (2012, p. 117; p. 123). So, across this range of critics and dance-researchers, ecological movement is seen as a way of participating with the movements of the nonhuman, and of enacting human-nonhuman agency. Movement is not a means to look upon ‘ecology’, but is conceptualised as a human and nonhuman activity, and rather than using ‘nature’ as a fixed background, or ‘picturesque backdrop for performance’ (Kramer, 2012, p. 83), movement is practiced as a way of ‘being among’ (Reeve, 2011, p. 50) and of taking an ‘active part’ (Kramer, 2012, p. 91) in environmental ecologies. This suggests to me how performances might emerge *through* human and nonhuman movements and collaborations. This literature also suggests that human movers do not so much *do* movement but rather join in *with* the ‘moving world’ (Reeve, 2011, p. 50) or in a different metaphor participate with the ‘liveliness of things’ (Kramer, 2012, p. 87). Movement does not work to represent an environmental ‘ecology’ but is seen as a way to *take part in* the diverse more-than-human agencies of these ecologies. The critical literature thus offers a nuanced approach to movement as a human-nonhuman occurrence of agency. My research built on these perspectives and practices by experimenting with specific movement practices that led me to push this idea of participation further: I propose movement is neither owned nor enacted by singular human or nonhuman agents or bodies but rather acts in and across all of us. We can, as it were, only *participate* in the agency and movements of ecologies.



Kramer helpfully critiques the concept of 'nature', disputing outdoor dance as a practice of getting back to 'nature' (2012, p. 83). She criticises what she calls 'alternative/eco/hippie practices of "communing" with nature' and she wishes to challenge the assumption that outdoor dancers who work in the 'natural environment' are seeking 'redemption' or 'enlightenment' or are 'out there' to become part of a 'purer world' (2012, p. 83). Kramer would like to attend to dance in 'the natural environment' in order to counter the above assumptions, developing a practice 'that glorifies neither human nor nature and allows for both to *inform* each other' (2012, p. 83). Halprin's work seems to operate in a similar vein, in that her work explores how 'nature' and 'human' might inform each other. Thomas describes how Halprin's body 'enters into relationship with the natural world', whereby she and those witnessing her are given 'pathways toward personal engagement . . . with the environment' (2012, p. 122-123). However, these theorisations about movement practice prove problematic. Whilst the practices may be effective in terms of questioning the supposed separation between 'humans' and 'nature', the critical discourses about them seem to reinstate a narrative of disconnection to connection (and indoors to outdoors), where movement practice is upheld as a means of bringing (back) together the 'human' artist with the 'natural' environment. Kramer discusses how movement arises 'from being in contact with specific textures, colours, smells or temperatures . . . [in] the natural environment' (2012, p. 84) and Thomas describes Halprin's work as a 'conversation' or 'duet' between the artist and 'nature' (Thomas, 2012, p. 122; p. 114). Movement practice seems to be asserted as a medium of bringing 'us' (humans) into contact with 'nature' (nonhumans) which, rather than presenting humans and 'nature' as entangled, presupposes humans and 'nature' are initially separated domains. This limitation of the critical literature is also evident in the largely unquestioned bias towards discussing practices that take place in *outdoor* and *natural* environments.

Reeve proposes that 'moving in natural environments' is 'more conducive' to ecological perception and 'embodied awareness' (2011, p. 50; 2008, p. 93). Kramer claims that the best context for experiencing human-nonhuman agency is 'extreme' natural terrain or weather - these are the 'conditions' under which 'nonhumans . . . [can] enter the dance' (2012, p. 86). Thomas focuses on how a singular human (Halprin) 'communes' with 'nature' in the outdoors (2012, p. 117). 'Natural' outdoor environments are presented as *the*, or at least the most preferable, way to experience ourselves as part of Earth's ecologies. Whilst making distinctions between studio-based and outdoor movement practices is an important pursuit in this field, by predominantly focusing on outdoor movement practices the scholarship risks

configuring 'ecology' as something that can only be experienced in certain types of locations: 'ecology' is accessible only to those who can 'go out' and move in the (implied) extremes of 'the outdoor natural environment'. Furthermore, in these practices it is largely only one human (normally the able-bodied professional adult artist) who is immersed in the 'outdoor' environmental ecology. This risks configuring ecological dance work as a matter of a singular (privileged) human in amongst many nonhumans. By emphasising and focusing on the singular adult able-bodied professional artist human going outdoors into 'nature', ecology is arguably reduced to an expert outdoors experience. Whilst the artists and scholars working in this field do not, I am sure, intend to configure ecological movement in these limiting ways, there is a risk in this field of fixing down what being and doing ecology looks like. Experiencing ecology through outdoor movement in 'nature' could become an orthodoxy: *this* is where, and how, to be ecological, and *this* is who can experience it. I think that ecological performance practices need to resist (re)configuring ecology as merely 'the natural environment' and must work hard to challenge the image of ecology as something 'out there' accessible only to a few. Nearly three decades ago Guattari proposed that '[e]cology must stop being associated with the image of a small nature-loving minority or with qualified specialists' (1989, p. 52). In contributing to the exciting field of ecological movement, it has been imperative for me to remain aware of how any ecological performance work always risks enacting what Wallace Heim warns against: she suggests that an ethos of mutual constitution can easily 'be translated into a conformity in how one is supposed to "do" nature-human relations' (2012, p. 212). Morton offers a helpful insight here in his suggestion that we must get away from 'ecological sentimentality' (2007, p. 200) and understand that 'the ecological thought . . . is easy to latch onto from anywhere' (2010, p. 18). Morton suggests that we are already in ecology, and so do not need to go anywhere to find (a separate or other) 'it'. His perspective implies that thinking and doing ecology is something accessible from wherever, and to whoever, we are.

My approach to movement practice builds on the work in the movement and ecology field: rather than focusing on the singular adult professional artist moving in 'the environment', my practice involves multiple human collaborators of diverse ages and performance experience. I do not think that practices should *not* take place outdoors or that artists should *not* make solo work, but rather I wish to resist this trend (in the critical literature) of presenting 'the ecological' only in relation to certain types of places and bodies. As I have already suggested, working with and exposing the paradoxes and complexities of binaries (such as indoor / outdoor, human / nonhuman and culture / nature) is a necessary tactic for any ecological

project. I think that if, in our practices and scholarship, we do not expose and experiment with these paradoxes and complexities, we risk (re)entrenching habits of binary thinking. Whilst fully transcending binaries is unfeasible, it is necessary to remain reflexive to them so that we may attend to, what Massumi articulates as, ‘the intricate complexities of [an] event’s acting out’ (Massumi in Manning, 2013, p. x; Manning, 2013, p. 212-213). In this sense, the complexities of human-nonhuman entanglement warrant further exploration in the movement and ecology field, and it is to this gap that my research attends. In making *Wild Life* I wanted to see what practices emerged when human-nonhuman entanglement was taken as a given from the outset: I wanted to explore the unavoidability of how we and our performances are continuously participating in actual ecologies. I approached movement as a practice of how we are all unavoidably constituted by and in the *movements* of ecologies or, as Manning puts it, we are ongoing processes of ‘more-than’ our (singular human) ‘selves’ (2013, p. 216).

Exploring ‘dance’ and ‘ecology’ Manning discusses how ‘there is no outside of movement’ and that ‘movement already moves and . . . we are moved by it’ (2013, p. 122; p. 35). She explores the ‘overarticulation’ of dancing, defining it as ‘the felt experience of the form outdoing itself’ (2013, p. 38), implying that dance transgresses definable positions. For example, she argues that a ‘spiral as such cannot be danced. It is more duration than form’ (2013, p. 30). Moving bodies, by constantly moving through (and past) any fixable form, emerge as a ‘bodying’ or a ‘participatory node in the milieu of movement’ (2013, p. 78; p. 122). She suggests that technique is a way into ‘technicity’, where technicity is a way of being danced by the movement of ecologies or, to use her word, ‘milieu’ (2013, p. 40). In *Wild Life* I set out to explore movement methods that would allow human performers to be danced rather than to do dance, to be moved rather than to do movement. However, Manning exclusively focuses on the professional dancers of the Forsythe Company and she presents ‘technique’ and, concurrently, the experience of ‘technicity’, as only accessible to highly trained ‘dancers’ (2013, p. 139; p. 141). Like others in the field, she risks demarcating the experience of ecological movement - of being ‘moved’ by the movements of ecologies - as something only accessible to the professional dancer. My research builds on Manning’s work, in that I have sought to develop a practice that does not instate the ecological as something some people are more capable of thinking and doing than others. Through the intergenerational and professional-nonprofessional collaborations of my practice, I explored how performance might be able to be an inclusive practice which enacts how we are all, in performance and in life, participants in the movements of diverse (performance, social and

environmental) ecologies. In order to further frame this aspect of my research the key terms of nonprofessional and professional, and of child and adult, need to be unpacked.

## Performance and Nonprofessional Performers

In this section, and in addition to discussing those articles that focus on nonprofessional performers in professional contemporary performance, I draw on two interviews I conducted for this project: Richard Gregory is the artistic director of Quarantine, a Manchester-based theatre company that works with ‘people who haven't been trained to perform’ (Gregory, 2010, p. 235) and who are often from diverse social backgrounds (Quarantine, 2015); and, Joke Laureyns, the artistic director, and Kwint Manshoven, the performer-collaborator, of Kabinet K, a Belgium based dance company which ‘make[s] dance performances with children and professional dancers’, and sometimes ‘older people’ (Manshoven, 2014).

Artists who work with nonprofessional performers tend to frame this choice as politically and socially driven. Gregory proposes that involving people not trained in performance is ‘about seeing people and hearing voices on stage that are rarely present’ (2010, p. 235). Laureyns frames the intergenerational approach taken by Kabinet K as a response to the lack of ‘intergenerational physical relations’ in wider society (2014). Choreographer Rosemary Lee, who works with large casts of nonprofessional dancers who span a range of ‘age, social and ethnic backgrounds’ (Welton, 2010, p. 48), wants her work to ‘open up a possibility for human contact that is usually foreclosed to the social arena’ where it is rare to see physical connections between adults and children (Lee, 2009 in Welton, 2010, p. 50). Whilst there is a clear politics of participation in these examples, these performance makers do not make participation their main focus: participation is not the direct theme or subject of their works. Gregory emphasises how Quarantine’s performances are ‘driven entirely by a desire to explore a set of ideas’, whereby participation is a ‘tributary of the process’ (2014). His focus instead is on the lives and identities of the participants: Gregory aims for a state onstage of ‘individuals, each with their own story, rather than interpreters of somebody else’s ideas’ (2010, p. 235). Taking a different perspective on participants, Manshoven proposes that Kabinet K works with children not because he wishes to make performances *about* children: he is not ‘interested in the identity of a youngster’ nor with ‘what the child wants in life [nor with] how the child feels’ (2014). Instead, Kabinet K’s work is driven by ‘another necessity’, whereby participation is ‘towards form’, and not content (Laureyns, 2014).

My approach emerges from what I see as a space of practice between Quarantine and Kabinet K. Whilst working with(in) an intergenerational performance ecology was a political choice in that I was responding to the scarcity of professional performance involving child and nonprofessionals as both collaborators and performers, I chose not to directly focus on their participation as subject matter. For me the participation of diverse human collaborators in *Wild Life* was a given from the outset, existing as the *form* of my artistic practice, with this form converging with content but not tied down by it (the readings audience members made of the final performance cannot, of course, be separated from the intergenerational form of the piece). Extending this further, I explored how performance can enact the given-ness of entangled human *and* nonhuman participation. Rather than instate a narrative of non-participation (disconnection) to participation (connection) by treating performance as a medium to bring people, or people and ecology, together, my research found ways of taking ecology (and our participations in it and with each other) as a given: I sought to coax out the innate ecological potentials of performance practices. My approach involved focusing on the inquiry of the piece - which, for *Wild Life*, was 'wildness' - as opposed to focusing on making human (or nonhuman) participation happen through performance, or focusing on (human and nonhuman) participation as (merely) the thematic content of the work. My research demonstrates how performance practice can enact our unavoidable participations in wider social and environmental ecologies, whereby part of this approach concerns how we are inevitably interwoven with other humans. Crucially, I developed a collaborative practice where 'humans' are taken to always already be entangled with the more-than-human: being a human is a matter of human-nonhuman entanglement. I found working with a diverse range of professional and nonprofessional adult and child performers to be a key aspect of developing this ecologically collaborative practice.

One approach in the small but emerging field of child and nonprofessional performers, is to focus on the particular aesthetic and style of the non trained performer, where the emphasis is on how they perform differently to trained performers. Gregory discussed with me how nonprofessionals give performances that are 'quotidian' and 'ordinary', which have none of the pretense that he associates with the trained actor or performer (2014). The nonprofessional performers can present the 'richness of an everyday life' (2014), he told me. Geraldine Harris, in reference to Quarantine's piece *Susan and Darren* (2008), identifies a 'naturalness [to] Susan's and Darren's interaction with each other and with the audience' (2008, p. 5-6). This, she proposes, results in a performance that has none of the 'irony, parody, pastiche or other "postmodern" modes of self-reflexivity . . . [that] create a

knowing distance from the spectacle and its subjects - Susan and Darren' (2008, p. 13). She suggests that, by having 'ordinary people' - in this case a middle-aged woman (Susan) and her son (Darren) on stage - there is an 'equality in Quarantine's work between art and non-art but more importantly between artist and non-artist' (2008, p. 9). This resonates with my practice and is a useful insight for my research, as it implies how nonprofessionals in performance might trouble the binaries between performers and spectators, and artists and non-artists. The presence of the nonprofessional in performance could, therefore, challenge the way performance often upholds 'the ecological' as an expert experience exclusive to the professional artist. Furthermore, the 'quotidian' style that Gregory deems to be typical of the nonprofessional performer could relate how we are, in an everyday sense, always in ecology.

However, through my practice-as-research experiments I found that to assume the nonprofessional always or even ever performs in an 'everyday' and 'natural' style (Gregory, 2014; Harris, 2008, p. 13) can be a limiting approach. Emphasising a particular kind of quotidian action can undercut and undervalue the work of the nonprofessional, defining them in terms of what they lack: they can naturally (and only) perform as their everyday 'selves' because they are *not* professional. Their value as performers emerges via their incapacities. In my work, I found that this approach risks romanticising nonprofessionals, who are read as some kind of an idealised 'other' in comparison with the trained performer. In this formulation, we do not read their work or their skills, but rather merely admire their 'natural' and 'ordinary' performances. (Revealingly, this is akin to the way the child film actor is, according to Karen Lury, often seen as 'successful' in terms of 'their essential characteristics and not their learned abilities' (2010, p. 156-7).) Furthermore, over-emphasising their quotidian style of performing denies nonprofessionals their capacity to be extraordinary or not 'everyday'. Their style of performance is fixed and presumed from the outset: they *will* perform ordinariness. This approach unhelpfully prefigures what performers are *not* capable of in the same moment as it proposes that which they are (ordinary), which not only risks presuming what their nonprofessional performances will be like, but also what their performances will mean and represent. Through my research process I developed an imperative to work without prescribing what style or type of performances the (adult or child, professional or nonprofessional) performers might give.

In her work on Quarantine's performance *Old People, Children and Animals* (2008), Lourdes Orozco describes a four-year-old girl, Maia, who, she proposes, is 'free' and 'let be' to play during the performance, entertaining 'the audience by entertaining herself' (2010, p. 82).

Orozco argues that, by Maia simply being ‘herself’, she signifies ‘unpredictability’ and ‘is a metaphor for what cannot be controlled, the looming danger of error, mistake and misfire’ (2010, p. 84). This is a useful analysis of the child performer for my projects since in both *Age-Old* and *Wild Life* I sought to work with, and respond to, the unpredictability of child collaborators, and find ways to enable their unpredictabilities to play out live on stage (this formed part of my paradoxical approach: how to allow for unpredictability in a structured and rehearsed performance?). However, there are also limitations with this approach. By discussing Maia as a metaphor of unpredictability, Orozco (from the outset of her discussions) seems to exclude any real unpredictability in what Maia might mean and represent in the live performance. There is a risk in her analysis of assuming that we (adults) can know what type of performance the child performer will give - that she is ‘herself’ and ‘free’ - and what this (nonprofessional, child) performance will inevitably represent - namely, ‘unpredictability’. In a similar vein, Gregory suggests that he was ‘naturally’ drawn to children for this piece because he wanted to explore who we are ‘responsible for’ (in Orozco, 2010, p. 82). This comment suggests to me that the significance and value of Maia’s performance for Gregory was prefigured (by him) from the outset: that her presence would bring up questions about ‘responsibility’. This denies Maia any unknowability, and effaces the potential that Maia might have to not mean ‘responsibility’, or even to mean a lot more than ‘responsibility’. Even if Maia did represent ‘responsibility’ to the audience and was in a common sense way unpredictable in what she did during the performance, Orozco’s critical discussion and Gregory’s motivation to work with a child both seem to deny Maia any part in contributing to these representations: that Maia’s presence will represent ‘unpredictability’ and ‘responsibility’ is presumed from the outset simply because she is a young child. With this approach there is a risk that the nonprofessional child performer is even rendered very much like the Victorian child actor described by Anne Varty - that he or she is simply a prop to be read only in terms of aesthetic effect (2008, p. 38).

The emphasis on nonprofessionals being ‘natural’ and ‘themselves’ also seems problematic because it glosses over the fact that the conventions that frame the performer are likely to be chosen and defined by the director, and not be the choice of performers themselves. Wilson discusses Junction 25, a Glasgow-based performance company of young people between 11 and 18 years old that is facilitated by artists Jess Thorpe and Tashi Gore of Glas(s) Performance. The young people are deliberately ‘empowered’ to make performances about issues or around themes relevant to them, where the focus is on them ‘being the authors and owners of the collaboratively devised work’ (Wilson, 2011, p. 110). However, Wilson suggests

that the 'voices' and 'ideas' of the young people may only be present inasmuch as they fit with, and can be communicated through, the theatrical, social and economic conventions and frames provided by Thorpe and Gore. He proposes that the sense that these young people 'are empowered is relational to the extent to which their empowerment is shaped by [the] directors of the group', suggesting that the 'theatrical language' that is used for their voices to be heard belongs more to Thorpe and Gore (and their training in contemporary performance) than the young people themselves (2011, p. 114; p. 115). I do not, however, think that the approach taken by Thorpe and Gore is problematic since their work does not deny (or hide) that they (the professional artists) input into Junction 25 performances through providing conventions and structuring performance material. What I think is problematic is to suppose that nonprofessional performers are heard and seen as 'themselves' simply because they perform 'their' ideas and with their 'own' voices. This notion is to neglect the nuances of how conventions frame and 'perform' the work as much as, if not more than, the performers themselves. To conceptualise nonprofessional performers as merely quotidian, 'natural' and 'themselves' seems to leave little space for unknown, unpredictable and even skilled performances to emerge. My practice of working with nonprofessionals is informed and inspired by Quarantine and Glas(s) Performance, yet my research took me in a different direction: I explored and challenged the very notion that there is a fixed singular human that can perform their 'natural' and 'ordinary' self. I aimed to treat diverse human collaborators as undetermined and unique performers who can produce unexpected and accomplished performances and, crucially, who are unavoidably entangled with(in) the more-than-human.

An alternative to the approach that I have ascribed to Quarantine and Glas(s) Performance can be found in practices where nonprofessionals give performances equal to the capabilities of trained performers. *That Night Follows Day*, a collaboration between Etchells and Victoria Theatre (Belgium), is a useful example.<sup>13</sup> The performance involved 16 youngsters reciting a list of statements and questions from 'children' addressed to 'adults' that was written by Etchells. The fact that this was a text pre-written by a professional adult practitioner and then spoken, and not created, by the child performers, was clear: the performance frame and conventions provided by the adult artist was explicit. But this, I found, allowed attention to focus less on the identities or everydayness of these youngsters and more on their skills as performers. The production was tightly rehearsed and structured, involving the performers speaking as a chorus with precise vocal intonations and pauses, with moments of individual as well as choric and other mixtures of voices. There was nothing 'ordinary' about their style of

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<sup>13</sup> I saw this performance at the Tramway, Glasgow, April 2008.



performing. As an audience member I was impressed by what I responded to as their expertise: I felt they were challenged by, but in no way unable to do, this performance. This approach ruptured my preconceptions about what children, and nonprofessionals, are capable of: the performers had been treated as and therefore read as skilled and consummate performers in control of their material. I did not interpret them as being patronised and told to be 'themselves', but saw that they had been assigned tasks just as any (professional, adult) performer might. By not presuming their inabilities, the youngsters were respected and given creative power. However, this approach largely predetermined what their (repeated) performances will be. Whilst the first approach I identified presumes a quotidian performance style, this second approach presumes a trained or coached one. With this approach, there is a risk of defining and judging the nonprofessional child performer merely in terms of how impressively expert their performance is. The performer is, therefore, still defined through and fixed by the binaries of child / adult, professional / nonprofessional, artist / non-artist and capable / incapable. So whilst initially attractive, this was ultimately an unhelpful approach for my practice, which aims to at once work with and reconfigure these binaries. I therefore aimed for a significant diversity in the skills, experiences and ages of the performance ecology.

But, helpfully, there is a third approach I can identify in the field that, I found, demonstrates a more complex conceptualisation of the nonprofessional and proved for me a more useful articulation of how professional and nonprofessional, and adult and child, performers can meaningfully participate in and contribute to the performance ecology. This approach is partly evident in the work of Kabinet K. Manshoven proposes that he and Laureyns collaborate with nonprofessionals because they wish to work with 'bodies that are not articulated too much in their way of dancing' (2014). Laureyns proposes that their practice is about performers' 'absence of knowledge' (2014). Taking these articulations on their own, Kabinet K seems to be another example of defining and valuing child and nonprofessional performers by their lack of performance training and knowledge. However, the approach is, in their description and practice as well as in my reading, more nuanced than this. When working with nonprofessionals, Kabinet K gives them some dance technique training, providing bodies with 'a knowledge [and] language' (Manshoven, 2014). This gives performers a way *into* working with physical tasks. Performers are equipped to 'struggle' creatively with the 'dance knowledge', and it is this 'struggle' that the creative team propose 'makes our work' (Laureyns, 2014). Laureyns discusses how unique movement emerges when performers simultaneously 'attempt' and 'resist' the conventions and techniques that she, the

choreographer, provides for them (2014). With Kabinet K's approach, it is *between* acquired dance knowledge and being not-fully-trained that these nonprofessionals are deemed to be unique and skillful performers. The nonprofessional is conceptualised neither by their lack of training, nor by being the same as professionals, but through being between the known and unknown, the learnt and not-yet-learnt, the mastery of technique and lack of technique, and ability and inability. In this liminal place, performers contribute neither through innate everyday-style performances nor by being performance experts, but by their unique and capable negotiations through performance conventions. My practice relates to and extends this approach. I developed methods that apply to both professionals and nonprofessionals, and adults and children - methods that allow collaborators to variously contribute to the process and performance. I found these methods were a question of how to, firstly, take the *betweens* into account and, secondly, respond to the unique and capable negotiations of how my collaborators *did* performance tasks. Andrew Quick usefully explores the idea of 'between' and 'doing' in his discussion of child performers and the 'secret gesture' (2006).

Quick discusses *Übung* (2001), a performance that involved a group of six youngsters between eight and 15 years imitating the actions of adult actors in a film projected behind them during the performance, made by Josse De Pauw and Victoria Theatre. The youngsters enacted through complex actions, costume changes and lip-synching in a 'faithful' imitation of the film (2006, p. 155). Quick reflects on what he identifies as the indefinable movements of these performers using Walter Benjamin's notion of the 'secret gesture', defining it as the 'spontaneous' and 'improvisatory gestures' enacted by children that are impossible to attribute with any meaning because they operate outside of adult systems of signification (2006, p. 160). These 'gestures' are 'secret' because they are movements that cannot be named or predetermined: they are 'beyond comprehension' (2006, p. 150). Quick proposes that these movements unfolded in the performance, not in a 'free' anything-goes context, but through the 'rule-bound space' (2006, p. 153). Quick recalls a moment in the performance when a boy walked across the stage. Quick can find no pattern in the movements of this performer, he cannot work out what is being 'done' before him (2006, p. 155). Unable to pin down the boy, he concludes 'that the performer is working and walking through numerous possibilities, making particular sets of performance choices *before* me' (2006, p. 155). The boy, tasked with strict rules of imitation, is negotiating and playing with what is 'permissible and inadmissible' where 'rules are not banished or permanently excluded but rather are suspended and pushed aside' as in the case of the 'rule of what is being "done" is worked through in the improvisational moment' (2006, p. 153). The children

in *Übung* perform *between* the known of the rules and the unknown of their *doing* of the rules, producing momentarily rupturing and unpredictable performances. Quick implies how child performers can meaningfully determine what a performance is through their unique, live and spontaneous negotiations through rules and structures.

Whilst offering useful insights about how child performers can transgress rule-bound space or performance containers, I find that Quick is reductive in his identification of a fixed difference between adult and child performers, deeming the latter the ideal spontaneous performer. He conceives the 'secret gesture' as something only children can enact, confirming Benjamin's romantic notion that nothing 'can compete with the authenticity that is the child's improvisatory activity' (2006, p. 152). Quick presents the 'gift' of the 'secret gesture' as something *for* adults: its significance lies, for him, in how it ruptures adult taxonomies of 'meaning' (2006, p. 150). I wanted to expand upon Quick's approach and so sought to create performances where adult and child, and professional and nonprofessional (and human and nonhuman performers) might all enact transgressive and 'secret' performances. Part of my approach was also to show *Age-Old* and *Wild Life* to intergenerational audiences, rather than limit and fix the performances to a specific type of audience.

Laureyns and Manshoven of Kabinet K define their work in terms of the performers' dedication to *doing*. *I See You* (2012) was a piece that involved Laureyns performing with a young girl and older man, which was structured entirely by physical tasks ascribed to the performers.<sup>14</sup> Laureyns gives the examples: 'you have to be busy with weight or counter weight, or with choosing directions' (2014). The performance emerged through the performers being completely, physically engrossed in doing the task: it was their real effort of *doing* that constituted the qualities and layers of the piece. Laureyns proposes that, if performers try and communicate meaning or emotion, or if they "play" they are dedicated' to a task, then 'the work would collapse' (2014). This focus on doing is about 'not being an actor' (Laureyns, 2014) but being 'yourself' and 'normal' (Manshoven, 2014) whilst physically in action. This notion of being 'normal' is different to the quotidian and ordinary performances that the first approach attributes to nonprofessionals. Rather, it references the actuality of, and dedication to, doing: it is about a 'physical presence' that is 'not related to everyday life' and can, in fact, appear 'very foreign' (Laureyns, 2014). They see the performances enacted by children to be at once 'normal' and 'foreign', 'capable' and

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<sup>14</sup> I saw *I See You* at the Tramway, Glasgow, October 2014.

‘incapable’ and ‘trained’ and ‘non-trained’, and in this sense their nuanced approach disrupts binary thinking.

Kabinet K seems to relate an approach to performance where the liveness of doing - beyond just being - is understood to lead the performance. I was also eager to understand children and adults, and nonprofessionals and professionals, to shape the process and performance through their unique and particular ways of *doing*: I focused on their diverse and distinctive negotiations through the performance training and containers I gave to them. However, my research took this a step further by focusing on how human and nonhuman collaborators might enact and transgress the boundaries and containers of performance. I aimed to develop methods of working that enabled diverse human and nonhuman collaborators to deliver unique and ongoing entanglements through *doing*. Ecology is, after all, a pragmatic physical reality, and may therefore be best experienced and exposed through the pragmatics of doing. In order to demonstrate more fully what I mean by this complex term ‘ecology’, I now discuss the conceptualisations and practices of ‘ecology’ that my research used, explored and developed.

## Chapter Two - Ecology

### Introduction

In the previous chapter I drew insights from performance scholars such as Kershaw and Heddon, and movement scholars including Reeve and Manning, to contextualise my research inquiry into how performance practice can be ecological. In this chapter I further contextualise my exploration of performance (in) ecology. I develop my thesis that performance - in process and product - is a distinctive ecology of diverse and entangled humans and nonhumans, and that the performance ecology continuously and inevitably interacts with(in) wider ecological processes and systems. I do this by drawing on my key interlocutors working in the field of ecology and more-than-human theorising: Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Jane Bennett and Karen Barad. These writers provide the most useful theoretical framework for my research.

I begin with Deleuze and Guattari as their conceptualisation of 'betweens' and their non-binary speculations on arborescence and the rhizome offer a useful theoretical touchstone for one of my key research findings: wilding performance containers. However, their analogy-based approach to 'ecology' (through the metaphors of arborescence and rhizome) is ultimately limiting for my inquiry into how the actual material *practices* of performance-making can be and do the ecological. I thus turn to the new materialist and posthumanist perspectives offered by Bennett and Barad. Both these writers aim to be more directly descriptive of the actual modes through which humans and nonhumans participate in different material processes, where agency is distributed across and between human and nonhuman actants. Their different yet related theories on matter are particularly useful for my project since my practice-as-research explored two performance ecologies (*Age-Old* and *Wild Life*) in terms of the actual human and nonhuman material actants involved. Bennett and Barad are thus the most relevant in terms of setting up, reflecting on and analysing my ecological performance practice. Crucially, I also show how my research might impact and add further complexity to Bennett's and Barad's thinking.

## Conceptualising Betweens: Rhizomes and Arborescence in the Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

Deleuze and Guattari propose their rhizome philosophy as a challenge to the arborescent structure of reality presumed in most Western thinking. An arborescent standpoint configures the world through hierarchies and origins, and constructs 'systems with centers of significance and subjectification' (1988, p. 16): there is an origin (seed) and a centrality (trunk) from which all things branch out (roots and branches). All human and nonhuman 'things' and identities are defined by their relation to a centre point. Arborescence relates a 'transcendent plan(e) of organization' upon which all 'things' are organised and signified, and are accorded 'fixed or ideal essences' (1988, p. 311; p. 248). This plane governs what 'things' are and what / who relates to what / who by stratifying 'forms and subjects' and configuring hierarchical 'relations between strata' (1988, p. 314). Human and nonhuman identities and differences are fixed by this plane of organisation: arborescence organises, and is organised through, the logic of binary.

In contrast to understanding the world through the tree, Deleuze and Guattari propose the rhizome. There is neither a fixed centre nor 'positions' in the rhizome, but rather there 'are only lines' (1988, p. 7). Instead of containing 'fixed and mobile elements', the rhizome consists of 'all manner of "becomings"' with the rhizome existing in ceaseless movement or 'continuous variation' (1988, p. 22; p. 553). It may be useful to think through theatre performance processes and events as a rhizome or as part of a rhizome, in that this usefully implies performance as a practice of ongoing dynamic movement, and as a practice that participates in the movements of wider ecology / rhizome. Deleuze and Guattari discuss how there is 'no preformed logical order to becomings and multiplicities', but argue that there is 'criteria' that emerges and applies 'in the course of events' (1988, p. 293). This informs my notion of participating in, rather than dominating, the trajectory of the performance process, whereby it is through attending to the distinct yet entangled human and nonhuman participants that the trajectory (or criteria) of the process and performance *emerges*. I developed an ecological practice where there is not a preformed organisation (or order) to what the work will be, but an immanent order constituted through the (a)live collaborations and events of the process. Whilst arborescent thinking purports a transcendent reality and assigns essential identities, the rhizome is 'interbeing' and 'alliance' (1988, p. 26). Rather than a plane of organisation, when it comes to the rhizome there is a plane of 'composition' (1988, p. 301). They use 'composition' to demonstrate how this plane is (and

can only be) constructed, it neither preexists nor transcends the ongoing movements of the 'becomings' that (continuously) make it up. The rhizome cannot, therefore, be pinned down, it can only be made and we can only participate in, and 'experiment' with, its making (1988, p. 293). This relates a concept of 'ecology' as something that is continuously in-the-making, whereby *what* humans and nonhumans are is in perpetual flux and always materialising. With their rhizome philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari propose that matter is 'nonstratified', that materiality does not constitute divided solid entities but materiality is *moving* 'energy' (1988, p. 178). In this sense, movement and choreography practices may be well placed to explore and enact the dynamics of ceaselessly moving matter. However, the most useful aspect of Deleuze and Guattari is their nuanced articulation of how the rhizome does not replace the tree, nor the tree replace the rhizome: there is no binary choice between the two, no absolute move from one to the other. Rather, there are 'knots of arborescence in rhizomes, and rhizomatic offshoots in [tree] roots' (1988, p. 21).

Deleuze and Guattari propose that 'in all things' there are lines of 'segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification' (1988, p. 2). They define 'stratification' as the process of structuring 'linear causalities between elements' and of organising 'hierarchies of order between groupings' (1988, p. 390). The freedom and openness of rhizomatic 'lines of flight' are not simple matters of supplanting and abandoning stratification. Rather, Deleuze and Guattari encourage an approach that works both *with* and *beyond* stratification, whereby lines of flight rupture the strata and 'follow the rhizome by rupture' (1988, p. 10-11). They do not take issue with segmentarity itself; the human is, they argue, 'a segmentary animal' (1988, p. 244). Rather, they imply that the dangers of arborescence emerge when we treat the segmentation of strata as a rigid and fixed reality. They discuss a notion of 'supple segmentarity', whereby 'segmentarity is not grasped as something separate from a segmentation-in-progress operating by outgrowths, detachments, and mergings' (1988, p. 245). They indicate that stratification is a rupture-able, rather than fixed and final binary structure. However, Deleuze and Guattari propose that transgressing arborescence is not a case of 'wildly destratifying it': they argue that blowing 'apart the strata' risks bringing the strata 'down on us heavier than ever'. Rather, they discuss a process of lodging ourselves 'on a stratum' and experimenting with the 'opportunities it offers', and by this process of 'meticulous relation with the strata . . . one succeeds in freeing lines of flight' (1988, p. 187). This usefully relates and critically frames my finding of *wilding performance containers*:

working closely with performance containers / 'strata' can be a strategy for transgressing and reconfiguring containment / stratification.

Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari argue that, just as trees 'may burgeon into a rhizome', so too rhizomes can be (re)stratified into arborescence (1988, p. 18; p. 9). They imply that lines of flight do not destratify in any absolute or final way. They propose that it is at the 'cutting edge' of 'deterritorialization' that a 'reterritorialization' can also 'be performed' (1988, p. 258). Lines of flight rupture the strata but are then restratified. For Deleuze and Guattari, lines of flight and stratification are processes that are enfolded into each other. I sought to test out their non-binary understandings of stratification / lines of flight and arborescence / the rhizome, which led me to discover a practice of working with *betweens*. Deleuze and Guattari argue that being between 'does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away' (1988, p. 27). Being between is not to 'progress or regress' to one or the other, but rather, being between has 'a consistency all its own' (1988, p. 277; p. 279). I developed an ecological practice that focuses on collaboration between diverse humans and between humans and nonhuman materials, where the process and performance can be understood to emerge through the *betweens* of the performance ecology.

Whilst Deleuze and Guattari offer a useful critical vector for my research inquiry into the ecological, their approach is ultimately limiting for my project. Their arguments rely heavily and primarily on metaphors of 'ecology' through the analogies of the 'rhizome' and 'arborescence', whereas exploring the ecological potentials of performance practice requires a sharp focus on the actual material processes of ecologies. Therefore, in order to further articulate the complexity of performance (in) ecology, I turn now to Bennett and her notion of 'vibrant matter' and Barad and her radical articulations of what it means to be entangled in material ecological processes.

### **Conceptualising Human-Nonhuman Collaboration: Jane Bennett and Vibrant Matter**

In her influential book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, vital materialist Jane Bennett proposes that matter is vibrant and 'alive' (2010, p. 8). Matter is not passive but 'lively and self-organizing' (2010, p. 10). She avoids the notion that there is a 'soul' or 'life' which enters into, or animates, materials that would otherwise be inert by proposing that matter itself, by its very materiality, is alive with 'agentic capacity' (2010, p. 10; p. 87-89; p.



9). So, nonhumans are, like humans, ‘actants’ (2010, p. ix). By placing humans and nonhumans on the same ontological plane, Bennett emphasises how all (cultural, natural, organic and inorganic) bodies are ‘affective’ (2010, p. xii) and have the capacity to *perform*. All ‘things’ demand attention in their own right, and ‘things’ exert a power beyond human attributions, constructions and meanings. For Bennett, nonhuman matter exerts its own pulls and lays its own trajectories within, through and beyond the human (2010, p. viii): this is matter’s ‘thing power’ (2010, p. xvi). Her articulation of nonhuman actants usefully frames one of my research aims: to develop performance methods of working *with* the agency of nonhuman materials. With *Age-Old* and *Wild Life* I sought to develop a practice of collaborating with materials not as props in aid of human performers, but instead as performers in their own right with their own trajectories and tendencies. However, to only focus on the vibrant matter of nonhumans would be to miss the complexity of Bennett’s theory. A key aspect of her argument is that nonhumans *and* humans are vibrant matter.

Bennett proposes that matter is not the background to human practices but rather we humans ‘are vital materiality and we are surrounded by it’ (2010, p. 14). She thus locates vibrancy across human and nonhuman bodies: agency is *distributed* across humans and nonhumans. So, the ‘human self’ does not exist as such but is ‘intrinsically polluted’ with ‘material powers’ which circulate ‘around and within human bodies’ (2010, p. 116; p. ix): ‘the environment is [literally] inside human bodies and minds’ (2010, p. 116) she writes. The implication here is that humans, and human practices such as theatrical performance, neither cause nor invite nonhuman vibrancy but rather we are always already caught up in it. Material vitality is both inside and outside of ourselves: material vitality ‘is me, it predates me, it exceeds me, it postdates me’ (2010, p. 120). This provides a useful frame for my proposal that we and our performance practices are always already *in* (the vibrant matter of) diverse ecologies. Under Bennett’s notion of ‘confederations’, humans can only *do* things because we are each confederations of vibrant matters and we are always in confederations with ‘various and variegated materialities’ (2010, p. 96). So, it is only possible for me to create collaboratively, direct a performance and write this thesis because I am infused by and I am in confederation with vibrant materials. Bennett discusses how it would be impossible for humans to exercise ‘wills or intentions’ without the endeavors of ‘many other strivings’ (2010, p. 98; p. 32). This poses a challenge to the very idea of ‘me’ writing this thesis and the notion that ‘I’ can communicate and speak from ‘my’ perspective and intentions. Indeed, Bennett’s ideas about ‘vibrant matter’ challenge the concept of human intentionality. If we are always already part of, and in confederation with, what is more-than-our(human)selves then how can we

attribute full control and intention to our actions? There is indeed an irony in 'me' writing about 'my research' when 'my research' is, in part, about disputing the centrality of 'the human' and the exceptionalism attributed to 'human' intentions. This paradox can work as a productive way of exploring what it means for humans to be part of the vibrant matter of ecologies. Furthermore, Bennett suggests that 'intention' is like a pebble thrown into the water or an electrical current sent through wire: it 'vibrates and merges with other currents, to affect and be affected' (2010, p. 32). By this she means that the idea of distributed agency does not deny human intentionality but renders it less definitive of outcomes (2010, p. 32). With this frame of reference, it is important to note that humans can perhaps only create theatrical performance and write about performance practices from our specific and unique human positions with(in) complex material systems and processes. Indeed, when discussing her performance experiments with water and its agency Donald proposes that 'our experiences are always, inevitably, felt, filtered and shared from a subjective human perspective' (2015, p. 38). These are the complexities and paradoxes that we must necessarily work with in developing an ecological performance practice.

Bennett proposes that humans are always already 'confederations of tools, microbes, minerals, sounds, and other "foreign" materialities' (Bennett, 2010, p. 36). Similarly Morton insists that nothing 'exists all by itself, and so nothing is fully "itself"' (2010, p. 15). If humans are never *only* 'human' - if we are always already more-than-human - then to focus on human performers and human practices is not necessarily an anthropocentric approach so long as we are alert to and acknowledge the multiplicity of the human or, more precisely, the nonhuman within, around and across the human. With this caveat, I propose that focusing on humans - in the case of my research, on humans of different ages, backgrounds and skills - is one strategic and vital way of attending to the inevitable entanglements of humans with(in) the nonhuman. I sought to explore not just how performance can enact vibrant matter but also what kinds of creative practices emerge from acknowledging and treating humans and nonhumans as vibrant and lively matter.

For my project, there is a key nuance to Bennett's arguments. She does not concede a passive acceptance of the vibrancy of matter as inherently positive and life-giving: she includes a brief discussion about the destructive capabilities of material processes, implying how ecological processes can involve damage and harm. She discusses how it is necessary to acknowledge matter's harmful capacities (2010, p. 54). If we do not, humans are merely (and hubristically) rendered as protectors and managers 'of an ecosystem that surrounds us' (2010,

p. 111). This focus on the negative aspects of material-ecological processes is something that has generally been avoided in the performance and ecology field (for example, Arons and May render human 'embeddedness and enmeshment in ecology' in exclusively positive terms (2012, p. 3) ). This limited approach is also evident in recent 'more-than-human' theorising (for example, Ingold renders his 'lines of life' that make up the environmental system of the 'meshwork' as an entirely positive process of being alive (Ingold, 2011) ). Bennett suggests that if we acknowledge the negative potentials of vibrant matter, then the task we have 'is to engage more strategically with a trenchant materiality that is us as it vies with us in assemblages' (2010, p. 111). This frames my concern that, if we are to take seriously our participation in all manner of distinct yet interrelating ecologies, then it is surely necessary to learn how to listen not only to the life-affirming vibrancy of matter but also to the vibrant negative feedbacks of performance ecologies? I think it is necessary to embrace the difficulties of what it means to be unavoidably in the wider ecology of Earth. Indeed, Bateson proposes: 'We are not outside of the ecology for which we plan - we are always and inevitable a part of it' and it is here that 'lies the charm and the terror of ecology' (1972, p. 510). This notion of the 'terror' of ecology is also something that Morton explores in his 'dark ecology', which is predicated on the 'ambiguity and darkness' of our 'intimacy with other beings' (Morton, 2010, p. 100). For the 'health' of 'ecologies', Bennett argues that we must devise new ways of enabling us to 'consult nonhumans more closely . . . to listen and respond more carefully to their outbreaks, objections . . . and propositions' (2010, p. 108). I take Bennett's argument further, aiming to develop performance methods that allow us to listen to nonhumans *and* humans more closely, and to listen and respond to the negative feedback from within a specific practiced ecology: an intergenerational performance ecology of diverse humans and nonhuman materials. What might a performance ecology uniquely tell / teach us about the negative, destructive and 'dark' aspects of material ecological processes?

Bennett's concept of 'vibrant matter' has usefully provided me with a critical frame for some specific research propositions that I explored. Barad is, however, able to offer an even more nuanced account of human-nonhuman material processes. Her anti-essentialist materialism provides a critical account of entanglement (and what it might ethically mean to be entangled) that has proved useful in explicating some of my key research findings.

## Conceptualising Entanglements and Boundaries: Karen Barad and Agential Realism

Karen Barad proposes ‘agential realism’ as a way of empirically understanding ‘matter’s dynamism’ (2007, p. 177). She suggests that we, and our practices, are always already constituted by entangled human and nonhuman involvements (2007, p. 171-172). However, she does not merely discuss human-nonhuman entanglement. She explores the actual material *processes* by which phenomena are rendered as ‘this’ and ‘that’, ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’, ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’, ‘organic’ and ‘inorganic’, ‘animate’ and ‘inanimate’, ‘material’ and ‘discursive’ (2007, p. 183; p. 178; p. 427; p. 381). She shows *how* diverse phenomena are constituted and explores how specific ‘things’ come to matter and not matter. In order to contextualise her ‘agential realism’, and its implications for my ecological practice, it is necessary to review the criticisms she makes of essentialism, representationalism and social constructivism.

Essentialist thinking supposes that ‘things’ in the world have an independent and given reality, that there are fixed properties and boundaries to all the world’s phenomena.<sup>15</sup> Humans are understood to be able to stand objectively ‘outside’ of and at a distance from the ‘things’ they wish to observe and understand. The ontology presumed through essentialism is that there is absolute ‘exteriority between observer and observed’ (Barad, 2003, p. 815). On the other hand, representationalism proposes that humans cannot access the ‘real’ world and that all we can do is endlessly (and subjectively) represent it. With representationalist thinking the world exists (to us) only inasmuch as we interpret and construct it. So, for example, ‘nature’ is understood as a construction that is constituted through human cultural practices of representing. Under representationalism, faith is not put in matter but in representations (of matter). Barad argues that, with representationalism, ‘we don’t trust our eyes to give us reliable access to the material world’, yet we believe ‘that we have a kind of direct access to the content of our representations that we lack toward that which is represented’ (2007, p. 380-381). Representationalism, therefore, relies on a fixed binary separation between materiality and representations and it reconfigures distinctions between the discursive and the material, and the cultural and the empirical. Social constructivism, on the other hand, understands the discursive and material as entwined processes. Barad turns to theorist Judith Butler in order to think ‘the matter of materiality and signification together in their indissolubility’ (2007, p. 145). With social constructivism, human practices are

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<sup>15</sup> The ‘arborescent’ view of the world explored by Deleuze and Guattari corresponds to the essentialism Barad discusses.

understood in terms of their material performativity. That is, social and cultural practices have real-material consequences on bodies. Cultural practice does not merely represent the world, but marks and materially contributes to what the world is. Barad draws on Butler's notion that it is the *repetition* of cultural performances that produces 'a specific materialization of bodies' (Barad, 2007, p. 63). In exposing the material *performativity* of identities, significations and power relations, social constructivists open up the possibilities for contestation and change. However, Barad criticises Butler, discussing how she presumes that materialisations, and marks on bodies, are the *end product* of human cultural practices. Matter is ultimately seen to derive from 'the agency of language or culture' and the material bodies that social constructivists discuss are usually only human ones (2007, p. 64; p. 145). Performativity and agency is attributed and limited to the human domain. Social constructionists, therefore, fail 'to recognise matter's dynamism' and do not take the dynamics of matter 'seriously' (2007, p. 64; p. 152).

In the place of essentialist, representationalist and social constructivist perspectives, Barad offers 'agential realism'. This is not the 'realism' of an essentialised world of inherent physical properties and boundaries. Nor is it 'about representations of an independent reality', and it 'goes beyond performativity theories that focus exclusively on the human / social realm' (Barad, 2007, p. 37; p. 225). Agential realism is, then, 'about the real consequences, interventions, creative possibilities, and responsibilities of intra-acting within and as part of the world' (2007, p. 37). But what does Barad mean by 'agential realism', and what implications does this have for my conceptualisations of an ecological performance practice?

Barad proposes that the world consists of 'phenomena' (2007, p. 139) and that these phenomena are constituted through the entangled dynamics of matter. There are no preexisting material 'entities' or 'relata' which then 'interact' or 'relate' with each other (2007, p. 139-140). There are only 'intra-actions' and the 'world *is* intra-activity' (Barad, 2003, p. 810; p. 817). Barad's concept of intra-activity resonates with the propositions I have already detailed, about how the performance ecology is a matter of distinct yet entangled diverse humans and nonhumans, and that process and performance is a matter of interacting or 'intra-acting' with(in) wider ecologies. Process and performance can be understood as *instances* of ecological participation or intra-activity. Barad proposes that intra-actions involve 'entangled agencies' but these 'entangled agencies' are only constituted through their intra-actions (2007, p. 33). Distinct 'relata' or 'agencies' do not precede but rather

emerge *in* their intra-actions. This is because every intra-action effects an ‘agential cut’. In contrast to the Cartesian cut, which takes distinctions for granted, the agential cut ‘enacts a resolution *within* the phenomenon of the inherent ontological . . . indeterminacy’ (2007, p. 140). In this resolution the intra-acting agencies are established and separability between agencies is ‘agentially enacted’ (2007, p. 175). Agential cuts do not uncover preexisting agencies, but rather co-constitute what the intra-acting agencies are. So what intra-acts with what is established *in* their intra-activity. The agential cut (temporarily) determines boundaries between one ‘thing’ and an ‘other’ with the cut enacting ‘*exteriority-within-phenomena*’ or ‘*agential separability*’ (2007, p. 175; p. 140).

I propose that performance, and performance practices, can be understood through Barad’s concept of ‘apparatuses’, where apparatuses are not pre set-up structures that can be used to look at the world but rather apparatuses are ‘material-discursive practices’ that are always already intra-acting with(in) the world. Apparatuses are practices through which distinctions between ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’, ‘culture’ and ‘nature’, and so on, are ‘constituted’ (2007, p. 141). An apparatus does ‘not simply detect differences that are already in place; rather they contribute to the production and reconfiguring of difference’ (2007, p. 232). In this sense, the apparatus of theatrical performance can be understood to contribute to and reconfigure wider ecologies: performance marks and is marked by diverse ecologies. Apparatuses enact agential cuts: that is they help to implicate boundaries between one thing and an other, say between eight humans, or between humans, rocks, water, buckets and matches.<sup>16</sup> With Barad’s agential realism, differences and relations between ‘phenomena’ are *made*, and differences and relations are intra-actively and materially *performed*. Differences and relations are not pre-givens, and they are not enacted once and for all. With every intra-action they are different. Differences are thus only ever ‘differences-in-the-(re) making’ (Barad, 2014, p. 175), and with each intra-action ‘the manifold of entangled relations is reconfigured’ (Barad, 2007, p. 393-4). The ‘phenomenon’ constituted by these boundaries and differences are utterly entangled. In this sense, boundaries and differences between humans and between humans and nonhumans are intra-actively produced such that with each of our intra-actions we take part in reconfiguring what these differences are. So, boundaries and differences can be understood not as fixed but as continually made and remade through material processes; processes that we do not have full control over but we are agentially part of. What is key about Barad’s argument for my research is that she is able to account for separation and difference between phenomena at the same time as she is able

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<sup>16</sup> These references correspond to *Wild Life*, which I explore in Chapter Five.

to show that these phenomena are materially and continuously entangled and entangling. This is particularly significant for my analysis of *Wild Life*, in which I discuss the differences and distinctions as well as the entanglements of the diverse humans and nonhuman materials in the performance ecology. Barad is able to provide a critical framework for discussing separation and entanglement, differences and interconnection, and boundaries and the unbounded.

Barad proposes that ‘phenomena - whether lizards, electrons, or humans - exist only as a result of, and as part of, the world’s ongoing intra-activity, its dynamic and contingent differentiation into specific relationalities’ (2007, p. 353). She proposes that ‘we participate in bringing forth the world in its specificity, including ourselves’ (2007, p. 353). Under Barad’s ‘agential realism’, being in the world is inevitably about being entangled within diverse ecological processes, which is always already a matter of intra-action, and so what matters is *how* we enact our live, ongoing and unavoidable intra-activity. This relates to my argument that since all performance practice participates in ecology then *how* we practice performance *matters* to ecology. Barad proposes that specific ‘possibilities for (intra-)acting exist at every moment’ (2007, p. 235). Vitality for my research, she implies that intra-acting agencies can transgress the boundaries they have helped to enact; according to Barad, intra-activity is a process of reconfiguring cuts, differences and boundaries. This relates to two of my findings from *Wild Life*: firstly, that ecological performance is a question of *what* methods allow us to enact through our intra-activities responsively and with responsibility; and, secondly that the diverse humans and nonhumans of the performance ecology all have the capacity and potential to transgress and reconfigure the boundaries of the performance containers I (as the director) provide. I characterise these findings through my phrases: the *agency of practice*; and, *wilding performance containers*.<sup>17</sup> .

The perspectives I have explored in this chapter have enabled me to critically frame my research inquiry and to discuss the key concepts and ideas that I engaged with, tested and developed in my practical projects. However, there are two aspects of Bennett’s and Barad’s work that my research into performance ecology might build on and offer important challenges to.

There is a tendency in Barad’s theorisations to lose sight of humans and intra-human relations. Her intention is not to jettison ‘the human’ but to present a more complex and

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<sup>17</sup> These are discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

accurate empirical account of how ‘humans’ and ‘nonhumans’ materially emerge. However, in putting forward her key argument that discursive practices ‘are not human-based activities’ (2007, p. 183-184), she often seems to push the human so far out of her theoretical discussions that the human appears to, well, disappear. This disappearance is evident in the examples she chooses, such as the brittlestar animal which is used to illustrate her ideas about ‘differences that matter’ (2007, p. 369): she tends to avoid focusing on specific human beings and prefers instead to focus on specific nonhumans. In exploring and developing an ecological performance practice I worked with a specific group of diverse humans, and I chose to focus on the performance ecology as an ecology of humans and nonhumans. This meant that my work involved a sharp focus on relations and collaborations between humans, as well as between humans and nonhumans. At times, I even specifically and only focused on the humans in the performance ecology as a strategy for working with the complexity of humans as human-nonhuman entanglements. In this way, my research offers an alternative to Barad’s predominant focus on the nonhuman. At the same time, Barad’s work offers a vital framework for my research into performance ecology; her perspective allows me to remain cognizant of the more-than-human and reminds me that the human is not all (of the performance ecology).

My research also adds to a different but related aspect of new materialist thinking, which can be identified in the work of both Bennett and Barad. When there is a focus on the human in their work, it is predominantly one single (adult) human who is discussed. Bennett discusses her experience of encountering the vibrant matter of a dead rat, cap, glove and pollen on her walk, where she is a part of this configuration of ‘things’ (2010, p.4-5) and Barad draws on the experiments of physicist Niels Bohr in order to frame her argument that we are part of the phenomena we wish to study (2007, p. 26). In both cases, ‘the human’ is represented through a single person. In my research, I explored and developed these ideas about material vibrancy (Bennett) and material intra-activity (Barad) by focusing on a *collective* of different humans: two children, one teenager and six adults (including me). I tested out Bennett’s and Barad’s ideas in terms of both intra-human and human-nonhuman relations, and I propose that ‘the ecological’ is necessarily as much about challenging our approach to *doing* human interrelations as it is about challenging our approach to *doing* human-nonhuman interrelations.

In these ways, my research aims not only to illustrate and test out the theories on matter offered by Bennett and Barad, but also to build on their work. So, whilst a large part of my



thesis is about what Bennett's and Barad's work brings to ecological performance practice, I am also concerned with what performance ecology can bring to the conceptualisations and meanings of ecology presented by their theories. This is, in part, why a practice-as-research (PaR) methodology is a significantly relevant one to use for my research. I think that the key potential of a PaR approach is that it can draw out insights from specific instances of performance practice, where these insights can shed light both within and beyond theatre and performance. In the following chapter I discuss in more detail my approach, locating it within the wider theoretical landscape of PaR.

## Chapter Three - Methodology

In exploring how a performance practice can be ecological, my project is driven by an inquiry that demanded a PaR approach. Since my research is concerned with *doing* - with the practices and modes of doing theatrical performance - the research needed to be led by the actualities of specific performance processes and events. A PaR approach was also key in terms of the research partnership with Catherine Wheels Theatre Company. In this chapter I discuss the complexities and issues of PaR and how I have approached using this methodology in my research.

In the UK PaR genealogies can be traced to at least the 1960s, emerging as part of the 'performative turn' or 'practice turn' that has taken place across a range of arts and humanities disciplines (Kershaw, 2011, p. 63). However, PaR in theatre and performance has only gained substantial recognition in British universities since the 1990s (Nelson, 2013, p. 4; Kershaw, 2009, p. 1-2). Despite being acknowledged by the sector's research agencies and processes - PaR is funded via the AHRC and evaluated as part of HEFCE's Research Assessment Exercises (RAE) and Research Excellence Framework (REF) - a key writer on PaR, Robin Nelson, has proposed that it does not currently enjoy a wholly respected position within the academy. He suggests that it remains for some a rather elusive and / or incomprehensible mode of research (Nelson, 2013, p. 4). Anxiety towards PaR is predominantly due to the ambiguity this methodology poses in terms of where 'research' and 'knowledge' can be located, and what constitutes their dissemination. By proposing artistic practice as research methodology, PaR troubles the traditional Western binary between 'practice' and 'theory', between 'making' and 'studying' something (Nelson, 2013, p. 19; p. 16). A key aspect to how I use and conceptualise 'performance' in this thesis is that doing performance can be a mode of theorising about performance; that making performance can be a mode of studying it. Furthermore, a key aspect to how I use and conceptualise 'ecology' is that, since we are always already *in* ecology, the ecological troubles binaries between thinking and doing, where practicing and theorising 'ecology' are not easily separable processes. My practical approach to thinking and doing performance (in) ecology resonates with Guattari's political proposition that any critical 'reconstruction' of the 'human' requires the 'continuous development of . . . practices as much as . . . theoretical scaffolding' (1989, p. 40). Furthermore, by proposing that research inquiry and findings can be embedded within artistic practice itself, PaR implicitly disrupts institutional structures of presenting and evidencing research. In particular, and certainly an aspect of my own research, the instabilities and impermanence of theatrical

performance pose direct challenges to the long-standing notion of fixed knowledge taxonomies. Since performance is a live as well as ephemeral activity, it also challenges the notion of 'reproducibility', which is something that has been upheld by 'the academy for the past 550 years via mechanically reproducible writing' (Piccini and Rye, 2009, p. 42). Therefore, PaR variously challenges traditional conventions of research inquiry and presentation. For me it is, in part, these very difficulties and complexities that make PaR a rigorous and robust research approach and, in particular, the necessary approach for my research inquiry into an ecological practice.

As previously discussed, I inherited a research topic: 'Sustaining the Imagination: Theatre and learning for sustainability'. I was attracted to this CDA because of my ongoing commitment, as a professional performance-maker, to exploring ecology through performance. I thus brought my own critically informed and creative practice to this project, which formulated into two research imperatives: exploring how performance can enact ecology through its very practices, methods and structures; and, exploring how intergenerational collaboration could be a particularly dynamic performance ecology through which to develop an ecological practice. I revised the overarching question to be: How can a performance practice be ecological? Brad Haseman points out that this negotiation is typical of a PaR approach - creative practice itself initiates the research inquiry (2007, p. 147) - albeit brought into sharper focus through the CDA format of my research. This aspect of PaR is further demonstrated by Kershaw, who suggests that artist-researchers tend to 'encounter *hunches*' from within their professional artistic practices and that it is these that form the starting points for their research (2011, p. 65). I certainly arrived at my research question as a result of the hunches I encountered in my practice leading up to my PhD research and I chose to begin my practice-as-research by testing out these hunches through an initial performance project, *Age-Old*, as well as through my initial literature reviews of two areas of performance studies: performance and ecology; and children and performance. Through the laboratory practice of *Age-Old* I identified more clearly and coherently the specific research questions I wished to explore: the project served to affirm my research inquiry and its feasibility and significances as part of a timely and meaningful scholarly conversation. This process of honing and specifying the research through the actual process of doing the research is, as Nelson points out, similar to all methodologies and disciplines (2013, p. 30) but nonetheless does create an 'output' in a format - a performance - rather dissimilar to other methodologies. *Age-Old* was an important scoping-out phase of my research and formed a development piece through which emerged some of the methods and aesthetics that I took forward into the

much more ambitious process and production of *Wild Life*, where *Wild Life* forms the major body and output of my research.

Whilst my PaR methodology was clear from the outset, the specifics of my performance methods were not predefined. This relates to two distinctive qualities of PaR: firstly, since the approach is particular to each artist-researcher the methods are inherently diverse (Kershaw, 2009, p. 4); and, secondly, since the methods unfold through the process of the research, they are always emergent and cannot be fully defined prior to the research process (Barrett, 2007, p. 6). Extending this latter trope of PaR, I found that a key aspect of an ecological practice is that its performance methodologies are neither fixed nor definitive but can be transgressed and reconfigured by the interventions that are enacted by human and nonhuman participants.<sup>18</sup> I thus consider PaR to be a robust methodology for my inquiry into ecological practice precisely because its methods can shift, develop and emerge in response to the particularities of the performance ecology. My performance (research) practice can even be understood to be predicated on its *lack* of fixed methodology. Simon Jones' insights resonate with this aspect of my approach. Jones argues that, what is needed with PaR, is not the courage of practitioner-researchers to predict and convict their practices, but rather '*the courage of their lack of convictions*' (2009, p. 22, italics in original). He proposes that PaR must resist 'coming to know a practice apparently once and for all time' (2009, p. 22). I think it is, in part, by embracing the unknown and emergent nature of creative practice that PaR can be generative of new thinking and doing, and can produce new knowledge and insight about, in my case, performance and ecology. This approach of embracing the unknown and emergent necessarily involves an openness to the muddles and messiness of creative practice. Bateson, through his 'metalogues', emphasises the importance of muddle and messiness: he suggests that 'if we . . . spoke logically all the time, we would never get anywhere . . . [and] in order to think new thoughts or to say new things, we have to break up all our ready-made ideas and shuffle the pieces' (1972, p. 25). For me, exploring and developing an ecological performance practice can be understood as a process of shuffling the pieces (of what is already known about 'performance' and 'ecology'). Jones' notion that PaR is not about fixing or predicting creative practices is also particularly apposite in terms of the emphasis my research places on exploring agency in performance ecology. Part of my PaR approach was a question of how to allow my methods to emerge responsively and reflectively in relation to the unknown, unexpected and unpredictable aspects of the performance ecology.

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<sup>18</sup> I discuss my notion of humans and nonhumans transgressing performance methods in Chapter Five.

Nelson describes a PaR approach as one in which the ‘products’ of artistic practice are presented as a key instance of the research findings and dissemination (2013, p. 8-9). This is reflected in my approach, where my research ‘products’ - the public performances of *Age-Old* and *Wild Life* - present the components of my research journey and outcomes, where *Wild Life* forms the major body of my research. Whilst I include a full-length film, along with specific film excerpts from process and performance, of both *Age-Old* and *Wild Life* as part of this written thesis, it is of course the case that these films do not replace the processes and performances themselves. Rather, they function as part of this written thesis as a reminder for readers who have seen both or either of the pieces, and as a mode of sharing the processes and performances, in some form at least, with readers. Furthermore, in chapters Four and Five I have chosen to direct the reader towards watching the full-length films of each performance prior to reading my full analysis of each project and its findings, and to view each film excerpt before the specific analyses it corresponds to. By doing this, I hope to avoid preordaining the documentation of the performance work with particular interpretations of action. I wish to allow the reader more scope (and agency) in terms of interpreting and understanding the creative work and my claims for that work. This is related to a significant issue with PaR: that its findings tend to be prefigured by the researcher prior to engagements with the actual performance projects. This prefiguration means that the practice risks merely being a project of self-confirming prophesy. By viewing the work prior to my writing about that work, my aim is to demonstrate how the practice itself *is* research; research which exists within and beyond the theoretical ideas I explored through it and the theoretical ideas that my critical reflections on that practice led me to.

My methods of documenting my two projects included filming and taking pictures of rehearsals and the final performances, and keeping a journal to reflect on each session and the research process. For *Age-Old*, film-maker Geraldine Heaney filmed the performance (at Hillhead Primary School) from the position of an audience member using one hand held camera. For *Wild Life*, film-makers Jack Nurse and Morven Williams each used a hand held camera and a third camera was set up at the top entrance of the auditorium (at Platform) in order to capture the performance space from above. In this thesis I include images and footage from the rehearsal process and final performances, and I use and summarise sections from my journal. With PaR, these kinds of documentation - films, images and reflective notes - are sometimes used in the place of the artworks in order to fully evidence the research inquiry and findings (Nelson, 2013, p. 5; Piccini and Rye, 2009, p. 36). This is, however, not the case for me. Since it is the actual *doing* of performance (in process and product) that my

research seeks to explore and elucidate, it does not make sense to treat the documentation as though it can fully stand in for my performance projects. Therefore, my presented documentation plays a small but supportive role as part of this written component of my thesis.<sup>19</sup> What is distinctive about research that is PaR, is that the research emerges from artistic practice, is carried out using that practice as the principle methodology and is (in part) evidenced through the products of that practice. I think artistic practice can explore questions that other methodologies cannot and, as Nelson puts it, what is at stake with PaR is the capacity of an artistic practice to ‘undertake an inquiry which yields insights of its own’ (2013, p. 81). PaR is predicated on the unique type of research inquiry an artistic practice can instigate and enact, and the distinct kinds of knowledge which that practice can produce. It remains the case, however, that the predominant ways others will engage with my research will be through this written thesis and the documentation of the performance projects. This presents a paradox: my research seeks to elucidate how actual performance practices can *do* the ecological at the same time as it relies primarily on this written component of the thesis for its scholarly dissemination. Remaining alert to this paradox is an important aspect of my reflexive approach. The different methodologies I adopted for gaining feedback from my collaborators and audiences may go some way in addressing the paradox of *writing* about the *doing* of performance (in) ecology.

My approach to gaining feedback from my collaborators developed and shifted over the course of my research trajectory. For *Age-Old* I recorded reflective discussions that I had with my young collaborator: 7-year-old Carragh McLavin. These reflective discussions took place during the creative process and after the public performances. However, when gaining feedback from Carragh I felt that when I recorded our conversations, Carragh tended to offer me (what she thought were) the ‘right’ answers to my questions.<sup>20</sup> Asking Carragh pre-formed questions seemed to prefigure specific kinds of answers: answers which were helpful to my understandings of the work but said little about how the process and performance may have been *doing* performance (in) ecology.<sup>21</sup> When reflecting on Carragh’s feedback during *Age-Old*, I felt that she had in fact presented me with the most interesting and useful insights into

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<sup>19</sup> I recognise that documentation and performance is a field of practice and critical discussion in its own right, and is often discussed in relation to PaR (see, for example, Piccini and Rye, 2009). Whilst it is beyond the scope of my thesis to explore the debates in detail, the documentation and performance field offers a useful reference for my brief discussion here about the role of my documentation in this thesis.

<sup>20</sup> Journal, 30 November 2013

<sup>21</sup> I asked her questions such as ‘what did you like about being animals in the performance?’ and ‘what did you enjoy most about the process and performance?’ Journal, 20 February 2013

my research process when we were not formally reflecting on the work but simply chatting either during or outside of rehearsals.<sup>22</sup> For *Wild Life* I therefore decided to adopt a different approach to gaining feedback from my collaborators: I simply made notes of the insights offered by my collaborators, where these insights occurred both during and outside of rehearsals and often at unexpected moments (i.e. not necessarily when we were having reflective discussions about the work and their experiences). This methodology enabled me to capture a sense of what my collaborators might be experiencing and what the different performance practices might be *doing*. I also gained feedback during the creative process of making *Wild Life* through sharing works-in-progress with my non-academic supervisor, Paul Fitzpatrick and dramaturge, Laura Bradshaw.

My approach to gaining audience feedback also shifted over the course of my research. For *Age-Old*, I predominantly gained feedback formally in post-show discussions and workshops. As part of a work-in-progress sharing of *Age-Old* at Tramway (a theatre venue in Glasgow), there was a feedback session with the audience, which provided me with responses about my work from professionals in the field of children's theatre. I conducted workshops with the Primary 3 pupils from Hillhead Primary School who saw the final performance of *Age-Old*, gaining theirs and their teachers' insights into, and readings of, the work. I also conducted feedback workshops with two youth groups at Platform (spanning 8 to 16 year-olds) who saw the final performance of *Age-Old*. Whilst these methods for audience feedback proved somewhat useful in terms of hearing about the varied readings of *Age-Old*, I felt that the feedback was limiting in terms of gaining any in-depth insights into what the performance was *doing*: the feedback was largely about what the young people thought the performance meant in thematic and content terms. This may have been, in part, due to the kinds of questions I asked (for example, 'what do you remember most about the performance' and 'what / who did you see in the performance?').<sup>23</sup> I also think that the limitations of the feedback I received was due to the very construct and context of feedback sessions and workshops. Whilst this set-up can be useful for developing performance work and developing people's engagement in that work, for my research I wanted to gain a sense from audience members of what the performance might have been doing in its very enactments. Whilst it may be impossible to ever fully gain these types of insights from audience members, I felt that the informal conversations I had with audience members immediately after the *Age-Old* productions were the most useful in terms of gaining a sense of what their phenomenological

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<sup>22</sup> I draw on Carragh's insights throughout my analysis of *Age-Old* in Chapter Four

<sup>23</sup> Journal, 30 November 2013

experiences of the performance were. Therefore, my predominant methodology with *Wild Life* was to have informal conversations with a variety of audience members. These included artist colleagues, scholars, friends and spectators who I spoke to informally immediately after the performances. I purposefully did not prepare specific questions to ask audience members since I wanted to see what emerged about the work when spectators were not prompted by my research agendas. I wanted to be open to their experiences even if their experiences went against my intentions for the work. By not aiming for any specific type of feedback, this more informal and casual approach had significant import for my research, as it allowed me to gain a deeper and more accurate sense of what the work might have been *doing* for these audience members. In my analyses I also draw on two published reviews of *Age-Old* and *Wild Life* by the same critic Mary Brennan (the first review containing a paragraph on *Age-Old* as part of a mixed programme and the second solely devoted to *Wild Life*). These reviews offer another mode of audience feedback from the perspective of a theatre and dance critic. This type of multi-modal feedback from both my collaborators and audience members is key to PaR as *both* process and production. I draw on these different feedback modes as key research evidence throughout my analyses of *Age-Old* and *Wild Life*.

By emphasising the capacity of a practitioner-researcher's specific practice to generate knowledge, PaR could be (mis)interpreted as a way of providing new insights merely for the artistic discipline(s) it adopts. Contemporary performance artist-scholar Paul Clark has discussed how 'live performance might theorise itself' and describes how the distinctions between 'the theory of performance' and 'performance of theory' became increasingly blurred during his PaR doctoral research (Clark, 2004). From this perspective, the relevance of PaR does not necessarily go beyond the specific artistic discipline. This presented me - working in a CDA format and seeking to influence professional practice, my scholarly discipline and ecology theorisations more broadly - with a rather limiting and inward-looking approach. Whilst I concur with Clark that a substantial part of PaR is its capacity to develop the artistic practices it uses as its methods, I have found that the radical potential of PaR is precisely its ability to transgress 'domains' of knowledge. Kershaw also argues that the 'reach and coherence' of successful PaR is always already beyond the particular arts practice (2009, p. 3). My approach takes performance seriously as a practice that can generate, extend and contest theory and knowledge both within and beyond the discipline of performance: specifically, one part of my research is about what new insights performance ecology might offer to theorisations about 'ecology' in non-performance fields.



So, performance practice can be understood as itself a theorising and thinking activity, *producing* ‘knowledge or philosophy in action’ (Barrett, 2007, p. 1). My PaR approach was not merely a case of bringing ‘theory’ into dialogue with ‘practice’ or of simply drawing analogies between my practice and the theoretical ideas I encountered. Instead it was predominantly a matter of theory (about performance and ecology) emerging from the enactments of the performance ecology in process and product. My ongoing critical reading and writing of course informed and influenced my ongoing practice, however, it was important that my reading and writing neither fully dominated nor determined what practices emerged. At the same time, my performance projects and my ongoing reflections on those projects led me to new critical reading and writing, whereby these in turn influenced my future practice. Nelson describes this approach through his notion of ‘praxis’, which is a term used to denote the possibilities of ‘thought within both “theory” and “practice” in an iterative process of “doing-reflecting-reading-articulating-doing”’ (2013, p. 32). It is important, however, to emphasise that in my approach this iterative process is not one of equivalence: the job is not for the performance practice to merely demonstrate the theory or the theory to simply demonstrate the performance practice. Indeed, when I tried to directly translate ecological-theoretical ideas from my critical reading and writing into my performance practice, both the ideas and performance practice were weakened. The following example demonstrates this.

During the process of making *Wild Life*, I facilitated the group of eight performers in a movement exercise. I instructed them to move together in a clump and on my instruction to run out and back together again. I added the instruction that one or two people could run away from the group and then re-join them when their running led them back.<sup>24</sup>

### ***Watch Clip 1 Practice-as-Research, Issues of Translating Theory into Practice***

I was attempting to directly translate the ecological notion of the ‘rhizome’ (put forward by Deleuze and Guattari) into a performance exercise. I had envisaged the movements of the group as a constant variation of ‘speeds and slownesses’ and I had imagined the single person running away from the group as a ‘line of flight’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 296-297; p. 187). I was expecting and demanding that my performance practice demonstrate a philosophical idea about ecology, and I was thus ascribing an instrumentalist notion of (and unrealistic purpose for) my work. The performance exercise became merely a vessel through

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<sup>24</sup> Journal, 14 October 2014.

which to represent 'ecology', and, as a result, the philosophical idea and the practice both seemed diluted to me. On reflection, this runs counter to my approach of allowing ecological insights to immanently emerge from the *doing* of performance. I was not giving my performance research practice its due as itself generative of theoretical ideas. I was treating my practice as a means through which to represent 'ecology', rather than working with performance as itself an ecology that can uniquely enact, and shed (new) light on, what an ecological practice might be. As my research process continued, and as I developed an approach whereby my critical reading and writing (which covered perspectives within and beyond performance studies) could indirectly inform my practical work, my practice began to yield theoretical ideas about ecology and performance which I could not have predicted from my desk-based work. Simultaneously, my critical reflections and further reading grew from, but inevitably exceeded, my performance practice. This praxis is what underpins my PaR methodology, which I want to articulate as a *thinking-doing* approach.

Kim Vincs helpfully argues that artistic practice is a 'process of thinking' and critical analysis is itself a practice that is 'alive, growing' (2007, p. 100; p. 108). My thinking-doing approach is one in which my performance practice and critical-reflective writing are distinct yet enfolded into each other. I think that both are generative, creative and performative practices, and together they constitute my research trajectory and findings. As I already suggested they are not equivalent practices, but rather they differentially disseminate, and dynamically carry on, my research. My research outcomes are, therefore, not locate-able in any one 'thing': they cannot be located or fixed in either *Age-Old* or *Wild Life* or in this written thesis. Rather, my research is *differentially* carried on by the distinct yet entangled practices of doing performance and critically reflecting on performance. Perhaps the radical potential of PaR is its capacity to enact and demonstrate how theory and practice, and thinking and doing, are not (and never were) fixed and separable domains of knowledge? Furthermore, I propose that me, my performance collaborators, the audience members and the (more difficult to name) nonhuman participants of *Age-Old* and *Wild Life*, are all instances of the dynamic, and often unpredictable ways, in which my research continues to be manifested and differentially carried on. And, *your* practice of reading this work is another differential extension of my research. In this project, then, 'research' and 'knowledge' are not, in any fixed sense, embedded anywhere or embodied by anyone. Rather, I understand research and knowledge to be (only ever) enacted, and to be (only ever) research-in-process

and knowledge-in-the-making.<sup>25</sup> The creating, directing and performing of *Age-Old* and *Wild Life*, the writing of this written part of my thesis, and your process of viewing and reading it, are all variegated practices of participating in the ongoing weaves of a dynamic research ecology.

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<sup>25</sup> Barad echoes my notion of knowledge as only ever knowledge-in-the-making. She proposes that '*practices of knowing are specific material engagements that participate in (re)configuring the world*' (2007, p. 91, italics in original).

## Section Two

### Research Findings



## Chapter Four - Exploring Ecological Performance through Intergenerational Practice: *Age-Old*

As previously stated, *Age-Old* was my first PaR project and was an important scoping out phase of my research. In *Age-Old* I wanted to test out whether intergenerational collaboration can be a dynamic and generative performance ecology through which to develop an ecological practice. The project formed a development piece through which emerged some of the methods and aesthetics that I took forward into the much more ambitious process and production of *Wild Life*. For *Age-Old*, I decided to focus on a specific intergenerational collaboration between me and a single child, as at this early stage of my research I wanted to focus on a small-scale project in which I could be immersed as collaborator, facilitator and performer. I was concerned with what particular insights my practice would reveal about the connections between intergenerational collaboration and ecological practice.

### ***Watch Age-Old Full Length***

#### **Project Structure**

For *Age-Old* I collaborated with a seven-year-old girl, Carragh McLavin, working with her to co-create a new devised performance. When looking for a collaborator, I had no fixed criteria for who they should be, aside from wishing to find someone who was interested in experimenting with performance and excited at the prospect of collaborating with an adult artist. Carragh was suggested to me as a potential collaborator by my colleagues at Short Courses at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.<sup>26</sup> Carragh attended the weekend drama class for children between the ages of six and eight so I was able to observe the class - and Carragh as a participant in it - before getting in touch with her parents to ask their permission to meet up and discuss the project. I was invited by her parents to meet with Carragh at her home and tell her about the project. From this meeting Carragh decided she wanted to be involved and a rehearsal schedule was agreed with her and her parents.

*Age-Old* was made and performed between November 2012 and November 2013. The project involved two stages of development: the first stage culminated in a work-in-progress

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<sup>26</sup> [www.rcs.ac.uk/shortcourses](http://www.rcs.ac.uk/shortcourses).

performance; the second stage culminated in a final performance. The work in both its stages was shown to a wide range of audiences in diverse contexts. For the first stage, I worked with Carragh for 11 weeks. For the first six weeks we met up once a week for a 90-minute session, and for the remaining four weeks we met twice a week for two hours. This stage of the project was produced by Nick Anderson and Rosana Cade, from Buzzcut, a Glasgow-based company 'dedicated to creating exciting, supportive environments for artists and audiences to experiment with cutting edge live performance' (Buzzcut, 2015). Buzzcut was unable to provide a budget, but did provide rehearsal space and technical support. A work-in-progress was shown at Summerhall in Edinburgh at Manipulate, a visual theatre festival directed by Puppet Animation Scotland, in January 2013. The audience for this showing was made up of theatre goers and arts professionals. It was also shown at Tramway in Glasgow at an Ideas Exchange run by Imagine, a Scotland-based organisation that promotes performance for children and young people. For that showing the audience was predominantly arts professionals with an interest in new work for and / or by children.

The second stage of developing *Age-Old* took place between September and November 2013. This phase was supported by producer Matt Addicott from Platform, who had seen *Age-Old* at Ideas Exchange. Platform is an arts centre located in Easterhouse in the East End of Glasgow, an underprivileged area with a high poverty rate. This phase ran over six weeks with Carragh and me working together for two hours twice a week. Carragh was, by this time, eight years old. Platform provided rehearsal space and technical support, but again we did not have a budget for the performance. The final performance was shown in the studio space at Platform to youth groups from Platform (young people between eight and 16 years old), local community members and a theatre going audience from across Glasgow. *Age-Old* was then shown at Hillhead Primary School - Carragh's own school - in the West End of Glasgow to an audience of Carragh's classmates, parents and teachers.

## Starting Points

When first meeting Carragh, I introduced the project to her by saying that recently I had been thinking about the age of landscapes and animals and how they are often so much older than me but are a part of who I am. I said that I wanted to work with someone younger than me in order to explore these ideas in new ways and that I was interested in her perspective and ideas about human age and things in 'nature' that are older than us. I proposed that creating *Age-Old* would be an opportunity for us to

get to know each other and what our different perspectives are: ‘We will do this’, I said, ‘through playing, making movement and using drama activities. From what we do in the process we will create a performance for a public audience.’<sup>27</sup>

In *Age-Old* I wanted to explore what intergenerational collaboration might uniquely tell us about how performance can be ecological. I entered into the rehearsal process with some specific questions informed by my past practice and my initial explorations into theories of children’s theatre, children in performance and performance and ecology:

- How can intergenerational performance - in process and product - enact the nonhuman in the human?
- What does a child’s approach to performance teach us about *doing* ecology in performance?
- What types of performance conventions allow adults and children to collaborate?

I started by making specific choices about the process and performance. Firstly, I decided upon the themes of the work: age, and human-animal and human-landscape relations. Secondly, I decided that we would work inside in theatre studios, outside in the local park (Kelvingrove) and further afield in rural locations near to Glasgow. I wanted to see whether the *ways* we worked together shifted depending on *where* we worked. I wished to test out - responding to the initial brief attached to the CDA - whether a place-based approach was going to remain a key aspect in developing an ecological performance practice. Thirdly, I chose a material for us to explore: white plastic bags. I made this choice because I wanted to see how we could work with a ‘normal’ material in new ways, and how we differently interacted, played and experimented with a material that is ‘everyday’ and easily recognisable. This also served to determine the visual aesthetic of the performance. Fourthly, I decided upon specific devising activities for Carragh and me to try, which included: writing questionnaires for each other and responding to these; writing lists about each other and about ‘things’ that are older than us in ‘nature’; choreographing movement sequences in response to words we wrote about particular landscapes; improvising and interacting with the bags; and, playing at different physical ways of ‘becoming’ animals. I chose these activities, and made decisions about the theme and material of the project, with the knowledge that any or all of these choices could be shifted, or even jettisoned completely, by me and / or

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<sup>27</sup> Journal, 27 November 2012.

Carragh once we began working together. Whilst I wanted the process to be open to Carragh's interests and responsive to our evolving relationship and whatever unpredictably emerged through our collaboration, my initial decisions gave helpful boundaries to our explorations. This approach enabled me to respond to Carragh and to the creative process itself, whilst avoiding being too open by following a process where 'anything goes'. Since I was working with a non-trained young collaborator, this aspect of my approach was particularly important: Carragh entered into a process that had parameters, which allowed her to feel safe and - gradually over the process - to experiment with and push the structures and ideas I brought in. I also had a hunch that a flexible process that has creative and generative boundaries, which can be broken and re-made along the way, may be a key part of intergenerational collaboration and, indeed, an ecological performance practice.

## The Performance

*Age-Old* explored the relationship between Carragh and me, and between each of us and animals and landscapes. It was described by theatre and dance critic Mary Brennan as a show about 'the natural world both real and as filtered through the prism of a child's imagination' (Brennan, 2013).<sup>28</sup> The audience sat in a horse-shoe configuration on chairs and on the floor on cushions. The piece was a collage of different performance modes. These included movements that echoed animal behaviours, which also involved me lifting, carrying and swinging Carragh. Two movement sequences were layered with recorded texts created by Carragh and me in turn: Carragh describing herself as a tree, which included 'I grow . . . Things grow on me . . . I can fall down, I need carbon dioxide, sunlight and water to grow'; and, me describing Carragh by listing what I saw when I looked at her, such as 'I see a wolf, I see doing something for the first time . . . I see not being afraid to love things'. Specific movements, such as doing a 'mountain' shape, were repeated and developed in different sections of the performance.

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<sup>28</sup> See Appendix C for a copy of Brennan's review. It can also be viewed here, [http://www.heraldscotland.com/arts\\_ents/13090933.display/](http://www.heraldscotland.com/arts_ents/13090933.display/).





Other elements included Carragh and me giving spoken introductions about each other, telling individual audience members what kinds of wolves they would be, playing at being animals with the plastic bags and making a circular path out of the bags. There was a projector onstage, which showed film footage and images at specific moments. At the start of the show, as the audience entered, the projection showed Carragh and me outdoors playing in a park. Later in the performance, questions for a mountain that Carragh had written were projected. At another moment, there was a film of us being animals in a park, which was layered with us doing live ‘animal’ movements and sounds. Near the end of the performance, a film of us ‘flying’ with the white plastic bags outdoors was shown, whilst Carragh sat on my shoulders watching it.

## Enacting and Representing the Nonhuman in the Human

### *Watch Clip 1 Enactment and Representation, Animal Improvisation*

Kershaw, in his discussion of how performance ecologies might constitute humans as ‘a wholly integral part of the Earth’s environment, acting *in* it rather than *on* it’, suggests that it is key for performance to focus on the nonhuman in the human (2007, p. 318; p. 238, italics in original). He argues that ‘human participation in ecologies . . . must be of kinds that are continually renewed through humans courting, as it were, the nonhuman “other” in

themselves and each other' (2007, p. 238). With *Age-Old* I wanted to explore the particular case of adult-child collaboration and how this collaboration might enable enactments of the nonhuman in the human. I was concerned with developing performance strategies for Carragh and me to explore and experience the nonhuman 'other' in our (human) selves and each (human) other. I was interested in how Carragh, as a young child, would imagine and enact the nonhuman and how our approaches to *doing* the nonhuman might be similar and different and how they could coexist. One way I did this was through improvisations that involved us 'being animals'.<sup>29</sup> An example of these improvisations is shown in the clip previously viewed. Whilst Carragh and I predominantly appear to be representing nonhuman animals, my experience of doing this (and other similar improvisations) was that by being absorbed in the performance labour of 'being animals', there was no (easy) separation between the symbolism and physicality, metaphor and literality, and representation and enactment of the nonhuman in the human. I found that my focus on representing an animal (or following the way Carragh was representing one) led me to, at times, forget what animal I was attempting 'to be' and my attention was instead fully pulled to the physical experience of enacting the improvised movements themselves.<sup>30</sup> There are moments in the clip when we appear to be fully immersed in the *doing* of our improvised activities, such as: when we make a continuous 'ooo' sound near the end of the film (which came from Carragh suggesting that we become owls); when we 'howl' loudly (a result of Carragh suggesting we become loud wild animals); and, when we jump forwards with our arms in the air, shaking our heads and baring our teeth (which emerged from Carragh's suggestion that we become angry wild animals). My experience of these improvisations was that, in the doing of the performance tasks, Carragh and I were *simultaneously* representing and enacting the nonhuman in the human. Perhaps 'courting' the nonhuman in the human is necessarily a matter of the simultaneity of the symbolic and literal, and metaphorical and physical? This idea challenges the approach taken by Arons and May: as discussed in Chapter One, they draw ecological metaphors and materiality, and symbolism and the literal, as fixed dichotomies. Perhaps theatrical performance cannot avoid ecological metaphors, symbolism and representations and, therefore, perhaps any engagement with ecology through performance inevitably involves metaphorising and representing the nonhuman? My experiences of the improvisations suggested to me that part of an ecological performance practice is to embrace and engage with the nonhuman through representation and enactment, where representation may well be an unavoidable aspect of enactment.

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<sup>29</sup> 'Being animals' is the phrase Carragh and I used to describe these improvisations.

<sup>30</sup> Journal, 15 August 2013

Furthermore, from participating in, watching and reflecting on the activity of ‘being animals’ with Carragh shown in the clip, there seem to be specific qualities of doing that emerged through our real physical efforts of improvising. In the moments of immersion in what we were doing (such as the examples already given), the ways in which we were collaborating and performing seem to shift slightly: rather than merely carrying out the tasks of a performance improvisation, we arguably become more attentive, open and responsive to each other. For example, when we are ‘howling’ together the individual sounds we are making develop and change in relation to the approach (to ‘howling’) taken by each other: by *attending* to each other’s ways of ‘howling’ we are able to be *open* to the shifts in our collective ‘howling’, which in turn prompts different kinds of ‘howling’ in *response* to each other. Furthermore, I think these qualities of doing also arose in relation to the ecology of the place we were in: the grass, trees, concrete path, people, dogs and more of Kelvingrove Park. For example, a man cycling past on a bicycle became part of our activity and another element for us to respond to, and the gusts of wind caused us to adjust our foot positions and ways of moving when we were ‘bearing’ our teeth and shaking our heads. By being immersed in the *doing* of ‘being animals’, it seems we were more able to respond to the constant shifts in what the other did and what was happening around us. Or, to put this another way, the physical demands of our improvisations, along with the very real physical demands of the spaces we were in, seemed to lead to an open, attentive and responsive quality of listening between Carragh and me. So, whilst we were theatrically working with representations and metaphors of nonhumans, there arguably were moments when we were in fact enacting specific qualities of doing. I want to propose that it is in the qualities of *doing* produced by certain kinds of performance activities, as opposed to the subject matter or themes being explored, that the potentials arise for ‘humans courting, as it were, the nonhuman “other” in themselves and each other’ (Kershaw, 2007, p. 238). This aspect of *Age-Old* led me to consider that, firstly, an ecological performance practice may be a matter of the qualities of doing (such as openness, attentiveness and responsiveness) that theatrical performance practices can instigate, where these qualities might be understood as *ecological*, and that, secondly, representing and symbolising the nonhuman may be a significant strategy *into* enacting ecological qualities.

This point about how there may be implicit aspects of theatrical performance practices that instigate ecological qualities of doing can be developed further through discussing my reading of a children’s dance piece, *Îlo*, by Belgium company ChaliWaté.<sup>31</sup> *Îlo* was performed by two

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<sup>31</sup> I saw this performance at Imagine Festival, Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, May 2013.

adult dancers. It involved mime and dance, and was framed as a play without words about a man and a 'thirsty plant' (<http://www.chaliwate.com/en/spectacles#llo>, no date). The piece was described as an environmentally focused work about the issue of water shortage: it was a story about a man and a plant going on a journey to find water (Imagine, 2016a <http://www.chaliwate.com/en/spectacles#llo>, no date). It has been discussed as an environmental performance that addresses the 'soaring issue' of global water shortages, exploring 'the topic from both the perspective of a human and a thirsty plant' (TV Bomb, 2016). *llo* explored an environmental issue through the use of metaphor and representation: mime was used to represent a 'thirsty flower' and the 'flower' (represented by the female performer) was in a large plant pot and served as a metaphor for 'nature'. Whilst the ecological topic was explicit and the human dancers were clearly representing nonhumans and demonstrating 'nature' through theatrical metaphors, for me the *physical qualities* of how the performers danced together were what made this performance, in my understanding, an ecological piece of work. Certain parts of the choreography demanded that the two dancers continuously take and give each other their weight in, what I saw as, an ongoing process of collaborative negotiations. These negotiations seemed to produce a responsive quality of reciprocity between the dancers, where the performers were (in these moments) *enacting* responsiveness and reciprocity. My thoughts eventually and subtly arrived at the need for reciprocity between humans and nonhumans in a wider ecological sense. Of course the topic of 'water' and the representations of 'nonhumans' played a part in my reading of the work, but it was the *physical qualities* and *dynamics* of their movements that had any lasting affect on me. Reciprocity is often presented as a key principle of environmental ecologies, especially through the ecosystem maxim of 'everything hangs together' (Naess, 1987, p. 37). Seeing this performance prompted me to consider whether dance practice implicitly entails the potential for enacting how 'everything hangs together', where movement work can *do* the qualities of healthy environmental ecologies (where these qualities include responsiveness and reciprocity). With *Age-Old* I explored movement creation in a number of ways in order to see what types of methods might allow ecological qualities to emerge in the *doing* of movement work (in both process and product).

## Immanent Authorship

### *Watch Clip 2 Immanent Authorship, Mountain Movements*

In a rehearsal during the first stage of developing *Age-Old*, we made a list of words to describe mountains, which included ‘muddy’, ‘high’, ‘spiky’ and ‘rocky’. At the end of the session, Carragh had commented to me that she ‘liked these words very much’.<sup>32</sup> In response to her comment, for the following rehearsal I transferred these words onto slips of paper, folding them up and putting them in a hat. I introduced my idea to Carragh: for us to create a movement sequence from the ‘mountain words’ we had come up with the previous week and we would create our movement sequence by taking turns to close our eyes, pick a slip of paper, create a movement from the word written on it and then teach our movement to each other. We would add each movement on to the last in order to create a movement sequence.

We began this activity, and I soon realised that the game of picking out an unknown word from the hat brought an excitement and energy to the way we worked together: there was a playful sense of ‘which one will I / you pick and what will it say and what movement will you / I do?’ Whilst I had brought a preplanned exercise into the rehearsal, Carragh and I were equally required to respond physically in-the-moment to what was written on the piece of paper. I could not plan how I would respond to the activity, as my responses were a result of the movement Carragh had just created, and how it felt being in the room with her at the time. It seemed that Carragh and I could have a more collaborative process as a result of us both being in a position of unknowing: neither of us knew what word we were going to pick, nor what movement the other would make. As previously discussed in relation to devising performance, Wilson proposes that the ‘hierarchy of the director is diminished as a result of their role as co-learner with the performers’ (2012, p. 121). The collective process of navigating through the unknown (of what movements we would create) seemed to temporarily enable a non-hierarchical adult-child and professional-nonprofessional collaboration between Carragh and me, in that we were equally implicated in devising this movement material.

With *Age-Old*, I developed an understanding that my role as the trained expert and director was to carefully plan structures that created a safe space for Carragh and me to work together with(in) the unknown: that is, intergenerational collaboration emerged when

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<sup>32</sup> Journal, 5 December 2012.

activities *demanded* that we create from a shared position of unknowing. So, whilst I was ‘in the know’ about how to create appropriate structures for devising performance material, I was not ‘in the know’ about *what* we would create: what was created relied on how we responded to each other and how Carragh interpreted an activity and in what direction we then took that activity together. My preplanned activities would not only be taken in unexpected directions, but new activities would often emerge from them. Creating the ‘mountain movements’<sup>33</sup> led us to explore and develop - later in the rehearsal process - the same movements through an improvisation, which led us to create new movements. By this approach, the performance material can be understood to emerge *immanently* from the collaborative process. Laura Cull’s description of ‘immanent collaboration’ is useful here: she discusses how performance can emerge from the differences between collaborators and from the process itself - from the ‘bottom-up’ (2013, p. 24-25). A ‘bottom-up’ approach was a key part of our intergenerational collaboration, where the structures of the performance activities (such as the creation of the ‘mountain movements’) would demand that Carragh and I contribute differently even as we were jointly working with(in) uncertainty and the unknown. The types of movements that Carragh and I created were at once unique to each of us and informed by what each other did: we were arguably discovering new performance material together in the moment of making it. Furthermore, my initial idea of creating movements from the ‘mountain words’ (written by Carragh and me the previous week) can be understood as an example of how my creative ideas often emerged from *within* the process itself, from a previous activity and / or from something Carragh had said or done. This troubles any clear sense of who the ideas belong to, where the ideas can be understood to be immanent to our collaborative process.

When performance ideas and performance material developed in response to something Carragh and I had said or done within or outside of rehearsals, I think that the performance process was being *led* by both Carragh and me, or rather it was being led by our *collaboration* and *relations*. Ingold’s description of environments is useful here. He describes human and nonhuman beings as ‘lines’ that interweave and ‘knot’ together (2011, p. 226; p. 151; p. 175), where these ‘lines’ do not connect one ‘thing’ to an ‘other’, but rather beings unfold through their ongoing relations with each other: things *are* their relations’ (2011, p. 70). His theories about ecological environments reflect and extend from the scientific understanding of ecosystems as a matter not of isolated individuals but of relations between organisms and between organisms and their environments. As Bateson describes, the unit of survival is not so

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<sup>33</sup> This is the name Carragh and I called this performance material.

much the Darwinian notion of the ‘survival of the fittest’ species but rather the ‘unit of survival is *organism plus environment*’ (Bateson, 1972, p. 489). In light of this ecological principle, the practices I developed in *Age-Old* can be understood as ecological when they allowed our *relations* to lead the process (as opposed to either of us individually leading). By this approach, the final performance of *Age-Old* arguably involved the relations between our adult and child perspectives as opposed to a performance that was entirely filtered through my adult gaze. This ecological principle of the relational can be extended to the relations between different performance elements. For example, the ‘mountain movement’ choreography became part of the final performance, and was layered with a recorded text that Carragh and I had put together from a poem she had written about trees. This choice to layer the movement sequence with a different element from the process (a spoken text) is another aspect of immanent authorship. I structured the performance by experimenting with putting different elements (created by Carragh and I) together. This allowed the immanent connections between performance elements to emerge, where unforeseen connections between, for example, the ‘mountain movements’ and Carragh’s tree text could arise. Perhaps this type of immanent authorship, where the focus is on relations as opposed to individual humans or individual performance material, is part of what sustains a performance ecology? Perhaps immanent authorship can be understood as an ecological practice inasmuch as it enables no one human perspective or no one performance element to dominate? Perhaps ecological performance practice is about *allowing* connections between collaborators and between performance elements to emerge from the ‘bottom up’ of the performance ecology (rather than connections being imposed by the human director)?

Whilst I emphasise our process of collectively working with(in) the unknown and the potential for the relations between Carragh and me to lead the work, this approach was not about complete equilibrium or equivalence between us. In the ‘mountain movements’ clip, it appears that at times I led the movements, at times Carragh led and at other times it is impossible to tell who was leading. We were able to collaborate without being fixed by the dualisms associated with adult / child and professional / nonprofessional relationships, such as knower / learner, leader / follower and teller / told. I do not think, however, that we completely transcended these binaries, but rather, there was a constant and dynamic *shift* in our relations. I think that these ongoing shifts meant that no performer, and in this case no movement, could dominate the performance ecology. Our collaboration, in this instance, was not a case of us contributing in equal and the same ways, but a matter of the emergent and changing dynamics *between* us. What I think is important about this immanent authorship

approach is that Carragh and I were equal inasmuch as the relations and betweenness led the work. As discussed in Chapter One, equilibrium is not a desirable quality for an environmental ecology because total equilibrium would mean a system becomes stagnant and dies. Rather, it is the changing *dynamics between* elements that defines and sustains a healthy ecosystem. Furthermore, ecologists propose that the diversity and health of ecosystems can be sustained by the positive effects of ‘ecotones’, which are dynamic places where, as Kershaw puts it, ‘two or more ecologies meet and mingle, such as, say, riverbanks, seashores and deep-sea volcanic vents’ (Kershaw, 2007, p. 19). Ecology, as a scientific discipline, demonstrates that in the *between* of two or more ecologies, new life-forms can emerge. So it may well be that for performance (in process and product) to *enact* the ecological, we need to develop strategies that allow for the unique and changing dynamics *between* collaborators to constantly change and evolve, where the *betweenness* of the collaboration lead the work. These ideas emerged directly out of the intergenerational context I was working in, which suggests that intergenerational collaboration can offer a productive context for developing an ecological practice. Practitioner and researcher Jess Allen articulates this connection between the intergenerational and ecological in her description of a conference performance-paper I gave about *Age-Old*.<sup>34</sup> In her conference review, Allen discusses the ways in which my presentation used ‘diversity and dynamism as signifiers of healthy ecosystems . . . [asking] how adult / child experiences might coexist within genuinely collaborative performance-making [and] how might they [Carragh and I] contribute not in the same ways, but differently and in dynamic relationship?’ (2014, p. 229). Allen’s observations signal my claim that intergenerational collaboration can implicitly *enact* the diversity and dynamism that is so necessary for the health of any ecosystem.

At the audience feedback session at the Ideas Exchange event, my non-academic supervisor Paul Fitzpatrick commented that, for him, the most compelling aspect of the performance was how clear it was that Carragh and I had made the performance material *together*. He suggested how, even though the piece was rehearsed and structured, the performance itself openly and explicitly involved the live process of Carragh and me dynamically navigating through the work. Fitzpatrick felt that he was watching the dynamics between us emerging *live* in the space: the intergenerational relationship happened transparently in real-time on the stage.<sup>35</sup> Brennan, in her review of *Age-Old*, describes the show as ‘a tender, merry yet

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<sup>34</sup> *Performance and the environment: new perspectives on ecological performance making, a symposium*, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, 1 November 2013.

<sup>35</sup> Journal, 13 February 2013.



affecting *dialogue* about the distances - in noticing, understanding, believing - that grow in, and with us across years' (Brennan, 2013, my italics). Brennan identifies the intergenerational dialogue that emerged live onstage, which implies that she was focused on the relations between us, as opposed to one individual performer. Fitzpatrick's comments and Brennan's review suggest that the dynamics of our intergenerational collaboration were not (only) represented in the performance but were *enacted* in the live *doing* of the performance. I propose that the public performances were each a unique carrying on of our collaboration, in which the dynamics of our relationship emerged differently each time we performed the work. Barad proposes that to 'specify or study the dynamics of a system is to say something about the nature of and possibilities for change' (2007, p. 179). By focusing on and specifying the dynamics between Carragh and I, I think that the performance embodied (in its very doing) possibilities for change: there was a sense that our relations could play out in different ways depending on, for example, the moods Carragh and I were in, the spectators who were watching the work, the particularities of the space we were performing in and (many) other factors. In this way, the performance may have been successful as an open ecology, in that the production inevitably shifted depending on our interactions and the interactions between the performance ecology and other ecologies, such as the ecology of the place we performed in. This leads to another aspect of the research project: through *Age-Old* I wanted to explore how the process of making the work could be informed by the ecologies of the different places in which we worked, and therefore whether a place-based practice was going to be a productive approach for developing an ecological performance practice.

## Place-Based Practice

### *Watch Clip 3 Betweens Leading, Flying with Bags*

Six weeks into the process of the first stage of development, I was walking Carragh home after a rehearsal when she began leaping in the air and, since she was holding my hand, she tried to bring me with her. I joined in and after a few minutes, asked her what she was trying to do. She replied that she was trying to fly in the air.<sup>36</sup> Reflecting on this moment afterwards, I thought Carragh was communicating to me that she wished to explore 'flying' in our creative process. This demonstrates the approach I developed of listening to Carragh's creative interests and ideas even when she did not present them to me as verbal suggestions but rather implied them through things she did. Carragh's tendency, as a young child, to *do*

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<sup>36</sup> Journal, 10 January 2013.

things as opposed to talk about them prompted me to listen to her in more open and responsive ways than I might have done if collaborating (only) with an adult professional artist. As already discussed, Heddon presents her notion of ‘entangled listening’ as a ‘dialogical listening which stretches a radical openness towards interconnections, “listening with”’, and she proposes a practice of listening ‘beyond the human’ (Heddon, forthcoming). With *Age-Old*, by listening and attending to Carragh I also wanted to explore how we might listen and attend to the dynamics of an environment and how those dynamics might inform the listening dynamic between us.

Reflecting on Carragh’s ‘flying’, I had the idea of making a film of Carragh and me attempting to ‘fly’ using the plastic bags outdoors. Carragh was keen on my idea and so I asked artist Becki Gerrard, who knew Carragh and her parents, to film Carragh and me in a location close to our rehearsal space at the University of Glasgow: Kelvingrove Park. Later in the process we filmed ourselves at Mugdock Country Park (ten miles outside of Glasgow). When we began experimenting with ‘flying’ in Kelvingrove Park it was, at first, forced and difficult. I found myself suggesting we do things, such as leap on the spot and run up a bank, whilst Carragh became quiet and unwilling to try things out. At this point, I was attempting to overlay my adult projections about what we would do and how we would do it: I had expected us to chase each other, run up the hill and ‘fly’ back down and try flying on the spot in different locations around the park. I had my own ideas about what interacting with(in) the ecology of this place should look like. I was bringing in activities that were not necessarily immanent to our collaborative process (I was working from the top down). After about 15 minutes I stopped suggesting ideas, and Carragh and I simply began to explore where we were: the tree beside us; the area of grass beside a tennis court; a muddy slope; a bench; a litter bin; a concrete path; and a tree stump. When we began attending to what was immediately there in the park, our actions began to emerge in spontaneous and immanent ways.

I saw Carragh run behind a bin, so I followed and crouched beneath the opposite side and then we both began circling the bin whilst holding our gaze with each other. This was not something either of us had vocally suggested, but rather was a playful activity that we came up with together in the moment of doing it. Carragh responded by jumping towards the tree that was beside the bin, and I again followed her, running to the other side of the tree. I noticed Carragh had her hands on the bark, and I began feeling the bark with my own hands, which Carragh then copied. Then, we were both creeping our hands up the tree. Later on, we found a bench, which we both climbed

onto. When we were standing there I felt the breeze blowing the bags on my arms, which gave me a feeling of lightness, which prompted me to turn on the spot in order to allow the breeze to blow all the bags. I began to pivot on the spot, which Carragh copied, and then she began bending her knees, which I copied, and we both jumped off the bench, as if we were lifting off into flight. At this moment I remembered our task of 'flying' - we had arrived at the task through a route neither of us could have planned, a route that was responsive and immanent to each other and where we were.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps our activities were led not only by the dynamics of our intergenerational collaboration but also by the environmental dynamics of where we were? When we focused our attention on *where* we were and *what* we shared this space with (trees, benches, bins, paths, grass, animals and other humans), we seemed to get more of a sense of what each other was doing, where each other was going and what the possibilities were for our activities. By collaborating with our environment we were seemingly able to collaborate more fully with each other. As we continued to explore our environment, our approach to 'flying' became more playful and ambitious: we clambered up a steep bank; I ran as fast I could with my arms stretched out; and Carragh climbed into a tree. In these instances it seemed as though we were not only playing *in*, but also playing *with*, our surroundings. My experience was that by playing with(in) the textures of our surroundings we could more fluidly share the roles of leader / follower. Perhaps by interacting with, and attending to, the *movements* of our environment our relationship could also be in movement? This approach is similar to the way Reeve conceptualises her 'ecological movement practice' (2008, p. 31), which she describes as a 'body-in-movement-in-a-changing-environment' (2011, p. 48). However, whilst Reeve and other writers in the movement and ecology field predominantly discuss a singular adult artist moving in a 'natural' environment, *Age-Old* explored the movements of two (very different) human bodies and between those bodies and 'urban' and 'rural' environments.<sup>38</sup> The relatively simple concept of exploring 'flying' arguably became a complex case of dynamics and movements working across Carragh, me and the environments. Perhaps this activity can be considered an instance of the inseparability of human-human and human-nonhuman dynamics and movements? That is, it was neither Carragh nor I, but the dynamics *between* us and *between* us and our environment that seemed to be leading our activities. I use

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<sup>37</sup> Journal, 18 January 2013.

<sup>38</sup> Kelvingrove park is a busy park situated in the West End in Glasgow, and Mugdock County Park is a rural location.

‘between’ after Deleuze’s and Guattari’s notion that the term ‘does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away’ (1988, p. 27). Perhaps the dynamics and betweens could lead our activities because I (the adult professional artist) did not ‘own’ these outdoor spaces in the same way that I ‘owned’ the indoor studio spaces? When we worked indoors it often seemed that Carragh was rendered ‘the child’ coming into an ‘adult’-ruled space, whereas outdoors it seemed that Carragh and I had a more equal ownership of the spaces (spaces which did not have such explicit boundaries as the studios). We were both newcomers, exploring and discovering these unknown (to us) outdoor spaces together. However, the qualities and dynamics of collaboration that we enacted outdoors were not limited to outdoor environments. Working inside in the studio spaces could also instigate an adult-child collaboration whereby the work emerged from our dynamics and betweens (as I demonstrated with the example of the ‘mountain movements’).

Whilst I found that focusing on the interactions between the performance ecology and ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ ecologies to be a rich inquiry, I realised that an ecological practice is not necessarily a matter of *where* the process and performance take place but is more importantly a question of *how* we approach process and performance. Whilst this place-based approach I had started to explore during the creative process of making *Age-Old* offered me insights into how I could approach collaboration as a practice of more-than (only) humans, I quickly realised that this notion of collaboration was not unique to place-based practices, and that indoor studio practices also had the potential to develop human-nonhuman collaborations. Furthermore, through working outdoors in these different environments during the process I realised that if I was to tie the performance down to one specific site I would be limiting the reach and openness of the work: it could only happen in one particular place and for those people who could access that place. A site-specific approach even struck me as potentially anti-ecological, in that to tie a performance down to one site risks fixing that performance ecology to one place. In contrast to this, the performance we made was flexible and adaptable insofar as *Age-Old* was performed in a diversity of indoor spaces: the ‘Red Lecture Theatre’ at Summerhall is an intimate room with two in-built white boards which we adapted the performance to by using the boards for projecting the film footage and writing on; ‘Tramway 4’ in Tramway is a conventional black-box studio with an end-on audience set up, which meant we shifted the physical position of specific parts of the performance; the large studio space at Platform is white with a wooden floor and no in-built seating, and so we used chairs and mats for the audience to sit on; and, finally, the large hall at Hillhead Primary

School is used for assemblies and sports, and so we used wooden benches for the audience to sit on and a large number of white sheets of paper to create the projector screen and a 'board' to write on. The various manifestations of *Age-Old* were, in part, determined by the different spaces the show took place in. Whilst *Age-Old* was tied to indoor performance spaces, it was not tied to any one type of indoor performance space. Although limited by the requirements of the performance (such as using a projector and needing enough space for Carragh and I to create a large circle of white plastic bags), this flexibility and adaptability is perhaps part the openness of the performance ecology?

My explorations into a place-based approach deterred me from using and developing that approach in the context of ecological performance. Furthermore, by working in indoor and outdoor locations during *Age-Old*, I became increasingly interested in how performance can challenge the notion that 'ecology' is something 'outdoors' beyond conventional theatre and performance spaces. Rather than focus on working with(in) the environmental and social ecologies of specific outdoor environments, which is a practice put forward by site-specific artists and scholars (Wilkie, 2002, p. 158; Pearson, 2010, p. 35), *Age-Old* led me to focus on how the creative methods and forms of the process and performance can be ecological wherever performance might take place.

### **Exposing Theatre's Role in Constructing 'Nature'**

In this project I wanted to test out Chaudhuri's and Kershaw's claims that theatre can challenge and revise binary divisions by exposing its own role in constructing 'nature' as some 'thing' outside of and other to theatre and 'culture'. As discussed in Chapter One, Chaudhuri proposes that by 'making space on its stage for ongoing acknowledgements of the rupture it participates in - the rupture between nature and culture . . . - the theater can become the site of a much-needed ecological consciousness' (1994, p. 28). Kershaw draws on Chaudhuri's claim when he suggests that, if performance exposes the complicit role it has played in upholding the (modernist) nature / culture binary, it could reconfigure that binary. He proposes that postmodern performance is 'a strong arena for such revisions' (2005, p. 79) because the paradox and irony of 'postmodern pastiche' are well suited qualities for revising the culture-nature and human-nonhuman divides (2007, p. 273). *Age-Old* can be considered postmodern in that, as Heddon and Milling discuss, postmodern performance is often understood through a certain 'aesthetic code' including the 'paradoxical', 'fragmented' and 'decentred'. (2006, p. 203). They propose that one 'event' of postmodern performance may

be to awaken audiences to their implication in meaning-making by performances being 'nonclosure oriented' and suggest that the key point of postmodern performance is to use performance to 'unmask performance' (2006, p. 205; p. 208). *Age-Old* was made up of fragments of movement, play, film footage, images, interaction with plastic bags and spoken and written text, and there was arguably no 'central' or dominant element or theme. I wanted to test and explore whether postmodern performance is capable of unmasking the performance of 'nature' through transforming the contradictions of its practices into paradoxes that might - even momentarily - reconfigure culture / nature binaries.



In the final performance there was a moment when I placed a plastic bag in front of the projector (which was at ground level on stage). The bag cast a shadow on the wall in the shape of a mountain due to where and how I placed the bag in relation to the projector. Later in the performance, I crouched down on my hands and knees and Carragh climbed onto my back, so that she was on her hands and knees on top of me. I crawled in a circle, moving in front of the projector, which resulted in our bodies casting a shadow. It looked as if we were traveling into a mountainous landscape. This sequence of actions produced an image that explicitly represented a 'natural landscape', whereby I was not masking the creation of this 'nature' image but transparently performing its construction. I hoped that our actions would

be an example for the audience of the performative process of making 'nature' that theatre arguably contributes to. Perhaps audience members were challenged to consider the performance's and their role in constructing what 'nature' is? I wanted to enable the audience to experience the paradox that the performance was about human interconnection with(in) 'nature' and at the same was contributing to the construction of 'nature' as other to 'culture'. Perhaps this paradox of the performance challenged the assumption that 'nature' is separate from culture and rendered theatre as always already *in nature*?



Kershaw argues that by using the 'spectacle' of performance we can transform the 'contradictions of [our] practices into paradoxes' (2007, p. 272), where these paradoxes prompt revisions of binary thinking. Certainly as a performer I experienced what Kershaw describes. However, I think my experience was largely because of my research intentions. In fact, this part of the performance troubled me because I found that neither Carragh nor the audience necessarily experienced the paradoxes. For Carragh, the significance of this performance material was that she enjoyed being on my back because it made her feel 'like a baby wolf being carried by a mother wolf'.<sup>39</sup> One audience member, Val Hopfinger, commented to me after seeing *Age-Old* that 'the moment when you and Carragh were

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<sup>39</sup> Journal, 30 January 2013.



walking on your hands and knees into the mountain was a beautiful image, you looked so peaceful and I thought you became an elephant in the mountains'.<sup>40</sup> This comment implies that my reflexive construction of the 'nature' image was not experienced by Val Hopfinger. Rather, the 'mountain image' was merely observed and appreciated as 'beautiful'.



This issue is reflected in the comments made by the P3 school pupils (seven to eight year olds) who saw *Age-Old* at Hillhead Primary School. In a workshop I conducted with the pupils a week after they saw the performance, I asked for their feedback about it. Many of the children commented on the 'mountain' made from the plastic bag and projector. One boy thought that Carragh and I were 'in the Rocky Mountains' and ten other pupils specifically enjoyed the moment when Carragh and I were 'far away' and 'in the mountains'.<sup>41</sup> Considering these comments, I cannot find any evidence that audience members (either adult or child) became aware of the performative construction of 'nature'. In fact, this moment in *Age-Old* may have actually risked contributing to, what Ingold describes as, the 'bombardment' of images of 'the environment' evident in our media. He proposes that 'nature' images from around the world presented in the media serves merely 'to make us inclined to forget that the environment is, in the first place, a world we live in, and not a world we look at' (2011, p. 95). Whilst this part of *Age-Old* may have merely rendered 'the

<sup>40</sup> Journal, 30 November, 2013.

<sup>41</sup> Journal, 20 December 2013.



environment' as other to the here and now of the performance, I think other elements of the performance avoided this issue. I want to propose that the binaries of culture / nature and human / nonhuman were more successfully explored and reconfigured through the approach we discovered and developed of collaborating with the material: white plastic bags.

## Collaborating with Materials

### *Watch Clip 4 Nonhuman in Human, Bags and Carragh and Clip 5 Unpredictability, Bags, Carragh and Sarah*

Prompted by Bennett's concept of all matter as 'vibrant' and 'alive' (2010, p. 8), one idea I wanted to test out in *Age-Old* was how working with a material that is manufactured (i.e. not considered 'natural') can be part of an ecological practice. I brought 50 white recycled plastic bags into the rehearsal process. These bags were always present in the rehearsals even when we were not necessarily going to work with them. I was interested in experimenting with different ways of exploring the *materiality* of the bags. I wanted to see whether Carragh and I could discover a creative relationship with them that did not deny, but neither was limited to, their meanings as 'plastic bags' with the connotations of 'waste', 'consumption' and 'environmental damage'. Specifically, I wanted to see how Carragh's approach to playing and experimenting with the bags might offer something different to my adult (performance-trained) approach.

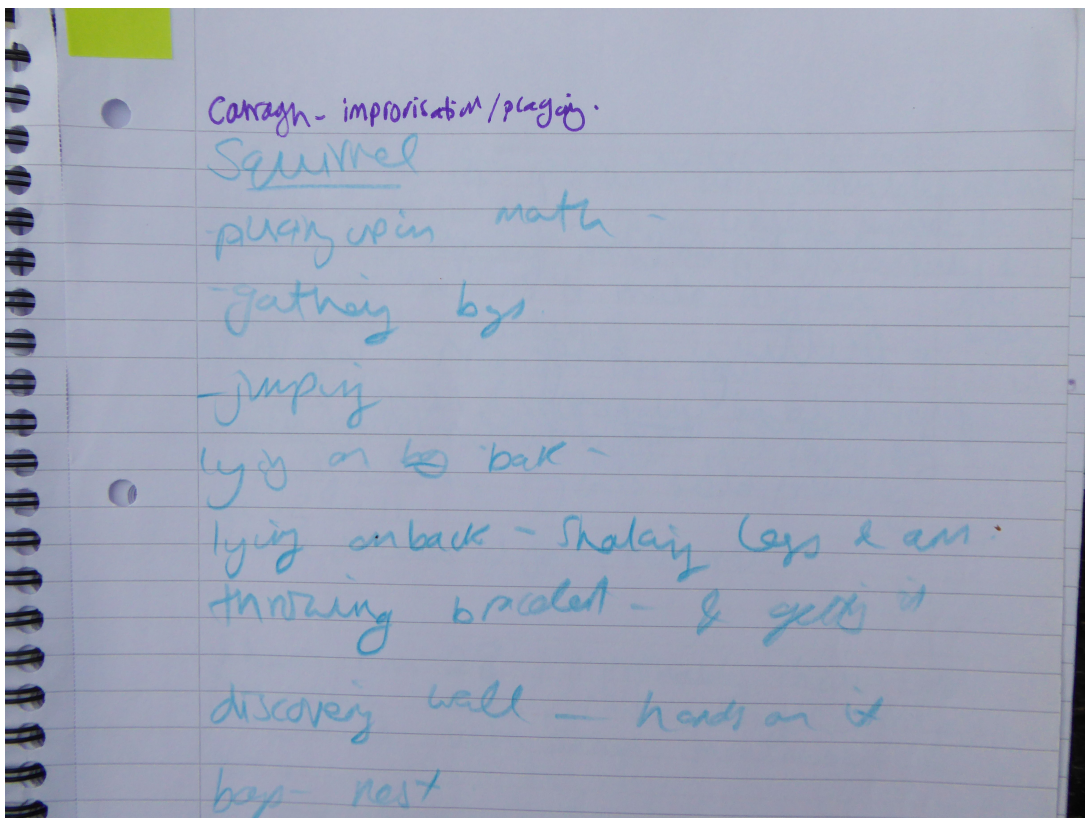
I planned an exercise that involved Carragh listing all the things she knew about trees. She decided to pick her favourite thing from the list she had made, choosing the fact that squirrels live in trees. She was explaining to me that squirrels collect nuts when she spontaneously picked up a plastic bag and crumpled it up, hiding it between her hands. Her actions suggested to me that she wanted to play at being a squirrel. I asked her if she would like to show me more about squirrels by playing with all the plastic bags while I watched. She was keen to do this, and immediately went into an improvisation (without words) in which she experimented, played and interacted with the bags, moving in response both to the bags and her task of becoming a squirrel. Carragh carried bags in her mouth, made a 'nest' with the bags and curled up in it, rested on her back and shook her legs and arms in the air whilst throwing bags up and catching them in her mouth.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Journal, 21 December 2012.



I felt like I was witnessing the simultaneous *processes* of Carragh discovering the bags and Carragh attempting to become a squirrel. It was the live-ness of her explorations that held my attention.



My notes from the rehearsal show that I was unwilling to look away from the movements of Carragh and bags: my writing was sprawling and not in keeping with the lines on the page, which is what happens when I am not looking at the paper. My notes demonstrate that I was preoccupied with Carragh's *physical* movements with the bags: I wrote 'gathering bags' and

‘gathering up in mouth’. I was drawn to the *interactions* between Carragh and the bags as opposed to viewing the bags merely as props that represented something in aid of Carragh’s performance. Carragh was bound up in the physical explorations of working with the bags and I think this, in turn, brought my attention to the materiality of her and the bags. She was not using the bags as objects with fixed meanings: rather, she was working with the tendencies and textures of this material. By only having the bags to play with, her movements seemed to become ever-more creative and responsive towards that material. There were constant changes in her gestures and the speeds at which she moved, all of which occurred as a result of her collaboration with the bags: Carragh’s unique movements were inseparable from the unique ways these bags moved and behaved. I think that it was these qualities of how Carragh was *collaborating* with the bags that challenged any fixed sense of human / nonhuman separability: it was impossible, at moments, to say who / what (Carragh or the bags) was leading the improvisation. I was drawn to the *performativity* of Carragh and the material itself. She often let the bags *lead* her movements. In these instances, Carragh, the human, was not necessarily at the centre of this performance, but rather, the *between* of Carragh and bags seemed to be at the fore.

Watching her, I felt that I was witnessing her embodied empathy for nonhuman ‘others’ - both the bags she was collaborating with and the squirrel she was imagining. Her playing was simultaneously a metaphor for squirrels (for her) and a physical matter of a human interacting and moving with plastic bags. This is another example of the entanglement of the metaphorical and material, and the represented and enacted, whereby this entanglement was arguably a key part of how she was ‘courting’ the nonhuman ‘other’ in her ‘human’ self, where this ‘other’ was perhaps the ‘squirrel’ and / or the bags? To return to the rehearsal, after watching Carragh improvise with the bags for some time I joined her. I was seemingly able to adopt a similar but distinct way of working. I was able to perform *with* the bags, treating them not as theatrical metaphors but as ‘vivid entities’ with their own trajectories and tendencies (Bennett, 2010, p. 5). Goulish offers a useful reference point here. He proposes how, in a Goat Island process, materiality becomes ‘another inquiry, another investigation’ as materials ‘are always in a state of imbalance, instability’ (in Bottoms and Goulish, 2007, p. 41-42). He suggests that materials are ‘elements of a process which demand to connect with us conceptually, spatially and physically’, which involves working *with* materials rather than assembling objects as ‘props’ to be used for predetermined ends (in Bottoms and Goulish, 2007, p. 42-43). Goulish implies a performance approach that can account for how materials have tendencies and trajectories beyond those which humans

construct and demand of them: the materials themselves make their own physical, spatial and conceptual demands. Interestingly, Bennett proposes that vibrant materiality takes shape vividly in childhood and that, for adults, attending to the world as vibrant matter involves a kind of return to a childhood sense of wonder at a world populated by ‘animate things’ (2010, p. vii). I certainly found that Carragh, as a child, was particularly predisposed to treating the bags as her collaborators. I found that I - the adult professional artist - had a lot to learn from Carragh - the nonprofessional child - specifically in terms of learning to collaborate with ‘nonhuman’ materials as vibrant matter. This suggests how intergenerational collaboration may be a particularly important performance ecology through which to develop an ecological practice.

I reflected on this rehearsal session with my non-academic supervisor Gill Robertson, who offered a valuable response in relation to the idea of how children work with materials. She commented that, from listening to me describing the activity of Carragh becoming a squirrel and interacting with the bags, it sounded as though I was discovering and allowing for the unpredictability and, as she put it, the ‘messiness’ of the ways in which a child performs, and in particular performs with materials.<sup>43</sup> I interpreted Robertson’s ‘messiness’ both in the literal sense of making a mess onstage (this was part of what Carragh was doing with the bags) and in a metaphorical sense of messing up (my) adult expectations about what the material means and how it can be used. This conversation with Robertson prompted me to develop structures in the process and performance that would allow for Carragh’s unpredictability as a child performer to ‘meet’ with the unpredictability of the bags, whereby I might also be prompted to perform unpredictably *with* Carragh and the bags. In rehearsals and the final performance, I found that since we had to respond to the bags - their tendencies and movements - live onstage, we also had to respond to each other’s unpredictabilities and spontaneous gestures. In this sense, my approach extended Quick’s notion of the spontaneity and unpredictability of the child’s ‘secret gesture’ (2006, p. 150), in that *Age-Old* arguably involved Carragh and me (child and adult) enacting spontaneity and unpredictability. During my workshops with pupils at Hillhead Primary school a teacher commented to me that he had found the ways we used the bags to be unexpected and ‘different’. He was fascinated by the unpredictable ways Carragh and I uniquely interacted with them.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Journal, 18 January 2013.

<sup>44</sup> Journal, 21 December 2014.



Furthermore, this teacher also read the bags symbolically as representing ‘waste’ and ‘pollution’. He saw the moment when I attempted to blow a bag off my shoulder as a representation of an animal not able to get rid of human ‘rubbish’: he said that it was a metaphor for how animals do not have a choice about human ‘waste’ being disposed of and adversely affecting them. At the same time, he was drawn to the physical ways Carragh and I used the bags, such as laying them out in a circle and Carragh throwing them in the air. He described how the bags were sometimes representing themselves (bags), other times acting as metaphors for something else, and at other times were simply physical things that he could see, hear and feel (the audience were able to pick up and play with the bags at the end of the show).<sup>45</sup> His comments suggest to me that the ways Carragh and I interacted with the bags were both representational and literal: an ‘ecological issue’ emerged but did not take away from him reading the bags as materiality with tendencies of its own (beyond the human meanings attributed to it). In light of this teacher’s comments, it seems that our collaborations with the bags meant that no one way of viewing that material could be fixed and that the performance was open to multiple interpretations of that material. Indeed, I had not specifically intended for this particular ‘ecological issue’ to be read into the work, but at the same time I had not *not* intended this type of reading. I had chosen bags specifically because of their ‘environmental’ connotations and had aimed to reference and move beyond these meanings. The teacher’s comments imply that this happened for him.

I want to suggest that *Age-Old* was, in part, an open and accessible performance ecology due to there being a child on stage, whereby child spectators were able to relate to the work more directly. Most of the comments made by the school pupils about *Age-Old* focused on the perspective of Carragh:

‘Carragh walking in a circle of bags you had made.’

‘Carragh waving two plastic bags when you said “Where are you?”’

‘Carragh was on your back.’

‘Carragh was swung round by you holding one of her wrists and one of her ankles.’

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<sup>45</sup> Journal, 21 December 2014.

‘Carragh was in a forest in a secret den.’<sup>46</sup>

Focusing on Carragh could have been, in part, due to the pupils already knowing her (Carragh attended Hillhead Primary school). However, I think that by collaborating with a child in process and performance, children watching the work can access it more easily and confidently. In my interview with Kabinet K, Manshoven commented that the children in their audiences often talk about the child performers but say very little, or nothing at all, about Manshoven (who performs in the Kabinet K shows with the child performers) (Manshoven and Laureyns, 2014). The comments made by the Hillhead pupils, along with this reflection from Kabinet K, suggest that children are able to identify with and access a piece of performance much more easily when there is a child or children performing in it. This finding presented me with a key concern: that ecological performance may need to involve a diversity of human collaborators in order to avoid presenting the ecological as something only certain people can do or experience. Seeing people that look like us on stage (for example, a child seeing another child) may be a key way in which performance can enact the openness and immediacy of wider Earthly ecology as something we are all always already *within* and an integral *part of*. I decided to further explore this idea, and the other key ideas I have discussed about *Age-Old*, through a new project, *Wild Life*, for which I collaborated with a larger and more diverse group of children and adults.

### ***Age-Old into Wild Life***

There were six key ideas from *Age-Old* that I took forward into *Wild Life*. Firstly, I wanted to explore further the relations between enacting and representing ‘ecology’ in performance: I wanted to explore how the entanglements of the metaphorical and physical, and the symbolic and literal, are part of an ecological practice. Secondly, I wished to further my findings on immanent authorship and adult-child collaboration by working with a larger intergenerational group and gaining a different perspective, by taking on the role of director and exploring an ecological approach to directing. This decision to work with a larger and more diverse group was also prompted by Kershaw’s useful reference to how ecology, as a scientific discipline, understands the ‘diversity of life in ecosystems . . . [as] an indication of health’ (2007, p. 53). I wanted to further explore how the diversity in an intergenerational performance ecology can be a productive way for performance to explore and enact the ecological. Thirdly, I chose to focus in particular on developing a collaborative practice with nonhuman materials in

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<sup>46</sup> Journal, 21 December 2014.

order to further my findings about working with materials as ‘vibrant matter’. Fourthly, in light of the limitations I had identified in place-based approaches, I decided to focus on developing performance practice within a theatre venue (Platform) in order to challenge the notion that ‘ecology’ is some ‘thing’ outside of theatre practices and spaces. Whilst the social and environmental ecologies in and around Platform would, of course, inform and interact with the performance ecology, I decided not to directly focus on these interactions. Given the rich questions and ideas that had emerged from *Age-Old* about studio-based modes and practices of performance, I resolved to limit my research to the specifics of a studio-based performance ecology, all the while remaining aware that this ecology would inevitably interact with other distinctive ecologies surrounding the venue we were working in. Furthermore, given the time frame and available resources for the project, it seemed appropriate to place this limitation on *Wild Life*: to explore the local environmental and social ecologies surrounding Platform would have required a more extended research project or another project entirely. Fifthly, I wanted to develop my performance strategies for working with binaries in order to disrupt them. Whilst I knew it would be inevitable that *Wild Life* would draw on the binary couplings of performance / ecology, inside / outside, culture / nature, human / nonhuman, adult / child and professional / nonprofessional, I wanted to further explore ecological performance - in process and product - as a practice of *enacting* ecological qualities, whereby these qualities might reconfigure and even transgress binary thinking and doing. In *Age-Old* I had discovered responsiveness, listening, openness, diversity and dynamism as ecological qualities that intergenerational performance practice could enact. With *Wild Life* I wanted to further explore these, as well as remain open to what new qualities - and in particular, what unexpected qualities - might emerge through the particular practices of this intergenerational performance ecology.

Lastly, there was a new idea, ‘wildness’, that had emerged directly from my reflections with Carragh about our collaboration, and which was key to the way I approached *Wild Life*. Three weeks after the final *Age-Old* performance I held a session with Carragh to reflect on the project. I asked her what stood out the most for her from the creative process and the performances. She said that the times she remembered the best (and which were most enjoyable for her) from the process were when we were both ‘being wild together’ and that the final performances stood out to her because they felt ‘wild’.<sup>47</sup> Carragh’s comments were a key moment in my research trajectory. Her comments prompted me to consider ‘wildness’ as a potentially key aspect of an ecological performance practice, especially if related to the

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<sup>47</sup> Journal, 5 January 2014.



re-wilding idea that 'wildness' is characteristic of healthy environmental ecologies (Monbiot, p. 8; Sandom, Svenning and Ejrnæs, 2012, p. 11). I therefore wondered whether the ecological could be productively *practiced* through creatively exploring 'wildness'? I had a hunch that exploring 'wildness' as concept, idea, actuality and enactment may instigate the ecological qualities already referenced in relation to *Age-Old* as well as revealing new ones. I therefore chose to embark on a creative inquiry into 'wildness' with my collaborators and to call this main research project, *Wild Life*.

## Chapter Five - Wilding Performance: *Wild Life*

I set out to explore how ‘wildness’ emerges in process and performance and what an intergenerational inquiry into ‘wildness’ can tell us about how performance can be an ecological practice. In keeping with my commitment to a thinking-doing methodology, at this point I chose not to explore ‘wild’ from within ecological or environmental theory per se.<sup>48</sup> I wanted to see what insights my practice would uniquely reveal about ‘wildness’ and its links to ecological practice. I was motivated to work with children and adults, professionals and nonprofessionals, and nonhuman materials in order to involve multiple interpretations and manifestations of ‘wildness’, where ‘wildness’ is - like ‘nature’ - a contestable and complex concept.

### ***Watch Wild Life Full Length***

#### **Project Structure**

For *Wild Life* I collaborated with and directed a group of eight professional and nonprofessional performers between the ages of nine and 60 years, working with and directing them in a new devised performance. The process and performance involved working with materials - stones, rocks, matches, buckets and water. The project took place at Platform. My collaborators were a mixture of people from the area of Easterhouse, and so local to the performance venue, and from the city of Glasgow more widely. They were (in order of image overleaf, left to right):

Geraldine Heaney (27 years old); Carragh McLavin (9); Graham Mack (52); Gaby McCann (13); Archie Lacey (55); Peter Lannon (26); Lennon Che Campbell (9); Liz Lumsden (57)

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<sup>48</sup> Whilst I do not explore critical concepts of ‘wildness’, I recognise that there are multiple theorisations about this concept and that these constitute a whole field of philosophical work. For example, Maurice Merleau-Ponty discusses ‘wildness’ and ‘wild meaning’, where the subject and object are not tamed into separate realms (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). As I show later in this chapter, it is the field of rewilding that has the most traction for my approach, and new concept, of *wilding performance*.



Geraldine Heaney is a professional artist, performer and film-maker, who often works with young people<sup>49</sup> and Peter Lannon is a professional performer and director who ‘works with people of all ages and abilities’ (Lannon, 2015).<sup>50</sup> Heaney and Lannon both took part in *Wild Life* as participants and were not involved in the planning and facilitating of the project, albeit that their professional experience prepared them for some of the challenges and opportunities of working with nonprofessionals of all ages. As the director, I led the project and commissioned Heaney and Lannon, as professional artists, to work with me on a two-day research and development process before beginning the project with the whole group. Through this preparatory phase of work, and in its operation, they provided expert advice and perspectives. They were both paid fees for their participation in the whole project. The other collaborators responded to call-outs for volunteer participants and were then invited to take part. These participants were not trained in performance, but some had previous experiences of performing. These participants were not paid artists, but took part because they wished to try something new, to work in an intergenerational group and were interested in the intentions of the project to explore ‘wildness’. After collaborating with me on *Age-Old*, Carragh chose to continue working with me for *Wild Life*, and to be part of this larger collaborative group. This continued collaboration with Carragh provided me with a useful through line, in particular since Carragh had initiated my interest in ‘wildness’.

<sup>49</sup> <https://vimeo.com/geraldineheaney>.

<sup>50</sup> <http://peterlannon.co.uk/about-2/>.

*Wild Life* took place between August and November 2014 and was co-produced and co-funded by Platform and Catherine Wheels. Matt Addicott produced *Wild Life*, with Platform providing rehearsal space and technical support during the three months that I worked with the group. For Platform, hosting *Wild Life* was particularly relevant to their remit of developing collaborations between artists and people in the local Easterhouse community, and the project was also an opportunity for Platform to learn from my particular artistic approach.<sup>51</sup> Fitzpatrick gave me advice throughout *Wild Life* on project management as well as offering artistic support. Glasgow-based performance-maker and researcher Laura Bradshaw came in five times in the last three weeks of the process to offer dramaturgical support. Suzie Normand, from Catherine Wheels, was the production manager, also leading on lighting and sound design.

For the first month I met with the group once a week for a two-hour session. For the next two months, we met twice each week, for a two-hour and for a five-hour session. A work-in-progress was shown in November 2014 as part of the *Only Human?* festival at the University of Glasgow.<sup>52</sup> The final performance took place at Platform at the end of November 2014, with three showings to a public audience of children, young people, families, people from the local area, artists, academics, and a theatre going audience. I engaged in audience feedback from child and adult spectators through conversations after the show and conducting workshops with the youth groups at Platform. The *Wild Life* performers also fed back to me the responses they had received from their friends and family. Gaining insights from diverse audience members was a key part of keeping a track of my research process.

## The Performance

The duration of the final performance was 60 minutes. It was shown in the main auditorium at Platform, with the seating bank removed. We created a round performance space measuring eight meters in diameter by placing the 60 audience chairs in a large circle. There were eight gaps placed intermittently in the circle, which the performers stood in at moments during the performance. I chose a circular configuration with the audience on the same level as the performers in order to have the audience in close proximity to the

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<sup>51</sup> Matt Addicott and Platform are funding and producing the re-mount of *Wild Life*, October 2016.

<sup>52</sup> *Only Human?* was a 'public festival of the humanities exploring what it is to be more-than-human in today's world' (onlyhumanglasgow, 2014).

performers, to enable a diversity of perspectives and for the spectators to be able to see each other as well as the performers. I hoped the audience would experience themselves as a *part of the performance*, rather than as separated onlookers.



The performance involved the eight human performers, eight large rocks, and 12 silver metal buckets - eight of which each had small stones inside and four of which were filled with water.

Brennan described the show as a ‘a far-reaching reminder of who we are, and where we come from in time and landscape’ (Brennan, 2014). The audience entered into the performance to see the performers already moving in and out of the circle in a high energy choreography - the action already in swing. The performance consisted of various parts, including: performers greeting audience members; performers traveling the circle close to, and at times touching, the audience, moving alone and in various combinations - walking, running, carrying each other and large rocks and flicking water at the audience; Pete swinging and carrying Lennon; a chaotic head-tapping choreography; performers messing up their hair; combinations of the performers spinning each other; dropping large rocks; lighting matches; a semi improvised choreography that involved Archie and Liz taking spectators by the hand and running with them; a water fight; rhythmically stomping through the water; and, stones flung across the floor.



In what follows, I critically reflect on the process and performance of *Wild Life*, drawing on my experiences of the work and the multi-modal feedback from my collaborators and audience members. My reflections further tease out and extend the ecological threads from the four performance fields I discussed in Chapter One, and my analyses draw on Bennett's and Barad's theorisations about material processes that involve human and nonhuman actants, as presented in Chapter Two. I demonstrate how my research builds on the performance and non-performance areas through presenting and discussing my key finding, *wilding performance*. I explore three distinct but related approaches I developed for wilding performance, which I have coined as: *wilding performance containers*; *just doing-ness*; and, *the agency of practice*. These approaches correspond to two key practices I developed - *Instant performances* and the *Interpretation Practice*. I close the chapter with an analysis of two specific sections in the final production, demonstrating how these sections might have productively engaged with the more negative aspects of the ecological. Together these approaches, practices and specific aspects of the final performance, constitute my findings.

Creating and critically reflecting on *Wild Life* led me to conceptualise ecological performance as a practice of 'wilding performance', and so I begin these discussions by briefly introducing the rewilding field. Whilst the concepts and practices of 'rewilding' provide useful reference



points for my findings, throughout this chapter I demonstrate how my approach is at once similar to, and signals a marked difference from, the predominant notions of 'rewilding'.

## Rewilding

In contemporary Europe rewilding is a land management practice that involves human plans and interventions aimed at restoring 'spontaneous processes' to ecological systems (Monbiot, 2013, p. 8; Sandom, Svenning and Ejrnæs, 2012, p. 11). It is a development of, and challenge to, the conservation agenda (Bekoff, 2014, p. 9). Whilst conservation has traditionally emphasised keeping or returning 'natural environments' to a specific 'wild' state, contemporary rewilding practices contest the notion that ecosystems can or should be restored to a fixed condition that is preserve-able. The rewilding agenda focuses on restoring the health, resilience and biodiversity of ecosystems so they can become more self-willed, self-sufficient and spontaneous (Monbiot, 2013, p. 8, Sandom, Svenning and Ejrnæs, 2012, p. 11). Rewilding practices are about humans involving themselves in environmental 'ecologies' in order to advance the recovery of the ecological processes. Rewilding is, paradoxically, a type of human interference in, disturbance and management of ecosystems with the ultimate aim of letting those systems go in their own 'wild' and self-willed direction beyond human control: rewilding is the deployment of the 'human touch to erase the human touch' (Hall, 2014, 30). However, the rewilding goal of humans 'letting go of' and 'abandoning' environmental ecosystems problematically assumes that humans are able to 'hold on to' and 'control' these ecosystems in the first place. In addition, to speak of erasing or retracting the human from ecosystems implies that humans have a choice to step into or out of these ecologies. At the very least, this concept of rewilding suggests a privileged vantage point of the human as separate from, or even above, environmental ecologies. These are assumptions that I have sought to challenge and contest throughout my research. The proposition that humans can involve themselves only to step away from an ecosystem is, however, challenged by more recent rewilding literature, which helpfully proposes human re-involvement in, as opposed to retraction from, environmental ecological systems (Jørgensen, 2014, p. 5; Monbiot, 2013, p. 11). The concept of re-involvement is relevant for my use of wilding because it does not assume ecology to mean human absence and it takes human participation in diverse environmental ecologies as inevitable. The aim with this type of rewilding is for less human-dominating involvement, rather than for complete human retraction. From this idea, a recent development in the field has been to apply the concept of rewilding to 'human life' by proposing the 'wilding of people and their cultures' (Monbiot, 2013, p. 8). Under

these formulations of rewilding, questions can then arise about what could or should be the *qualities* and *dynamics* of humans' inevitable involvement in ecosystems. This presents a key critical frame for my explorations into performance as an ecology that can enact and say something about the wider ecology of Earth and our (human) participation in it. My concept of 'wilding performance' is about how theatrical performance is at once a human and nonhuman ecology and, crucially, what creative practices emerge from recognising that we are always already *within* and *part of* the wider ecology of Earth. I want to propose that what matters when it comes to an ecological performance practice is *how* we enact our inevitable participation in the performance ecology and the wider dynamics of Earth's ecology. I hope to show that performance can be ecological when its practices enable and enact the qualities and dynamics of ecological participation, where these practices can be understood as methods of wilding performance.

### **Introducing Wilding Performance**

During the creative process of making *Wild Life*, I often brought in a piece of music that I thought would initiate 'wild' energies of moving and dancing. This practice of using music to prompt 'wildness' was my response to a reflection Geraldine made when I asked the group to share what and where made them feel 'wild'. Geraldine replied that, for her, it was being at the live gigs of her favourite bands and dancing.<sup>53</sup> This demonstrates one way in which I continued my findings on immanent authorship from *Age-Old* into *Wild Life*, in that my artistic ideas often emerged immanently from the process itself, from something someone in the group said or did. For one rehearsal I brought in 'Largs' by King Creseote and gave the group the instruction to dance to the music all together, in partners, alone and in different combinations.

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<sup>53</sup> Journal, 5 September 2014.





Lennon runs to the middle and the rest of the group follow, they pause in the centre and then dance harder, tearing away across the room with a shared impulse of energy. Archie is running fast in circular directions, jumping at moments. He is good at dodging people, he heads towards the wall, he leaps up and into it . . . there is a loud crack. Some folks slow and look at Archie, still moving through the trajectory of their movements. Archie looks up, smiling and alive in his eyes, though sheepish and shocked. I stop the music. He has cracked the wall, a three foot long bending line emerges above the head height of the shortest in the group - Lennon and Carragh. We crowd around . . . glances, laughter, 'oh shit' in my head . . . some chatter I half remember . . . 'Archie, are you ok?', 'I'm ok, but the wall might not be', 'wasn't it there before?', 'no, I heard the sound of it crack', more laughter, 'Archie, why did you jump into the wall?', 'I don't know', 'have we broken it?', 'it can't be very strong or solid if it breaks that easily', 'I wonder if anyone else has ever cracked the walls here', 'what have we done?', 'will we get into trouble?', 'what is the wall made out of?', 'can it be mended?', 'I don't think it should get mended, I like the shape of the crack', 'maybe the wall will fall down', 'it's lucky you didn't go through the whole thing and come crashing out in the cafe' . . . laughter . . . alive, alert faces looking from wall to each other to wall to me to Archie to wall to beyond the wall. These containing walls of the rehearsal room arose now as less solid and more permeable - their structure and containment giving us a place to work in, a focus, a shape to our activities, but now, as

we are coming up against them, we are sensing the beyond of them. Archie cracking the wall did not destroy it but it did rupture our thinking about how solid and fixed the walls that were containing us really were.<sup>54</sup>

The ‘wildness’ of this rehearsal was less the music and dancing and more the cracking of the wall and the rupture this enacted to the containment of the activity. Cracking the wall did not only crack the wall, but also cracked and ruptured the activity itself and my expectations for what this activity would involve. I began to consider that to enact ‘wildness’, we would need to be open to the unpredictable and unplanned ways ‘wildness’ might emerge. I became interested in how the container-ship of performance structures and boundaries could enable me and the group to collaborate with the unpredictable, unplanned, unexpected and unknown.

### Wilding Performance Containers

‘Performance’, in its theatrical sense, suggests a ‘frame’ or container (Schechner, 2006, p. 2). That container can be understood as the rules and boundaries of an exercise, the directives given by a director, the physical space(s) of the rehearsals, or even the structure, length and spatial configuration of a performance. I discovered a generative tension between the containment of performance frames, and the ‘wildness’ of spontaneous unplanned enactments - where ‘wild’ suggests something unruly, self-willed and less contained (Griffiths, 2006, p. 49; Bekoff, 2014, p. 10; Monbiot, 2013, p. 10). Paradoxically, wilding performance involves working with the containment of rules, boundaries and predictions in order to work with, and respond to, what is unruly and unpredictable. Rewilding perspectives often focus on how human involvement in, and management of, environmental ecologies can lead to an un-managing of, and a less human-dominating involvement in, those ecologies. For example, in rewilding practices, the fences (or containers) erected necessarily contain in their making their potential to be transgressed, whereby their impermanence *allows* rewilding. An initiative by Rewilding Europe to reintroduce (or rewild) bison in a region of Romania is described as not simply about releasing the bison into ‘the wild’ but rather as a process where fences are needed to create a ‘recovery and acclimatization’ zone where the bison learn survival skills before the fences are broken down and the bison are un-contained (Vlasakker, 2014, p. 14). This rewilding process *needs* the fences to contain the bison and *needs* the bison eventually to transgress those fences (containers). My approach of wilding

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<sup>54</sup> Journal, 28 August 2014.

performance containers is about how management and containment of the performance ecology and its human and nonhuman participants is a strategy for working with what is uncontainable, unpredictable and unruly.

***Watch Clip 2 Wilding Performance Containers, Feeling Faces and Clip 3 Wilding Performance Containers, Playing with Boundaries***

In rehearsal I give a performance container to Gaby and Carragh in the form of an instruction: I ask them to close their eyes, and with their hands feel and trace the contours of each other's face. My idea had emerged from a moment in the previous rehearsal when Carragh and Gaby were tracing the lines and shapes of each others faces during a warm up activity. They follow my instruction and largely fulfill my expectation - they are attentive and responsive to each other and each other's faces. Yet they teeter on the edges of the instructional container: their tracing becomes, momentarily, a pressing and rubbing and Carragh, almost too quickly to notice, brushes over Gaby's hair, slightly messing it up.<sup>55</sup>

This brush at the boundaries of Gaby's face is also a brush at the boundaries of the instructions I gave them and at the boundaries of my expectations about what that instruction would prompt. It is a rupture of my directive. This is an example of a momentary wilding of the performance container in that Carragh momentarily transgressed my instruction.

From seeing Carragh accidentally brush over Gaby's hair, I have a new idea. I ask them to find different ways of messing up each other's hair. At first, they simply take turns at ruffling each other's hair. Their ruffling becomes rougher, and they try different ways of doing the task - playfully flicking hair upwards, rubbing hair between two hands. The physical demands of doing this task produces unexpected and spontaneous movements: Carragh creeps up behind Gaby, interlaces fanned-out fingers into Gaby's hair, and, leaping into the air, Carragh swooshes Gaby's hair from behind her head so it falls and fully covers her face. At the same time, Gaby tilts her head backwards, causing her hair to bounce about as Carragh attempts to flick Gaby's hair up. Whilst their performances are rougher, they are still enacting the attentive and responsive

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<sup>55</sup> Journal, 8 October 2014.

quality I had originally observed, it is only that the responsiveness between them, and between them and their hair, is emerging in ways I could not have predicted.<sup>56</sup>

Their responsive quality of doing emerged *unpredictably* and, furthermore, it seemed to emerge less from them as individuals and more from the ecology of Carragh, Gaby, me, their hair, and the more-difficult-to-name forces such as the breeze from the window and the rehearsal room itself: for example, I could not tell whether Carragh flicking Gaby's hair up was a result of Carragh's hand, the breeze in the room, my instruction, or the way Gaby tilted her head at that moment. Some rewilding perspectives focus on rewilding as a strategy, not to create something predefined but to restore spontaneity to environmental ecosystems: humans work with the *unpredictabilities* of ecosystems as opposed to trying to control ecological processes. George Monbiot suggests rewilding is a process of humans letting 'nature decide' (2013 p. 10), and similarly Dolly Jørgensen emphasises rewilding as a practice of 'letting nature itself decide much more and man decide much less' (Rewilding Europe 2011 quoted in Jørgensen, 2015, p. 5). Whilst these rewilding perspectives posit a very problematic anthropocentric (and patriarchal) notion that 'nature itself' can 'decide' if only 'man' would allow 'it' to, they usefully gesture towards the notion that spontaneous process and unpredictability are key aspects of healthy environmental ecologies. In a related way, I propose that ecological qualities of performing (such as Gaby and Carragh being responsive and attentive to each other and each other's hair) can emerge from working with the unpredictabilities of the performance ecology. It was, therefore, vital for me as the director to be open to the unexpected and unpredictable. This openness was a key part of sustaining the, as it were, ecological-ness of the performance practice. Wilding performance containers can be understood as a strategy that allowed me and my human collaborators to participate *with(in)* the unpredictability and spontaneity of the performance ecology, whereby ecological qualities of doing could emerge from this participation.

Gaby turns, Carragh jumps away, trying to dodge Gaby's outstretched ready-to-ruffle-her-hair hands, dipping under Gaby's arms and flicking Gaby's hair from behind her. Gaby jumps and twists, bringing her hands gently down onto Carragh's head, rubbing her hair this way and that.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Journal, 8 October 2014.

<sup>57</sup> Journal, 8 October 2014.

Gaby and Carragh are constantly predicting and anticipating what will happen, at the same time as having to spontaneously move with, and respond to, what actually happens. Their movements emerge between my instructions and their interpretations of my instructions, between what they think the other will do and what the other actually does, and between their own plans of action and the pragmatics of what is physically possible. Similarly, my directing emerges between my expectations of what my prompts will initiate and their spontaneous responses to my prompts, between what I plan to do and what I actually do when responding in-the-moment to the movements of the girls and their hair. They are following my instructions, yet wavering and deviating beyond what I think my instructions will produce: their movements are not only messing up their hair but they are also recurrently messing up the performances I had envisaged for them. These are the productive tensions of wilding performance containers and they present a key finding about ecological practice: collaboration emerges *between* the planned and unplanned, known and unknown and predicted and unpredicted. That is, the wilding of the performance container is not attributable to Gaby or Carragh or me, but rather wilding emerges through the dynamics *between* what is preconceived and the un-pre-conceivability of spontaneous enactment (which includes what their hair is capable of doing). With a wilding performance approach, collaboration is therefore not a case of going back and forth between the predicted and unpredicted, and planned and unplanned, but collaboration is to ‘transverse’ between (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 27) and to *do* (in) the betweens. This conceptualisation of collaboration challenges the predominant trend in the devising field to pit the openness of mistake and accident against the supposed closure of the intended and predicted, evident in Tim Etchells’ practice of trusting ‘discoveries and accidents’ and distrusting ‘intentions’, and celebrating ‘misunderstandings and misrecognitions’ above ‘clear communication’ (1999, p. 55). The task for Gaby, Carragh and me was not to *not* have intentions and clear communication - indeed, planning, predicting and clearly communicating were vital aspects of this activity. I articulated my instructions and prompts as clearly as possible and the girls were constantly planning what to do and predicting what each other would do. Yet the task was also not to fulfill *predetermined* plans: throughout the activity I reminded the girls that the task was to *interpret* my instructions as opposed to do the instructions ‘correctly’ or ‘right’. I think that we were collaboratively negotiating through this performance practice as it unfolded, responding to what emerged immanently from the practice itself. In this sense, wilding performance containers can be strategies for human collaborators to neither fully lead nor passively follow an activity, but rather the director and (in this case) young performers must make their own choices about which possibilities to follow in the very

moments when specific performance possibilities immanently open up in the *doing* of the practice. Wilding performance containers is, therefore, an approach that can work against, firstly, any one human leading and, secondly, the director and /or performers passively engaging with the performance activity. Rather, wilding performance enables (and needs) the director and performers to be *active* participants in the (unpredictable) performance ecology.

Wilding performance requires that the director provides containers, is open to the possibilities of wilding that are entailed in performers enacting through those containers and, crucially, is responsive to the moments when the performers transgress the containers (by giving further prompts or by letting the performers carry on with what they are doing). Wilding also requires the human performers to be confident enough to experiment with the container in a diversity of ways so that they can discover the opportunities for wilding and can then actually rupture and transgress the container. When facilitating Carragh and Gaby, I think that wilding only emerged as a result of the safe and trusting environment that had been built up in the group. I was careful and keen to encourage this throughout the creative process: I framed exercises by saying that there was no single or right way of interpreting my instructions and I gave encouragement to my collaborators - child and adult, and professional and nonprofessional - as and when they individually needed it. Often I would work with just one, two or three collaborators at a time, which allowed me to focus on individuals and to provide them with the support and challenges they needed in order to feel confident enough to experiment with the performance containers in their own unique ways. Similar to Cabinet K, I found that providing some movement and performance technique enabled my collaborators to creatively, uniquely and skillfully 'struggle' (Laureyns, 2014) with tasks and activities. Part of wilding performance was, therefore, about providing the tools to performers for them to be able to enact and transgress the containers I gave to them.

The girls continue moving. They are working through ever-new-reconfigurations of doing the task - giving rise to messier and messier hair. They remain committed to the task of 'mess up each other's hair', yet they are moving to logics I cannot always fully attach to that task: they continue to breach and play with its boundaries.<sup>58</sup>

My reflections suggests how their physical enactments were 'secret' in the sense that Quick uses this term. Quick proposes the 'secret gesture' of child performers as spontaneous unpredicted movements, which do not appear to have a namable logic and, furthermore, do

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<sup>58</sup> Journal, 8 October 2014.

not unfold in a 'free' anything-goes context but rather in 'rule-bound space' (2006, p. 153). He discusses how rules and boundaries (what I call containers) enable child performers to negotiate and play with what is 'permissible and inadmissible' where 'rules are not banished or permanently excluded but rather are suspended and pushed aside' whilst the 'rule of what is being "done" is worked through in the improvisational moment' (2006, p. 153). He implies that it is the live enactments of performers negotiating *through* performance rules that leads to un-namable and spontaneous movements. I found this to be the case when working with Carragh and Gaby. Even as they remained fully focused on doing my tasks and prompts, their enactments were unruly, unpredictable and 'secret', in that I could not always understand what their movements were or where their movements were coming from (whether from me, them, their hair, or something else). This adds to Quick's work. Whilst Quick focuses on the 'secret gestures' of child performers in a finished performance from his perspective as a spectator, my wilding performance approach was about working with the spontaneous movements and gestures of my collaborators throughout the creative process such that their unpredictable ruptures and transgressions of the containers I provided to them could contribute to *leading* the process.

#### ***Watch Clip 4 Wilding Performance Containers, All Messy Hair***

I extended the task to the whole group and there was a section in the final performance which involved all the performers messing up their own hair (followed by Gaby and Carragh messing up each other's hair). As is evident in the clip, the ways in which both the child and adult performers mess up their own hair is diverse and unpredictable, and they arguably all enact spontaneous bodily movements in doing the task of 'mess up your hair'. In this instance, the wilding of the performance container applies as much to the adult as the child performers. This is another way in which my research furthers Quick's work. Whilst Quick attributes the 'secret gesture' only to the spontaneity of the non-trained child performer, my wilding performance approach was about working with the unpredictability and spontaneity of both child and adult, and nonprofessional and professional, performers.

To further frame what I mean by wilding performance containers, it is useful to think through 'containers' as Deleuze's and Guattari's 'strata' and 'wilding' as their 'lines of flight' (1988, p. 2). Understanding performance containers as the imposition of 'strata', I found that performance containers are ruptured by freeing 'lines of flight', whereby wilding performance can happen only when humans develop a 'meticulous' relation to the

performance container or 'strata' (1988, p. 187). Wilding performance involves lodging oneself on a stratum (working with containers) in order to then experiment and play with the opportunities of that stratum for transgressing and rupturing the containment it provides. I think it was *because* Carragh and Gaby were focusing on doing the container / strata (my instructions to mess up their hair), that they were then able to momentarily transgress that container / strata: it was by their meticulous relation to the instruction that they were able to transgress that instruction. So, opportunities for wilding the container happen as a result of working with that container: what underpins the wilding performance container is how it at once gives rise to, and is transgressed by, the enactments of those it involves. My role as the director seemed to largely be about learning to be open and responsive to the transgressive enactments of my diverse collaborators.

Carragh is keenly watching Gaby, judging when to jump forward and shake up Gaby's hair. Carragh suddenly and inadvertently shakes her own head. She seems surprised by her own spontaneous shaking. Gaby responds by shaking her own head too - more fiercely than Carragh. A smile flickers between them. This moment of shaking and smiling is a playful experimenting with what the performance container permits: another temporary rupturing of the task's boundaries. This moment suggests to me a new direction for this performance activity to go. I respond to their momentary transgression of my instruction by encouraging Gaby and Carragh to now experiment with messing up their own as well as each other's hair. As they respond to my reconfigured instruction, their movements become bigger and, as it were, more flowing. Responding to this new quality of movement, I prompt them to follow through with their movements, to see where their movements take them. Soon they are shaking heads, pulling and tugging at hair and vigorously moving their bodies, and their movements seem to become more responsive and dynamic as they 'go with' the movements of their own and each other's moving hair. They are following my reconfigured instructions, but they are not tied down by one way of doing them. Their following of my instructions and their improvising in response to each other and their hair emerges in different ways and uniquely for each of them.<sup>59</sup>

Gaby and Carragh moved in their own distinct ways, yet they were constantly moving in response to each other, me, their hair and much else besides. I think they were able to move in their unique and different ways *because* they were constantly collaborating with and

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<sup>59</sup> Journal, 8 October 2014.



responding to what each other, and each other's hair, was doing. To put this another way, their collaboration did not submerge their differences; rather, their distinct 'selves' seemingly emerged *through* their collaborative explorations. Ingold's metaphor of 'lines' as human and nonhuman organisms is useful here. He discusses that a 'line of life' is entangled with(in) other 'lines' but that this entanglement does not engulf uniqueness and difference but rather continuously constitutes it (2011, p. 232). He implies that all (human and nonhuman) 'phenomena' are unique and distinct *because* we are constantly entangled with (human and nonhuman) 'others'. Barad takes these notions of entanglement and difference further. She proposes that differences between individuals (whether human or nonhuman) are not fixed but are constantly *made* by the intra-actions of agencies. Wilding performance containers can be understood as Barad's 'apparatus', where apparatuses are not pre set-up structures but are 'material-discursive practices' through which distinctions between one 'self' and an 'other' are 'constituted' (Barad, 2007, p. 141-142). In this sense, performance containers / apparatuses inevitably take part in making and reconfiguring the differences and boundaries between one 'self' and an 'other'. Indeed, *what* Carragh and Gaby *were* and *did* seemed to emerge differently throughout their ongoing collaborative responses to, and explorations of, the performance container or apparatus. This can be understood as a case of their unique 'selves' emerging *in* their live collaborative and dynamics enactments and transgressions of the performance containers / apparatuses. Therefore, it was not so much a collective of individuals that led this activity, but rather it was the *dynamics, differences* and *betweens* of the performance ecology that led it. This also suggests how, with a wilding performance approach, collaboration is not about focusing on prefixed different selves coming together but is about working with diverse and unique 'selves' as they emerge *in* the collaborative process itself. This reflects the intention in rewilding to help restore the diversity of environmental ecosystems, where diversity of life is understood to be indicative of the system's health and sustainability. However, my concept of wilding builds on this aspect of rewilding, in that wilding performance containers is an approach that is not about conserving a fixed state of diversity but about allowing for diversity to thrive and continuously *emerge* in the performance ecology. It may be that the ephemeral and live nature of performance (for example, the performance activity involving me, Gaby, Carragh and their hair) can readily expose how diversity *emerges* (as opposed to being a pre-given or fixed thing). Performance ecology thus builds on the ecosystems concept of diversity. Diversity emerged in this 'messy hair' activity as a case not merely of the differences between Carragh and Gaby but also the differences across their own ongoing movements.

Gaby and Carragh continue exploring the instructions: to mess up their own and each other's hair and to follow through with their movements. They are finding as-yet-unthought-of ways to mess up hair: they roll on the floor, jump up and down, twist in side-ways swinging motions. Judging by their expressions of excitement, their enactments are not only outdoing my expectations but they are also exceeding their own - they are surprising themselves with the diversity of movements they are discovering.<sup>60</sup>

Their ongoing *doing* of the task can be understood as an enactment of diversity - they were discovering multiple movement possibilities within the limited resources of me, the instructions, their bodies, their hair, and the room we were in. This implies how there are no orthodoxies in what wilding performance containers looks like: there is no one way to transgress the containment of instructions and tasks, but there are specific sets of possibilities for wilding that emerge in the enactment of those containers.

A key aspect of wilding performance is that containment never completely disappears. Gaby's and Carragh's movements, and my responsive prompts, were not instances of jettisoning boundaries but of contesting and reconfiguring what the boundaries were of the activity. Barad argues that boundary 'transgressions should be equated not with the dissolution of traversed boundaries . . . but with the ongoing reconfiguring of boundaries' (2007, p. 245). With this frame of reference, wilding performance can be conceptualised as the process by which the intra-acting (human) agencies can contest and reconfigure the performance boundaries and containers. This entails that we (director and human performers) work *with* containers, rather than seek to wildly jettison or blow them apart. As already discussed, it was only by meticulously attending to the containers that opportunities for transgressing those containers could emerge. Deleuze and Guattari usefully propose that blowing 'apart the strata' risks bringing the strata 'down on us heavier than ever' and that it is not possible to *make* 'lines of flight' but, rather, it is only possible to be open to the opportunities for 'freeing' them (1988, p. 187). Wilding performance is not a process of jettisoning the containers of performance rules, instructions and tasks and thus causing 'wildness', but rather wilding is about committing to containers and, through that commitment, being open and responsive to the opportunities for wilding that emerge. Wilding is not, therefore, a 'thing' or a destination: it cannot be grasped or planned. I think that wilding can only be *anticipated*. Furthermore, performance containers do not get wilded once and for all: the

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<sup>60</sup> Journal, 8 October 2014.

transgressions of containers can become new containers. This process is evident in how Gaby's and Carragh's transgressions of my instructions gave rise to new instructions, which they then enacted through and eventually transgressed, which, again, gave me ideas for newly reconfigured containers. So, wilding performance is seemingly not a linear process of containment *to* 'wildness', but is arguably an ongoing *process* of rupturing, transgressing and reconfiguring containers. The more complex rewilding perspectives offer useful insights in relation to this aspect of wilding performance containers. Rewilding is not always seen as a linear progression from 'non-wildness' to 'wildness', but rather is often understood as an ongoing *process* of rewilding ecosystems. Monbiot suggests that rewilding 'has no end points, no view about what a "right" ecosystem or a "right" assemblage of species looks like' but rather merely seeks to reduce human dominating behaviour in order to enable 'eco-systems . . . [to be] self-willed' (2013, p. 10). Similarly, Jørgensen proposes rewilding as an ongoing process of partaking in the recovery of an ecosystem that has been damaged or destroyed by human behaviours (2015, p. 1). With my approach of wilding performance containers, the wilding is not treated as a separated 'it' that we can look upon, arrive at or (merely) represent in a performance, but rather, wilding is an ongoing *process* that diverse collaborators can enact (in both process and performance event). This approach, therefore, neither replaces containment with unbounded 'wildness' nor progresses to 'wildness' and regresses (back) to container-ship: there is no going back and forth between 'wildness' and containment. Like Deleuze's and Guattari's 'movements of deterritorialization and processes of reterritorialization', containment and wildness are 'caught up in one another' (1988, p. 9). As already proposed, wilding seems to emerge in the tensions *between* - it is arguably an emergent process that comes up through the middle. This middle is neither a meeting point between containment and 'wildness' nor the result of two equal opposing forces. This middle is the movement of being between.

This further elucidates my new conceptualisation of collaboration. Helpfully, Laura Cull proposes that working with 'chance' is not about trying to escape intention altogether - this, she is clear, is impossible - but rather it is about affirming the multiple forces that author works of art, and she argues that art can be a practice 'that affirms its [own] uncontrollability' (2013, p. 51-52). I think that collaboration can most radically emerge as an ecological practice through the play between the structured and spontaneous, rehearsed and un-rehearse-able, planned and un-plan-able, expected and unexpected, fixed and improvised and intended and unpredictable. Most crucially, wilding performance is an approach to collaboration that works with the contained and uncontainable, with this being a dynamic

that is arguably resonant in any ecology (whilst it may be possible to place containing boundaries around an ecology - whether a performance ecology or an environmental one such as a forest - that ecosystem will inevitably impact on, and be impacted by, what is beyond those boundaries). In light of my discussions about me and my instructions, and my collaborators and their hair, wilding performance containers is arguably an approach through which child and adult, professional and nonprofessional (and even human and nonhuman) performers can all be participants and agents in enacting and transgressing performance containers. My discussions have, however, so far focused on humans and I want to show that it is by participating in the dynamics *between* what are usually conceptualised as oppositions that collaborative performance can challenge and transgress fixed hierarchical structures and power relations between all - human and nonhuman - collaborators.

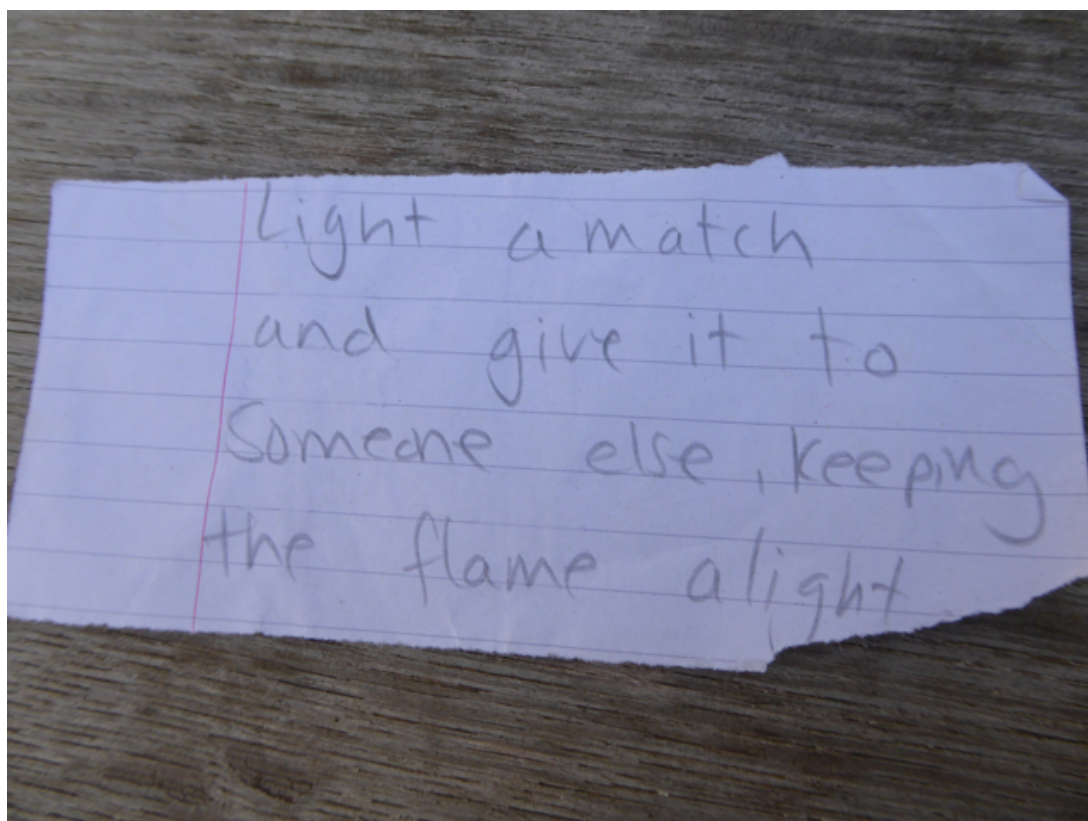
### **Instant Performances: the Separated and the Relational**

I now further demonstrate my wilding performance containers approach by focusing on a specific performance practice I developed called the Instant Performance, which involved the human performers and nonhuman materials. I developed this practice over the course of the creative process. I began working with it as a result of experiencing a similar one by Kabinet K. In August 2014, as part of my research development, and just before beginning *Wild Life*, I participated in a five-day Kabinet K masterclass in Ghent (Belgium) led by Laureyns and Manshoven, which was for professional dancers and children. During this masterclass I experienced their practice of 'Instant Compositions', improvisations that involved performers interacting with objects. The objects could be anything: during the masterclass we used whatever we found in the studio (clothes, shoes and chairs). Accompanying the objects were written tasks on slips of paper - for example, beside a pair of shoes the task read 'put these shoes on your hands without tying the laces and walk in straight lines across the space.' These tasks were either made up by the child and adult participants or prewritten by Laureyns and Manshoven. Kabinet K uses this practice as a way to produce material that can then be developed for performance. By experiencing their instant compositions as a participant, I sensed it could be developed as a productive performance methodology for collaborating with nonhuman materials as vibrant matter. My Instant Performances were 45 to 60 minute improvisations involving the human performers and nonhuman materials: stones, rocks, buckets, water and matches.



I chose to include materials in *Wild Life* because I wanted to explore further my findings from *Age-Old* about collaborating with the vibrancy of materials and the entanglements of enactment and representation. I felt that by working with different materials rather than just one (as had been the case in *Age-Old*) there would be more scope for developing a practice of collaborating with the diverse vibrancy of materials: I might learn more about how different materials *perform*. I use 'perform' here to reference the potential of materials to meaningfully impact on, and contribute to, the process of making theatrical performance and in the productions themselves. I chose these specific materials precisely because they can be considered to *represent* 'wildness'. I wished to see what meanings, creative ideas and performances emerged from focusing on the vibrant *materiality* of the stones, matches, buckets and water, as opposed to (only) emphasising them as symbolic of 'wildness'. I sought to develop a practice that would allow these materials to emerge as a lot more than (only) their metaphorical associations of 'earth' (stones), 'fire' (matches) and 'water' (buckets full of water). Whilst in *Age-Old* we had worked only with a manufactured material (plastic bags), with *Wild Life* I wanted to explore both manufactured (matches and buckets) and, what can be considered, 'natural' materials (stones, water, flames). I hoped that by involving both the manufactured / human-made and 'natural', there would be more potential for the process and performance to work productively with and (even momentarily) reconfigure binaries such as culture / nature, human / nonhuman, literal / symbolic and inside / outside.

We used the practice of Instant Performances throughout the creative process. I provided 20 to 30 written instructions alongside the accompanying materials: for example, 'Tap two stones together as fast as you can for one minute' was placed beside two stones; 'Splash your face with water and then stand in the bucket' was placed beside a bucket of water; 'Light a match and watch it burn and decide when to blow it out' was placed beside a box of matches; and 'Line the stones up across the space in order of size' was placed beside a pile of stones. Each instruction can be understood as a potential wilding performance container.



I wrote these tasks in order to encourage the performers to explore different ways of interacting with the materials. Performers were invited to pick an instruction and execute it - in whatever way they interpreted - before moving on to another instruction and action. A variation and development of the practice involved performers choosing to join with someone else, if they felt that another person's actions invited them in. This instruction was intended to give more creative freedom to the human performers, and was a strategy for enabling unpredictable and unplanned activities and relations to emerge.





As the director, I set up and watched these performance pieces. I noted particular moments, images, ideas and combinations (of people and of people and materials) that stood out, sometimes developing them with new instructions for subsequent Instant Performances. Furthermore, my ideas for other activities would often come from things I observed during this practice. For example, seeing Liz walk in a large circle carrying a heavy rock in one Instant Performance gave me the idea to create a dramaturgical structure that involved performers circling around the performance space in different ways. This structure or container of 'circling' became the foundation for the first 20 minutes of the final show. So, my ideas for other performance activities emerged immanently from the human performers and nonhuman materials and what I saw them *do* during the Instant Performances. This practice was also a key way by which human participants evolved as a group and developed their confidence and skills as collaborators and techniques as performers. In response to the spontaneous happenings of these improvisations, I sometimes offered encouragement and prompts to the performers during their improvisations, coaxing out their unique qualities of performing. However, often I simply observed what was going on, this proving an invaluable way for me to get to know the diverse qualities and behaviours of the different human performers and the different materials.



When observing the Instant Performances I was struck by how they would often move between being dominated by the human performers and being focused on relations between nonhuman materials and human performers. Furthermore, sometimes the practice would emerge *between* the human and nonhuman, producing what I saw as an entangled human-nonhuman theatre performance. These shifts between different modes of performance - human dominated, relational and entangled - would occur within one Instant Performance itself, as well as at different points during the rehearsal process when we used this practice (often weeks apart). The Instant Performance had the potential to be a wilding performance container, where the individual written tasks can be understood as smaller wilding containers within the larger container of the practice.

At the beginning of an Instant Performance, but also at different moments within it, the human performers would often dominate the performance ecology, with the stones, matches and buckets of water seeming to be inanimate objects that only became 'alive' when human performers engaged with them. In these instances, as a spectator, I felt aware of the materials as symbolic of the 'natural' elements of earth, fire and water. In one rehearsal Pete leant over a bucket and splashed his face with water and I read this action as symbolic of 'human purification', with Pete representing 'humans' and the water representing 'purity'.





When the Instant Performances were dominated by the human performers, the materials seemed to emerge, and be largely treated, as theatrical props and metaphors. Their significance was predefined, or at least limited to a symbolic function in aid of the human. The materials seemed to serve merely as metaphors about, and representations of, ‘ecology’. I think it was the type of instruction, and the type of activity which that instruction gave rise to, that meant that the group was not necessarily able to work with, or respond to, the stones, water, buckets and matches as ‘vibrant matter’, as agents with their own forces, trajectories and tendencies (Bennett, 2010, p. viii). Fitzpatrick came into one rehearsal during which we did an Instant Performance. Afterwards he commented that when he saw Graham placing stones around his body he felt that Graham was making his own grave and that the stones represented the ‘earth’.<sup>61</sup> This comment implies that Fitzpatrick read the stones as a metaphor in relation to the human performer; he did not, and perhaps could not, experience the stones as vibrant materials (they could not be more than props in aid of a human-focused performance). These activities seemed to uphold a narrative of humans-animating-materials, whereby the instructions demanded the humans either to make the materials into something, such as a line of stones, or to cause them to do something, such as clicking two stones together to make a sound. Perhaps the Instant Performances were, in these instances, fulfilling the anthropocentric perspective that Bennett describes as the Western view of matter as passive and inert (2010, p. vii)? Under this view, matter is

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<sup>61</sup> Journal, 18 September 2014.

understood to be significant and ‘alive’ only when it is animated by humans or when a ‘soul’ or ‘life’ enters it (Bennett, 2010, p. 10; p. 87-89). This is not to say that the materials were not vibrant in these instances, but rather that they were being treated and rendered *as if* they were not. As previously discussed in Chapter Two, it is problematic to think that humans can cause or invite nonhuman vibrancy. Perhaps it is more realistic to consider how we are ourselves always already part of (nonhuman) vibrancy? The question that, therefore, arises for me is not whether but *how* to work with the vibrancy of nonhuman materials?

During an Instant Performance, there would often be a shift into a more relational mode of performing. This involved the group ‘getting to know’ the potential of the materials as agents with, as Bennett describes it, ‘thing power’ (2010, p. xvi). In one rehearsal, the stones laid out by Liz at the beginning of the exercise were later being leapt over, avoided and followed by Graham, Gaby and Lennon: the stones were *shaping* the path of movement that these differently-sized-running-humans took. I became aware of the ways the materials were shaping the human performances and the humans were shaping the materials’ performances. The Instant Performances, in these instances, seemed to implicitly draw my attention to the ways in which both the humans and nonhuman materials were co-determining the practice: humans and nonhumans were *performing*. In my notes (overleaf) about one particular Instant Performance, I listed the activities of the performance under the headings ‘matches’, ‘water’ and ‘stones’ and focused on human activities *with* the materials, which seems to imply that my focus was on the *relations* between humans and nonhumans, as opposed to predominantly on the human performers.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Journal, 16 October 2014.

u - Canavan jumping falling in water  
 l - Graham picking up tennis in @ position  
 - Stuff  
 a Matches:  
 a - watching flame burn  
 b - go going somewhere as it burns  
 - play out arm & hands  
 - passing flame on to others  
 - striking - tennis - for net  
 a Water:  
 - washing face  
 - dampening others skin  
 - head in bucket  
 - standing in water  
 apples, eating, holding in  
 mouth, in hand.

u - ...  
 l - ...  
 Stones:  
 outline of body, lying on stones, carrying big  
 stone in big circle, circles of stones, lines of stones,  
 stone on head & standing watching, filling shoes, hitting 2 together.  
 Tapping head. taking shoes off.  
 Following someone.  
 closing eyes & listening to sounds in the room.  
 Gathering people into circle of stones.  
 Running in circle  
 Resting, watching from hands & knees changing the  
 energy.  
 Lifting people up & carrying them.  
 Jumping full circles.  
 putting out wild fire. upside down



Fitzpatrick also commented that the symbolic meaning he read of the stones as the 'earth' for a grave was disrupted when Graham left the stones (in the outline of his body) and later Carragh came and pushed them into a pile, proceeding to follow the same instruction, lying down and outlining her own body with them.



Fitzpatrick reflected how his original meaning for these stones was swept away when Carragh swept the stones into a pile and began laying the stones around her body with more difficulty than Graham as some were very heavy. Carragh's interactions with the stones made Fitzpatrick wonder how Graham had managed to place them around his body so easily and, in this moment, Fitzpatrick was drawn to the weight, textures and noises of the stones. As a result of focusing on their materiality, a new meaning for the stones emerged: Fitzpatrick read the stones as symbolic of a boundary Carragh was making around herself. For a moment, Fitzpatrick had ceased to read the symbolism of the stones, with the image of 'a grave' disappearing, and he had become aware of the stones *as* physical and present materialities with their own qualities and tendencies, albeit an awareness purely in relation to the human performer. Symbolism did not, however, completely disappear, but rather his meanings of the stones were shifted by the activities of different humans and the behaviours of the stones themselves. As a spectator to the Instant Performances, I also found that the diverse ways in which different (younger and older) human performers engaged with the materials brought attention to the materials *as* vibrant materials and, at the same time, symbolic meanings that I had at first attached to them were simultaneously disrupted and shifted (to a new meaning) through the interactions with the stones by different performers. The unique textures,

behaviours and tendencies of the materials in combination with the different human performers arguably produced different types of performance with different readings, where the readings were also dependent on what I (the spectator) brought to the work. In one Instant Performance Gaby sat amongst the stones, which Lennon had previously laid out in a circle, and lit matches.

Watching Gaby, I was drawn to the playful and inquisitive qualities of how she lit, watched and blew out the matches. The unique combination of Gaby and matches produced a specific quality of *doing*. As I continued watching, Gaby and the matches became for me a metaphor for how teenagers often create their own 'space' in which they can feel at ease and held by the boundaries of their created 'space' - Gaby's 'space' was represented here by the circle of stones in which she sat. In another rehearsal, Lennon lit the matches and my reading of the material was different: at first, I saw Lennon as a symbol of 'young children' with his actions representing to me how children need to experiment with risk. However, this was not merely metaphorical as there was an actual element of risk in Lennon lighting and playing with matches.



This suggests how the 'represented' and the 'real' are difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle. In light of Fitzpatrick's comments about, and my experiences of, watching the Instant Performances, this inseparability between the represented and real is seemingly the case especially when it comes to diverse humans collaborating with nonhuman materials as



vibrant matter, where the actualities of these materials can play a significant part in producing (and rupturing) theatrical meanings and representations.

In this relational mode of the Instant Performances, not only did my readings of humans and nonhumans shift, but my relationship to them shifted between symbolic meanings and simply focusing on their physical qualities and behaviours. In the final performance there was a section when Lennon sat lighting the matches, whilst the other performers moved around him.



When watching Lennon and the matches in the final performances, any meanings I had would often disappear because I was fully drawn to the physical activities of strike-flame-smoke-sit-watch-burn-flicker-billow. I suspect that other audience members watching this Lennon-match activity had their own meanings for it and their own moments of focusing on the physical qualities of Lennon and the matches.

In the (human-nonhuman) relational performance mode, which occurred in the Instant Performances and in parts of the final performance, I was constantly asked to let go of the meanings I projected on to this ecology of children, adults, stones, water, flames, etc. The *diversity* of human relations with the materials took precedence, as opposed to humans dominating over and fully determining the activities and meanings of the materials. Even as

representations, symbols, metaphors and meanings formed, as a spectator I could not hold them still, since they were always changing into something else by the different live interactions enacted by different human performers. Perhaps live performance has the innate potential to enact the ongoing flux and process of how ‘things’ and ‘selves’ materially and ecologically *emerge*? Live performance arguably enacts the constant letting go and abandonment of fixed states: even as images, meanings and specific identities form, they are always already changing into something else. This may be one of the key and innate ecological potentials of performance practice: live performance as a case of performance constantly un-doing any fixed sense of the ‘things’ and ‘selves’ it presents.

With the relational mode of the Instant Performances, it was not a case of there being no symbolic significance, but that the significance of the humans and nonhumans was constantly shifting and was, in part, continuously determined and changed by the relations between them. The materials were rendered as collaborators in the performance, albeit that the humans and nonhumans were still rendered as separated and separable collaborators. In this relational mode, whilst the spectators may become aware of both the ongoing shifts in ‘things’ and ‘selves’ and how these shifts are intimately tied up with the relations between the humans and nonhumans on stage, the opportunities for wilding performance are limited. The ‘circling’ section in the final performance exemplifies these limitations. The focus during this section was on the relations between different human performers and between human performers and nonhuman materials.



The performers travelled the inside perimeter of the circular performance space in different combinations (singularly, in pairs and all together) by walking, running, carrying and chasing each other, balancing a stone on their head, carrying large rocks and holding water in their mouths. They also paused together in the large gap: once to each click two stones together and again to spray water in a fountain from their mouths. The performers followed a strict order of rehearsed activities and each new circling activity was a playful, and often unexpected (for the audience) introduction to the diverse intergenerational performers and the nonhuman materials.

There were moments during the circling when the performers almost slipped or bashed into the audience; Graham accidentally kicked a woman's bag and almost slipped into her as he ran full-pace and Archie nearly tripped over as he ran in the circle calling in a high voice.



Moments like this had the potential to rupture and transgress the performance container, however, this section remained within the explicit container of circling and, in turn, within the relational mode of performance. As a consequence, I think the audience could only read the nonhuman materials in relation to the activities of the humans. One audience member, Dan Serridge, spoke to me after one performance, describing how the circling section was, for him, about the history of humans or a particular human family; each circle taken by the performers represented a period of time, such as a decade or century. Dan Serridge felt that he was watching a 'human saga' that covered many generations.<sup>63</sup> His reading was focused on

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<sup>63</sup> Journal, 30 November 2014.



the humans themselves and how they represented a human story. Listening to his comments made me think that the nonhuman materials could only be viewed in *relation* to the humans and thus there could only be a human-focused reading. As already argued, the relational can be rather limiting when it comes to the complexity of ecological entanglement. Whilst I think it is impossible to avoid discussing the relations between one 'thing' / 'being' and an 'other', solely focusing on relations risks presuming that 'things' / 'beings' are originally separated and separable. I found that the Instant Performances and the final performance of *Wild Life* was - at times - able to go beyond a relational mode, emerging through and bringing attention to the *betweens* of humans and nonhumans. This process of moving between and across the separated, relational and entangled (not necessarily in a linear way) is an example of how wilding performance is, as I have already proposed, an ongoing process.

## Enacting Entanglement

### *Watch Clip 5 Vibrant Humans and Nonhumans, Water Fight*

Archie has his head in a bucket of water, Carragh gurgles a mouthful of water, some spilling from the sides of her lips. Gaby sits looking at Archie, her hands cupped inside another bucket. Graham and Liz sit on rocks, turning to look around at the different human-bucket-water activities. Geraldine sustains a screaming 'ahhh' as she brings her head in and out of her bucket, causing the sound to playfully chop and change. Gaby flings her cupped hands of water towards Archie.

Pete dips his head into a bucket, holding it there for ten or so seconds, before bringing it out suddenly, making a huge spraying arc of flinging water - an air-borne stream from a dipped-flung-up head. He shakes vigorously, spraying any one and any thing near him, including some audience members.



Soon, there is spitting, flinging, spilling, ducking. Lennon escapes out of the circle, trying to avoid Gaby who splatters towards him with mouth and cupped hands full of water: a human transgressing the boundaries of the contained performance space. Carragh holds a bucket, almost too heavy for her, and swooshes it towards Pete but the water escapes before Carragh means it to because of the weight and slipperiness of the metal bucket. The water goes towards Geraldine who, surprised, gasps and twists on the spot as a walloping splash extends across her, some water missing her and carrying on to land on Graham. Lennon creeps up behind Gaby, flicking his hands to spray the back of her neck - his flicking wetting his face as much as Gaby. Pete drops the biggest rock into another bucket, masses of water splashing out in all directions. I am not sure who / what made the splash - Pete, the rock, the shape of the bucket, the amount of water or the people avoiding it.

Water spreads across the floor, some traveling under the feet and chairs of the audience, escaping the perimeter of the performance space: a nonhuman material transgressing the boundaries of the contained performance space. Graham and Geraldine attempt to whisk the water back into the centre of the space by splashing-whipping-kicking their feet across the layer of spreading-out-moving water, spraying each other as they go.

The movements of water are shaping the activities of humans, who are never quite sure where the water and themselves will end up. Odd human stances and curious gaits are produced, different in every performance and led by the pragmatics of negotiation across a wetter and wetter floor. The unpredictability of escaping water encourages humans to escape the predictable and the humans must also negotiate with the unpredictable movements of each other as they step between rocks and buckets, trying not to slip in the water. The speeds and slownesses of spreading water across the floor is different with each performance, persuaded in certain directions by the buckets, rocks, chairs, audience's feet and the pattering tip-toe feet of the performers.<sup>64</sup>

When watching different iterations of the water fight (during the Instant Performances and in the final performances) I felt that the activities arose in a non-locatable way. I experienced the work as *brought forth* and *shaped* neither by humans, nonhumans nor the relations between them, but immanently through intra-actions occurring across distinct yet inseparable human and nonhuman bodies. This practice of the performance ecology extends and challenges Bennett's notion of 'assemblage'. Bennett focuses on how humans and nonhumans are 'actants' who produce 'effect' and exist in assemblages or confederations with other 'actants' (2010, p. 103; p. 21). Her arguments, however, fall back on the presumption that there are, in the first place, individual entities: agency is attributed either to individual actants or to the 'assemblages' that individual actants make up (Bennett, 2010, p. xvii). Either way agency is presented as something to have or not have. The water fight seems to demonstrate agency differently. This performance ecology (of children, adults, water, buckets, rocks, chairs and more) was not so much an assemblage of human and nonhuman actants but rather a case of un-locatable actions emerging *between* humans and *between* humans and nonhumans. This un-locatable-ness of 'agency' is a key aspect of wilding performance. I think certain performance containers, such as the water fight, can enable human and nonhuman performers to rupture and transgress the containments of the performance event, where agency is dynamically distributed across and between the diverse humans and nonhumans involved.<sup>65</sup> The water fight in the final performances was contained by human *rehearsed* actions - actions discovered during earlier Instant Performances - dipping heads, cupping hands, gurgling and screaming mouths, dropping rocks, techniques of splashing, chucking, and flicking. Yet the live performance involved spontaneous,

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<sup>64</sup> Journal, August 2015.

<sup>65</sup> I further discuss this more complex notion of 'agency' later in this chapter.

unpredictable and diverse movements of (its entangled) human and nonhuman performers. Arguably, the performance ecology needed, and was sustained by, these unpredictable human-nonhuman movements. Perhaps the performance activity was *wilded* by the unpredictabilities of diverse humans and nonhumans?

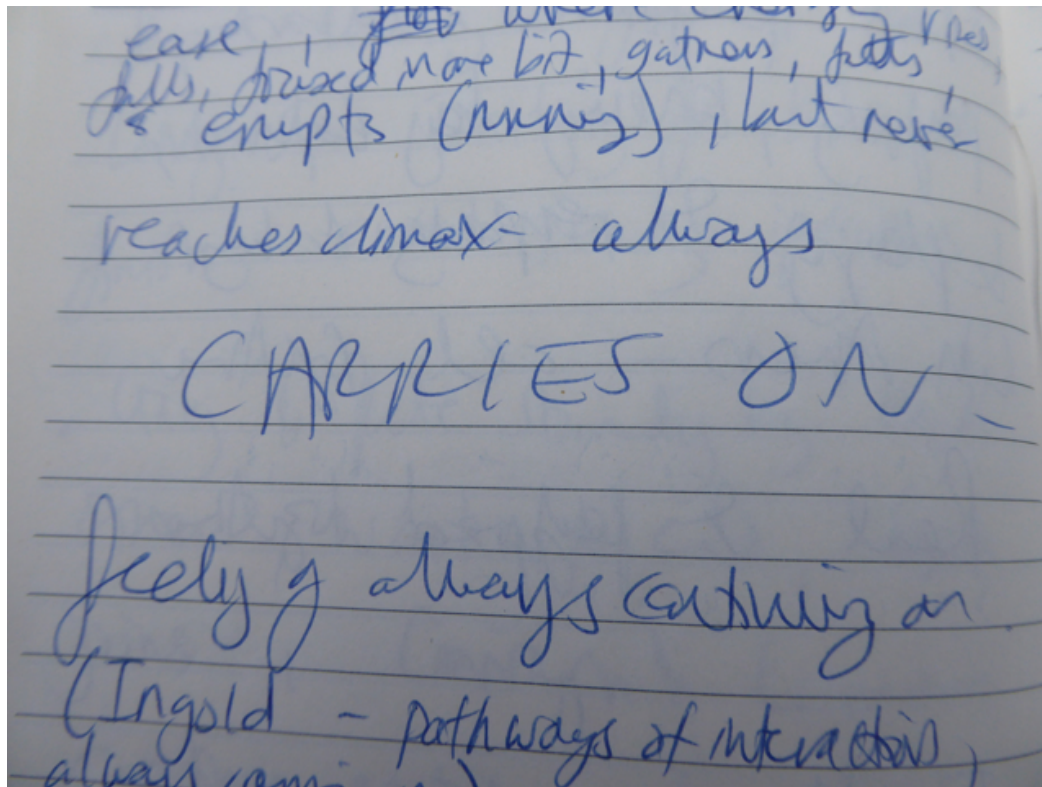
At the end of the film clip of the water fight, the human performers try to splash each other by kicking the water. Like the humans' kicking feet attempting but failing to control or capture the water, I could never wholly encapsulate this performance, just as no *one* (human or nonhuman) performer seemed to ever fully capture or dominate the performance ecology. In this entangled mode of performing, I think that the humans performed *with* what the materials and each other vibrantly *do* rather than with what they preconceive the materials and each other to *be*. Each time I watched the water fight (in rehearsals and in the final production) I had a sense that at any moment something could change, the slightest shift in angle could cause water to spray me or cause a performer to duck and bash into a bucket or rock. Whilst in an ecological practice diverse humans must have a say in the work, I do not think it is a case of the human collaborators having the dominant or the final say in where the process goes or what constitutes the final performance. Rather, an ecological practice is about finding ways for the different humans and different nonhumans to mark and co-determine the process and performances, and, more precisely, for the unpredictable *dynamics* and *betweens* of the human-nonhuman performance ecology to steer the work. The Instant Performance has the potential to be an ecological practice because it can enable any (human or nonhuman) participant to transgress and reconfigure the performance containers and, therefore, play a part in what theatrical performances emerge.

When discussing *Wild Life* with audience member Hayden Foreman-Smith, he commented that the water fight was the most 'wild' because he felt that it was not only he (and the rest of the audience) who did not know what was going to happen next - he said he was on the edge of his seat - but he also observed that the performers themselves did not always know what was about to occur. He could not distinguish between what was rehearsed and not rehearsed. He could not tell whether Lennon chucking a bucket of water across Pete's back was planned or not, because Pete looked so surprised and Lennon looked so pleased with himself. Not knowing what was known and unknown to the performers made Hayden Foreman-Smith feel that he was *part of* the performance - the audience and performers were all in this (performance) together.<sup>66</sup> His comments offer further evidence that wilding emerges *between*

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<sup>66</sup> Journal, 21 December 2014.

what is planned and unplanned, predicted and unpredicted, known and unknown and, ultimately, between the human and nonhuman. An ecological practice is, in part, about how the process and final performance is always subject to being changed by the unpredictabilities of human and nonhuman performers. During the process of making *Wild Life*, I noted that even when performance activities, such as the Instant Performances, reached a climax they often carried on from what might, at first, seem an end or fixed point.



Furthermore, the final performance of *Wild Life* was not something assembled out of 'parts' made during the process: the performance was not a culmination, summary or representation of the process. Rather, the performance *carried on* (with) the process: in fact, I would suggest that the performance carried on, and was carried on by, the diverse and unpredictable performances of my (human and nonhuman) collaborators. I think a key aspect of ecological performance practice is incompleteness, where the final performance is constantly completed by the unpredictable human-nonhuman (intra)activities that issue forth through the performance containers. Ingold offers a useful insight here: he argues that 'it is precisely because no [art] work is ever truly "finished" . . . that it remains alive' (2013, p. 96).

With the water fight performance, it can be argued that the 'water' and 'humans' (and other nonhuman materials) were all processes, becoming as definable 'things' only inasmuch as they were *intra-acting*. The performance was not, therefore, the result or bringing together of a network of *a priori* separable 'water' and 'humans'. Rather, it was (a)live evidence of a

complex of non-isolatable (human and nonhuman) performers: the *doing* of the water fight was led by the vibrant (rehearsed and un-rehearse-able) enactments of dipping-splashing-colliding-slipping-spreading. The performance was an instance of ‘water’ and ‘humans’ being *performed by*, and differentiated with(in), the vibrant performance ecology. As discussed in relation to Barad’s ‘agential realism’ (2007) in Chapter Two, relations and collaborations do exist but only inasmuch as what / whom relates or collaborates with what / whom is intra-actively constituted *in* enactment itself. The ‘water’ and ‘human’ agencies did not precede but rather emerged through their intra-actions: their separations and relations were intra-actively constituted in the *doing* of this performance. Perhaps ecological performance is, in part, about how humans and nonhumans can emerge, and be revealed, as ‘entangled’ and intra-acting agencies (Barad, 2007, p. 33)?

These notions of human-nonhuman intra-activity and entanglement are evident in the review of *Wild Life* by Mary Brennan. Brennan’s reading of the performance focuses on ‘wild’ as something unfixed and un-locatable: “‘wild’ selves . . . surface’ and the ‘wildness’ of Geraldine’s dancing is simultaneously ‘pure 21st century’ and ‘timeless’ (Brennan, 2014). Brennan reads ‘wild’ as emergent across humans and nonhumans, both metaphorically, in terms of what meanings the performance represented for her and literally, in terms of the human bodies and nonhuman materials physically onstage. She sees metaphors of the human and nonhuman in what the human performers *do*: their movements are ‘animalistic lumberings’ with ‘hints of pack behaviour’ and these movements are set ‘alongside the beginnings of tribal rituals’ (Brennan, 2014). She also focuses on what the human *and* nonhuman performers do: when the ‘significant elements’ of ‘stone, water, fire’ come into play, there are ‘complex meanings’: the water fight is an ‘outburst of mutual drenchings’ that feels ‘like the anarchic predecessor of ancient mid-winter rituals’; the ‘stone circle’ in the middle of the performance space is a ‘home’ for the performers; the ‘flaring light’ of the ‘short-lived’ flames of the matches vanish ‘into the darkness of history’; and the ‘clatter of skimming stones clutter [the stone] circle into anonymity’, making her ‘realise how easy it is to walk past, without noticing, the traces of humanity in the wild’ (Brennan, 2014). Brennan discusses the human and nonhuman in a way that does not separate them out into categories. Her meanings and readings of ‘wild’ evidently emerged from the vibrant matter of the humans and nonhumans onstage. That is, the live (intra)activities of humans and nonhumans led Brennan to read ‘wild’ not as something separate from humans and human culture, but rather as something human ‘selves’ can actually be and as somewhere where the ‘traces’ of

humans can be found.<sup>67</sup> Her review implies how the final *Wild Life* performance may have enacted human-nonhuman, mind-matter, metaphor-material and culture-nature inseparability. Brennan's reading of *Wild Life* suggests that the theatrical performance was able to implicitly show that 'humans' and 'human culture' are not, and have never been, 'of our own making' but rather humans and their cultures are infused 'by biological, geological, and climatic forces' (Bennett, 2010, p. 115). With Bennett's vital materialism there is no human-nonhuman, mind-matter or culture-nature division and so human cultural practices (such as performance) is not separable from wider ecological and material processes, and performance cannot construct independently (of the materials) what the materials mean. With my ecological practice, the vibrancy of the materials is not an add-on to human experiences and meanings, but rather is co-constitutive of those experiences and meanings.

I had discovered some specific aspects of 'wildness' and 'ecology' in the creative process, which I hoped the final performance would communicate (which I discuss later in this chapter), yet a key aim was to create a performance that would allow the vibrant, unique and unpredictable activities of entangled human and nonhuman performers to 'meet' with the unique perspectives of audience members, resulting in rich and multiple readings of 'wildness', 'humans', 'nonhumans', and 'ecology'. I was not aiming for an absence of ecological metaphors, representations or meanings, but rather by not prescribing a narrative or fixed meaning to the work I wanted the entangled human and nonhuman participants of the performance ecology (including me, the group, the nonhuman materials and the audience) to continuously co-determine what the work was and meant. A key aspect of my ecological practice is that vibrant human performers collaborate with nonhuman vibrant matter, instigating unpredictable human-nonhuman entangled performances that might implicitly invite audience members to have unique experiences of, and meanings about, the work. This may result in audience members experiencing themselves as *vibrant* parts of the performance ecology, whereby they might even become *aware* of being active participants (along with the human and nonhuman performers onstage) in constituting what the work is and means. This is evident in Hayden Foreman-Smith's comments about how he felt a part of the performance because of the unpredictabilities of the water and human performers during the water fight, and is also evident in Brennan's reading, where she does not separate the humans and nonhumans out, but rather writes about them simultaneously in terms of what they literally do and what they symbolically mean.

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<sup>67</sup> See appendix D for a copy of Brennan's review. It can also be viewed here, [http://www.heraldsotland.com/arts\\_ents/13191174.Review\\_\\_Performance/](http://www.heraldsotland.com/arts_ents/13191174.Review__Performance/).



## Wilding Performance Through a Just Doing-ness Approach

### *Watch Clip 6 Working With and As Vibrant Matter, Sliding Stones*

In one rehearsal I give Liz the instruction to fling and slide a stone across the floor. It is difficult to know where the stones will go when thrown - whether they will end up under chairs, banging into feet or simply arrive at a particular spot on the floor. I invite the whole group to participate: each member stations her or himself at different spots around the edges of the circular performance space. Soon stones are being sent spinning in a multiplicity of pathways, going in unintended directions due to the forces of the throw and / or as a consequence of other stones bashing into them. The textures of uneven stones sliding across hard-stage-flooring produce a grating-thundering sound that rises and falls depending on the amount of stones in motion and their various speeds.<sup>68</sup>

The human performers were not just letting the stones go from their hands, but they were also letting go of trying to fully control and predict the stones. Even as the group became more skilled at judging how far the stones would slide, individuals were never able to know fully what the stones would do. The activity enabled them to work with and respond to the stones in their (a)live vibrant materiality. They were fully committed to, and wholly focused on, the task of sliding and flinging, which meant that their ideas about how to slide the stones emerged inseparably and immanently from the vibrancy of the stones. I think that by focusing on the just doing-ness of sliding stones, the humans performers emerged as themselves vibrant matter. The positions of the humans, textures of the floor, collisions of stones with other stones and harder-to-name forces, all played a part in constituting what the stones and humans *did*: vibrant humans were collaborating with(in) vibrant nonhumans. With my just doing-ness approach it is necessary, however, to be wary of translating what I might frame as humans-immersed-in-the-vibrancy-of-the-nonhuman into the idea of humans-passively-immersed-in-the-nonhuman. My term 'just doing-ness' risks giving the impression that we must surrender to whatever happens in performance because it *just* is what happens, it *just* is the doing-ness of vibrant matter. 'Just doing-ness' risks becoming what Morton describes as a 'laissez-faire' or 'let it be' mentality (2010, p. 101). Morton discusses the tendency in ecological thinking to relegate the human to a position of 'passive immersion' in the 'web of life' or 'more-than-human' (2010, p. 122; p. 8; p. 76). This scenario rests on the

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<sup>68</sup> Journal, 15 October 2014.



idea that there is little we can do and less for which we can be responsible - it proposes that we are not in full control so we must simply accept what(ever) occurs. However, my just doing-ness approach does not manifest as an amoral attitude of 'anything goes' but rather involves human performers *actively* committing and attending to performance tasks. I developed an approach in which human performers, by (just) *doing* a performance task, were arguably able to become responsive and responsible to their entanglements with each (human) other and the (nonhuman) materials.

To do the sliding stones task, the performers had to be responsive to the unpredictabilities of each other and the stones, which also meant that they had to be responsible for how they participated in the performance ecology of humans and stones. They each decided when to slide the stones depending on how many other stones were moving across the floor: they slid them differently depending on the size, weight and texture of each stone. They had to be careful about and focused on what they were doing and how they were doing it, deciding when and how they flung stones and how many to fling at a time, and choosing the amount of force they gave in each fling. The humans were neither passive to the stones nor did they do whatever they felt like with them. *Just doing* this performance task demanded the human performers to make responsive choices from within the performance ecology, whereby they could not fully control what happened but they could play *responsible parts* in what happened.

Just doing-ness is a performance approach in which entangled but distinct human and nonhuman participants are exposed as collaborators in what the performance is, whereby humans are not passively immersed in the nonhuman vibrancy but rather are active participants within it. A just doing-ness approach is about practicing how we (humans) are not (ever) the full scope of things. It is an approach that can potentially produce theatrical performances that implicitly enact how what we are and what we do is never a matter of just 'us'. My job as the director was often to simply prompt and encourage the performers to focus on the task at hand and the materials they were working with, which included the stones, water, buckets and matches and each (human) other. Perhaps a just doing-ness approach allows the performance production to implicitly demonstrate how 'we' are always already entangled with 'many other strivings' (Bennett, 2010, p. 32)? Furthermore, by focusing their attention on the specifics of a task, each other and / or the nonhuman materials, I think that my human collaborators were able to participate more responsively and responsibly in the performance ecology.

Just doing-ness is also about the particular performance style and quality that emerges when performers focus on the actualities of *doing* a performance task. Performers do not attempt to overlay narratives, emotions or meanings onto their actions, but focus on the pragmatics of physical enactment. With the water fight performance, the human performers did not try to represent, demonstrate or act out a 'wild' water fight: they did not try to make this activity have a certain narrative or symbolic meaning of 'wildness'. Rather, they simply *did* a (real) water fight *as* themselves, whereby they attended to the pragmatics of buckets, rocks, each other, and an increasingly wetter floor. In Chapter One I discussed nonprofessional performers in contemporary performance, drawing on Quarantine and Kabinet K. In my interview with Quarantine's Gregory he described his preference for working with people not trained in acting or performing, saying that nonprofessionals give performances that are 'quotidian' and 'ordinary', which have none of the pretense that he associates with the trained actor or performer (2014). He added that, whilst they do have 'skills' and 'they are performing', nonprofessionals 'are not attempting to reproduce some kind of paradigm of what performance on stage should look like or feel like' (Gregory, 2014). Similarly Kabinet K emphasises how child and nonprofessional performers are more likely to be 'normal' and 'themselves' onstage as opposed to the trained actor who has learned to represent and pretend (Manshoven, 2014). Just doing-ness builds on the approaches and conceptualisations of nonprofessional performers presented by Quarantine and Kabinet K. Firstly, Gregory's notion that nonprofessionals do not try to reproduce a paradigm of what performance should be - they are not actors or performers trained in certain ways of presenting themselves to an audience - resonates with my notion of just doing performance tasks, where the pragmatics of what is being *done* takes precedence over performing narratives, meanings or emotions. Gregory hopes that in his shows the performers are not acting or showing, but rather 'they're doing' (2014). Whilst I disagree with his proposition that nonprofessionals' performances are implicitly 'everyday' and 'ordinary', his emphasis on 'doing' is useful for articulating my just doing-ness concept. Kabinet K take a similar approach, yet offer a more complex practice in terms of disrupting the professional-nonprofessional binary. The company encourages performers to focus on the actualities of doing, rather than on trying to show an emotion. Laureyns and Manshoven argue that their dance performances have their own 'colour' precisely because the child, professional and older dancers are 'dedicated' to their tasks and do not try to overlay 'colour' onto their movements (2014). Laureyns comments that the 'meaning' of their work is 'not described in emotions . . . [but] it's described in physical presence' (2014). They aim for performers to 'be as normal as possible onstage', proposing

that if the child and adult (nonprofessional and professional) dancers are ‘fully occupied’ in doing the specific performance task - if they do it sincerely and ‘profoundly’ - then the work will have ‘the colour but they [the performers] don’t have to know what the colour is’: the performers themselves should ‘not give the movements colour, that’s very important’ (Laurens and Manshoven, 2014). Their approach resonates with my concept of just doing-ness inasmuch as they do not wish the human performers to dominate the performance by prescribing meanings, narratives and emotions to their own activities. Laureys and Manshoven imply that they want *enactment* itself to determine what the work is and means. I take this a step further by proposing that it is not merely the enactments of diverse humans that can determine and ‘colour’ the performance, but it is the enactments of distinct yet entangled humans and nonhumans.

I also further Kabinet K’s notion that by performers not ‘colouring’ performance the performance has rich ‘colour’ for an audience. (Laureys, 2014). I propose that by fully committing to the (just) *doing* of tasks / containers, performances emerge that are vibrant and complex and open for audience members to find within them rich meanings, narratives and emotions. In Brennan’s review she describes how ‘simple tasks take on complex meanings’: she asks is ‘the lifting of large stones a test of stamina, or the start of henges past?’ (2014).



I suggest that spectators’ readings and experiences of ‘wildness’ emerged not from the performers trying to ‘colour’ what they did with ‘wild’ meanings, but from the performers’

focus on (just) doing the particular performance tasks. This is not to say that the human performers did not have meanings and emotions about ‘wildness’, but rather I wish to emphasise that the performance ecology was more open and vibrant - more wild perhaps? - when performers did not try to colour what they did with predetermined ideas and meanings about ‘wildness’. I think that wilding emerged in the process and final performance by me and my collaborators *indirectly* approaching ‘wildness’, which involved performers focusing on specific kinds of performance containers and on the pragmatic demands of doing those containers. I understand just doing-ness as an approach to performance where we do not look upon the ‘wildness’ of ‘nonhumans’ or ‘ecologies’, but rather we work from the reality of being in a performance ecology and find strategies for *wilding*, and for letting ourselves be *wilded* by, that performance ecology. This idea is evident in the programme notes I wrote for *Wild Life*. I do not propose that the show is (only) *about* ‘wildness’ but rather I describe it as a live ‘meditation and celebration of wildness’, framing the performance by writing: ‘We are asking what it is to be wild. We would like to know about it with our bodies - alone, together and with what we don’t yet know or understand. We are not just us. There are children, adults, water, stones, matches and other ‘goings ons’. Each of us are here, and since each of us are multiple, we are quite a crowd. We would like to go into the wild life. You are welcome.’ (Hopfinger, 2014).<sup>69</sup>

The line ‘You are welcome’ implies my aim for audience members to experience themselves as participants in, as opposed to onlookers of, the performance ecology. The openness of the performance ecology was, in part, I suggest a result of the diverse child and adult, professional and nonprofessional performers I collaborated with. Reflecting on *Wild Life*, researcher and artist Robert Walton proposed that by having such a diverse group of people onstage interacting and moving *with* and *as* vibrant matter, the experience for him as an audience member was one where he could see himself onstage - ‘I look like the people I am watching, so it is easier for me to feel a part of what they are doing’.<sup>70</sup> This relates to my finding from *Age-Old* that children could access the work more easily due to the child performer (Carragh) onstage. Walton felt that he was *like* the people in *Wild Life* because they were not (all) trained performers / dancers. He could see himself fitting into this intergenerational group - in terms of age he would fit between Geraldine and the older adults, and in terms of things he would enjoy doing he could imagine himself participating in the water fight. Walton implied that the intergenerational performance ecology was an

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<sup>69</sup> See Appendix B for a copy of the programme.

<sup>70</sup> Journal, 21 September 2015.

intrinsically open one, whereby he could directly and immediately feel himself a part of it. Related to this, the feedback I received from a number of child and adult audience members was that they wished they could have joined in more with the performance, citing the water fight, lighting matches and flinging stones as things they would like to do themselves. They also commented that one of the most exciting and memorable moments was when Archie and Liz took audience members by the hand and involved them physically in the movements of the performers.<sup>71</sup> This feedback implies the performance was open, inviting and accessible to adult and child audience members because there was a diversity of humans *and* nonhuman materials onstage. Walton described how he was seeing ‘normal’ people ‘intra-acting’ within ‘vibrant matter’ live onstage, and that having ‘normal’ people enacting ecological entanglement meant he could experience ecological entanglement for himself. This furthers my finding from *Age-Old* and suggests that an intergenerational performance ecology may well make it easier for audience members to experience how the ecological is something that is an everyday material reality of being alive. Through the intergenerational, professional-nonprofessional and human-nonhuman collaborations of my practice, it seems that performance - specifically under my just doing-ness approach - can be an enactment of how we are all, in performance and in life, participants in the dynamic vibrant matter of ecologies. Walton’s feedback also suggests to me that *Wild Life* offered an alternative to the trend in some ecological performance practices, and specifically in ecological movement and dance practices, to relegate experiences of ecology to the singular adult professional able-bodied artist. Working with an intergenerational collective allowed me to develop an approach (wilding performance) that is not limited to certain types of performers, but rather is one that can account for the *dynamics, differences* and *betweens* of child / adult, professional / nonprofessional and human / nonhuman. I think that ecological performance practices must necessarily not enact orthodoxies about what ‘the ecological’ looks and feels like and who gets to experience it (paradoxically, this statement about non-orthodoxy could itself be an orthodoxy). What I think matters in ecological practice is whether we can be *responsive* and *responsible* to the live moment and mode of ecological participation.

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<sup>71</sup> Journal, 1 December 2014.

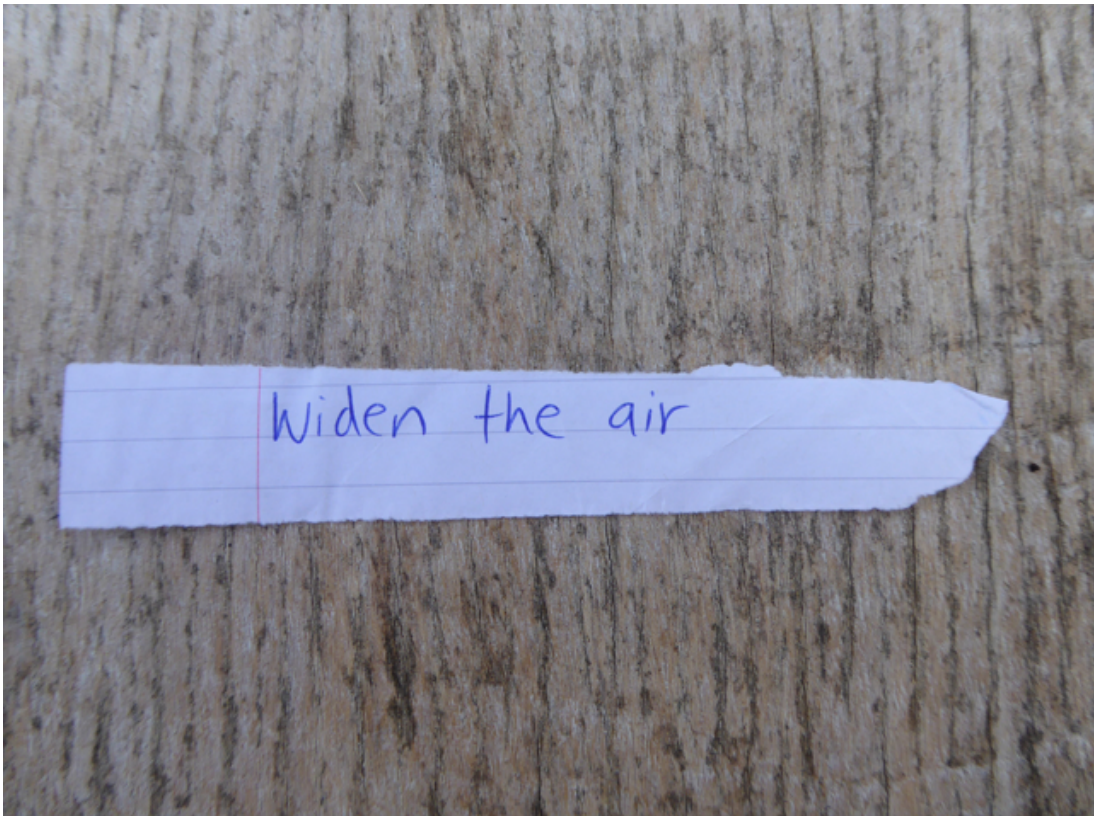
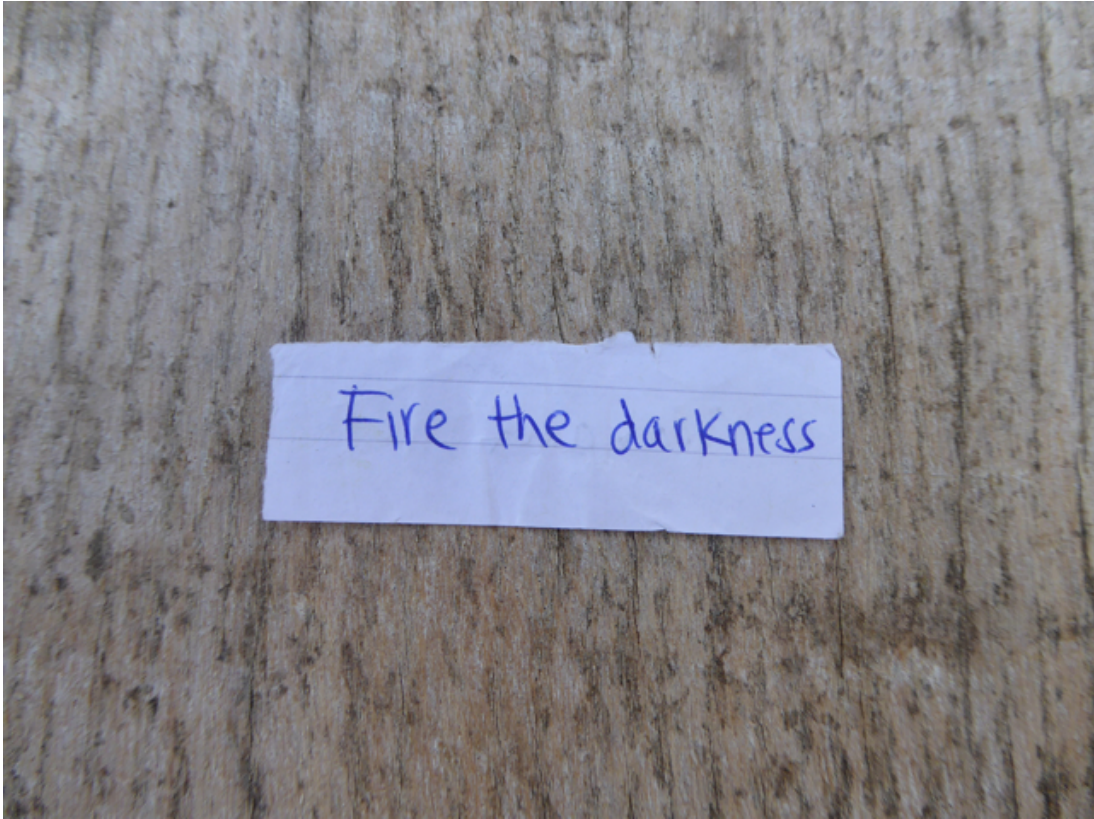
## The Interpretation Practice: Responsively and Responsibly Participating in the Agency of Performance Practice

### *Watch Clip 7 The Agency of Practice, Interpretation Practices*

I developed my Interpretation Practice by converging Goat Island's 'Impossible Tasks' and with another Kabinet K technique called 'Movement Interpretation'. I participated in a workshop with Hixson and Goulish in January 2014 at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS). During the workshop we worked with 'Impossible Tasks' to generate performance material. I had previously developed this practice during my education and training at the RCS in Contemporary Performance Practice. An 'Impossible Tasks' exercise is given in detail in Goat Island's *School Book 2* (Goat Island, 2000, p. 2). My Interpretation Practice differed from Goat Island's practice in that I provided instructions specifically for movement explorations.

I devised, what I chose to call impossible instructions, with a view to instigating and experimenting with different qualities and dynamics of movement. I chose to create the instructions, as opposed to asking the performers to write them, because I wanted the performers to respond to an instruction without thinking about whether the instructions were 'good' or who wrote them. It was important that they could simply focus on and commit to interpreting the instruction. Each instruction was conceived of as a container for a performer, who was invited to interpret the instruction through movement. One person's movement explorations become a container for another performer's movements, with other performers interpreting that person, observing and interpreting the qualities and dynamics of their movements. Different instructions suited different performers, and performers would often choose to return to one or two instructions they particularly enjoyed interpreting. For example, Gaby and Graham each focused on the instructions overleaf:





Interpreting an instruction is a process of ongoing experimentation in the creative *doing* of that instruction, rather than being a mime or literal demonstration of it. Interpreting someone else's movements is similarly a continual process of observation and doing, and was never to be understood as the mimicking of someone else and their movements. In keeping with my findings from *Age-Old*, I discovered that representing either the instruction or the person's movements can be a strategy *into* interpretation, but I encouraged performers neither to mime nor to copy but to discover their own version of *doing* the instruction or of *doing* the person's movements. The Interpretation Practice can be understood through the lens of my just doing-ness approach: the task is to just *do* the instruction or to just *do* their version of the movements they see someone else doing, rather than seeking to overlay narratives, emotions or 'colour' onto movements.

Rehearsals would often involve improvisatory processes based on the Interpretation Practice, which lasted between 30 and 90 minutes.

Pete is exploring the impossible instruction 'be spirals', Archie is exploring 'sink into the earth while holding up the sky' and other performers are interpreting their movements. I have a pile of slips of paper with impossible instructions I have prewritten on them, which I pick from in order to give people new instructions throughout the structured improvisation. About five minutes into the activity, I stand against the rehearsal room wall looking in on the performers. From this 'outside' position I find it difficult to know what prompts to give the performers. The prompts I do give are general and un-inspiring for those moving in response to them - they come out in ways that work against, rather than with, the performers and their movements. I call to Graham and Liz to interpret Archie, but as soon as they do so I know this was not the right decision, because Liz and Graham lose the flow of what they were each doing (exploring different instructions) and Archie is jolted out of his focused movements. I ask Lennon to interpret Pete's movements, but Lennon seems unable to 'get into' what Pete is doing: Lennon is immediately distracted and bored. My instruction to Lennon was not immanent to his activities but was a preformed notion I had about how it would be interesting for Lennon and Pete (a young boy and young man) to work together. I am unable to sense the possibilities of the performers' movements and the practice itself.



I begin moving in and out of the performance space, and find myself turning and traveling in amongst the performers. I start to give prompts to them that spur them on. I turn, dipping under Gaby's flinging arm, and I catch up alongside Archie and Graham, whispering to them to interpret Carragh. I chase after Gaby, and prompt her to carry on her 'swinging' but to allow her movements to propel her across the space. I see Archie poised on tiptoes as if he is about to run, so I instruct him to run between the other moving bodies and into the empty spaces he sees. Carragh and Graham almost start to move with Archie when he passes them by, so I say to Carragh and Graham that they can join Archie running when they choose to, and then I let all three of them know that they can choose when to return to doing their instructions and when to start running again - they can change between these tasks as and when they wish to.



My prompts are in-the-moment responses to their movement interpretations, and I am transgressing my own expectations for the Interpretation Practice with my nuanced and spontaneous prompts. I am on the go - experiencing and contributing to this performance practice by responsively moving *with(in)* it. I jump to avoid Archie bashing into me. I come across Geraldine and Pete - I feel there is potential for them moving together and so I instruct Geraldine to interpret Pete. It is as if they were almost doing this before I suggested it: my instruction encourages them to go in a direction they were already sensing the possibility of.

I stand still for a few moments, feeling the air currents rustling through my hair and skin - air stirred up by these moving bodies. The performers and I are whipping up, and being whipped up by, the movements of this practice. We are moving *with(in)* the practice, rather than trying to make the practice move.<sup>72</sup>

When, in the first part of the session, I stood 'outside' the activity, I was trying to fully lead the practice by *my* directives: I was attempting to be *the* agency of the practice. When I began weaving within, and in and out of, the activity, I ceased trying to fully determine it. My directing became a matter of being a participant *in*, rather than leader or separated onlooker of, the performance ecology. *Letting* the practice happen took precedence over *making* it happen, yet 'letting it happen' was not about me becoming passive but about me becoming actively responsive and responsible to the performance ecology. By letting go of (fully controlling) the practice, I could get to know what I was capable of doing *with(in)* it: I was able to try things out, be braver, and more experimental - discover and play with ideas. I could feel what was immanent in the practice, sense something of what the performers were capable of and respond to the vibrancy of the movements themselves. This can be described as a case of 'composing' with the 'force of technicity' (Manning, 2013, p. 39). I was not weaving the practice, but rather weaving with, and as part of, it. This demonstrates how directing was not always a cause-and-effect process of me bringing in ideas, offering them to my collaborators, and then reacting to what happened. Rather, my ideas for *Wild Life* often emerged through the live enactments of me and my collaborators: through responsively and responsibly participating in the agency of the practice. I want to propose this as ecological directing.

This type of directing seemed to encourage the human performers to also become more responsive and responsible participants of the practice. When I directed the Interpretation Practice by working as a participant in it, the performers began to collaborate with each other, and with each other's movements, in more dynamic and open ways. Graham reflected that when I asked Gaby and Carragh to interpret his movements, he felt that he was 'mutating' between himself and the other performers and that his movements became more 'empathic' and 'responsive' to the energies, movements and bodies around him. Since he knew that Gaby and Carragh were interpreting his movements, he felt more responsible for the movements he was exploring, as his movements were now not just 'his own'.<sup>73</sup> His

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<sup>72</sup> Journal, 10 September 2014.

<sup>73</sup> Journal, 26 October 2014.

comments imply that the Interpretation Practice can be a process of performers becoming responsive and responsible to each other and to the dynamic and ongoing agency of the practice. Ingold's notion that markers and plans are vital ways for 'wayfarers' to interweave 'attentively and responsively' within the becoming world (2011, p. 251) is useful here. My agency of practice approach is about plans, markers and containers (in the form of, for example, the impossible instructions and my prompts) that enable myself and my human collaborators to enact our *participations* in (rather than ownership of) agency. As already proposed, I do not think agency is attributable to singular (human or nonhuman) 'things' or 'selves', and neither is agency something that can be assigned to a network or assemblage of humans and nonhumans. Rather, drawing from Barad's notion, agency is an enactment, 'a matter of intra-acting', a "'doing" / "being" in its intra-activity' (2003, p. 826-827). With this frame of reference, *doing* performance (in process and product) is always already an involvement in agency - we inevitably take part in its ongoing and dynamic 'ebb and flow' (Barad, 2003, p. 817). I thus extend Barad's concept of 'agency' by applying it to something specific: theatrical performance practices. I think that performance practices themselves have, or rather *are*, agency and I want to propose that ecological performance practice is about director and human collaborators learning to play our parts responsively and responsibly in the ebbs and flows of the agency of our practices.

My practice and conceptualisation of ecological directing is similar to Hixson's approach in the context of Goat Island. Cull describes Hixson's position as 'a kind of immanent or internal outside' (2013, p. 44), emphasising that she works as *part of* the collaboration at the same time as having a different role than her collaborators. Cull explores how Hixson works with, and responds to, what is immanent to the creative process (a bottom up approach). This directing practice has not, however, been extensively explored and demonstrated through practice-based scholarly research, and so my concept of 'ecological directing' makes visible directing and collaboration in ways that have not yet been iterated in theoretical discourse. I also extend Hixson's approach by understanding and including nonhumans as collaborators in performance and acknowledging human collaborators as human-nonhuman entanglements. Ecological performance is a complex matter of intra-human and human-nonhuman entanglement and, crucially, a matter of humans as always already human-nonhuman entanglements. In my research practice, I tried to embrace the complexity of entanglement, which involves a concept of 'humans' as themselves always already 'confederations of tools, microbes, minerals, sounds, and other "foreign" materialities' (Bennett, 2010, p. 36). As previously stated, I do not propose that entanglement is a case of humans entangling with

other originally separated humans or nonhumans, but rather humans are always already constituted in and by our entanglements. As such, focusing on human performers - as was the case with my Interpretation Practice - does not necessarily mean we are denying the nonhuman forces and trajectories at work within and across us and our practices. Ecological practices of collaborating and directing are seemingly not about 'right response[s] to . . . radically exterior / ized other[s]', but rather a matter of accounting for how 'one's very embodiment is integrally entangled with the other' (Barad, 2007, p. 393; p. 158). The Interpretation Practice can be understood as a method that potentially enabled this kind of collaboration.

Graham provided another insightful reflection on the Interpretation Practice. He described how he had been aware of me giving him impossible instructions and encouraging him to continue interpreting one specific instruction, but he could not tell whether the impulses for his movements were coming from inside or outside of himself, himself or the other performers, inside or outside the rehearsal room, the instruction itself or my encouragement.<sup>74</sup> His reflections resonate with Barad's notion of intra-activity, in terms of her proposition that humans and nonhumans are constituted through ongoing intra-actions (2007, p. 140). Barad proposes how differences between 'inside' and 'outside' and 'self' and 'other' are not fixed but rather intra-actively and differentially constituted. She points out that 'intra-activity' enacts both boundaries and their reconfigurations: intra-activity is an ongoing process that ensures boundaries between all (human and nonhuman) phenomena 'do not sit still' (2003, p. 817). The boundaries between one thing and another - between the 'inside' and 'outside' of Graham - do not sit still but are continuously and intra-actively produced. The Interpretation Practice can be understood as a performance strategy for human collaborators to experience intra-activity, a practice for humans to experience that what they are and do and the differences between them, are a matter of intra-action 'with / in and as part of the world's differential becoming' (Barad, 2007, p. 361). Using Barad's concepts of 'intra-action' and the 'agential cut', the Interpretation Practice can be understood as a practice for constituting and transgressing boundaries: the ongoing movement explorations and interpretations seem to continuously make, transgress and reconfigure the boundaries between the moving bodies. Thinking and doing the ecological in performance is, I think, about practicing how we are caught up in, and constituted by, our ongoing entanglements in the performance ecology. My agency of practice approach is about how collaborative performance making can be a radical practice of being and playing

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<sup>74</sup> Journal, 1 November 2014.

responsive and responsible parts in the performance ecology, which involves being accountable for the cuts, boundaries and transgressions we continuously help to enact through our (collaborative) intra-actions. I use the term 'responsible' in relation to Barad's notion that intra-acting '*responsibly* as part of the world means taking *account* of the entangled phenomena that are intrinsic to the world's vitality' (2007, p. 396, my italics).

Being a responsive and responsible participant in the agency of practice did not, however, mean that my collaborators and I were always explicitly involved in the performance activities. In the same rehearsal session when I had discovered my approach of moving with (in) the Interpretation Practice, I soon felt that I did not need to always give instructions or be (literally) moving within the activity: the performers did not always need my direct involvement and encouragement. Furthermore, the practice could carry on without all the performers being directly in it all the time. This prompted me to say to the performers that they could choose to step out of, and back in to, the performance activity as and when they felt the activity needed, or did not need, them and their movements. This was not about leaving the practice to see it fully from the 'outside' as a separated onlooker, but about varying our involvements in response to the dynamic agency of the practice. Sometimes the most responsible way of participating in the performance ecology was to merely attend and listen to it, which involved *not* being physically in the activity.



However, that attending and listening did not mean that we were not (still) actively part of the practice. In Chapter One I discussed Heddon's 'entangled listening' concept, through which she usefully re-thinks doing and performing as an active attending and listening (Heddon, forthcoming). This resonates with my finding that part of an ecological practice is about responsively choosing when, and when not, to be directly involved in the performance practice. I think that shifting between different levels of participation in response to the dynamics of agency is a key way for us to play responsible parts in the ongoing and differential becoming of the performance ecology.

The dynamic of varied involvement in the performance ecology corresponds to Kershaw's proposition that 'we are *fundamentally* performed by *Earth's ecologies*' (2015, p. 113, italics in original) and his implication that we often need to do *less* in order to allow ecologies to be and do *more*. Kershaw's project, *Meadow Meander*, is based on a path that has been trodden / scythed into the grass. He describes how, at his home in Devon, he had set out to cut the grass, but soon realised that he had inadvertently made a path that was not straight but 'all twists and turns looping back and around to end up where it started' (2015, p. 126). This suggested to him that his movements and the path were not merely his, but they had emerged from the ecology of where he was: he was being performed by the ecology of the meadow, wind, earth, sky and more. He developed the project, inviting others to experience walking the path. Participants took a meander with the only 'rules' being to 'always stay on the path; avoid walking / moving against the lay of the grass' (2015, p. 127). Under the container of these simple rules, Kershaw found that participants 'appear to experience both performing and *being performed* by the environment of path, meadow, field, earth, water, sky . . . and beyond' (2015, p. 131). He proposes his meadow meanders as instances of 'the patent and profound environmental dynamics that bind humans incontrovertibly to Earth's ecologies, ephemerally performing *together* as vitally material life' (2015, p. 131). He suggests that the 'simplicity' and 'minimality' of the performance activity led to 'an overall scale and complexity of experience', putting forward his concept of 'minimalist-units of human performance' (2015, p. 131; p. 123). Similarly, I found that the simplicity of a performance container can give rise to 'minimal' - or, as I put, just doing-ness - human performances, where perhaps human performers can experience themselves as being performed by, rather than (only) performing onto, the performance ecology? The Interpretation Practice may be an example of this happening.

**Watch Clip 8 The Agency of Practice, Leaping and Being Leapt**



We are using the Interpretation Practice as a basis for an improvisation. Gaby is exploring the impossible instruction, 'fire the darkness'. She whips up her arm in a pulling-upward twist, her body following the force of her wielding arm. With each twisting jump she finds herself somewhere, a new place to jump up and release from. Her movements are a simultaneity of her forceful arm, her bodily yielding to where that force takes her and the movements of other human bodies around her. Her movements arise between her intention and her openness to where she might be taken - she collaborates with indeterminacy.<sup>75</sup>



This was arguably 'movement beyond position' (Manning, 2013, p. 30). Gaby seemed to discover her movements not by leaping but by letting herself be leapt. The container of the Interpretation Practice arguably allowed her to enact a minimal or just doing-ness performance: she neither fully led nor determined her movements, but the movements variously determined her. I hoped that the movements would emerge for the audience as a matter less of an individual human body doing movements and more of a human body being moved. Watching Gaby, to me it seemed as though she could never fully predict, and thus

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<sup>75</sup> Journal, 16 October 2014.

could never be fully responsible over, what her movements emerged as live in the space, yet at the same time I could see that she was responsible for the (*intra*)active part she played in (doing) these movements.

Perhaps when humans are given certain types of ‘concise and open-ended’ performance containers to explore movement through, they can move *with* movements as opposed to singularly making movement happen? Manning discusses ‘enabling constraints’ (2013, p. 30), which are types of dance ‘propositions’ offered by the director that give dancers a means not of moving but of being moved, not a way of dancing but of being danced. Manning’s ‘propositions’ seem to be akin to my wilding performance containers. The container of the instruction ‘fire the darkness’, along with the rules of the Interpretation Practice, seemed to give Gaby the means to move beyond being a body performing movements to being a bodying that is performed by the movements of what is beyond her ‘body’. My research thus builds on the critical theories about movement and ecology. This notion of ‘bodying’ challenges the widely used concept of ‘embodiment’ in the movement and ecology field: the ‘body’ that ‘embodies’ is always a human one. Recognising the limitations of the concept of ‘embodiment’, Ingold helpfully argues that ‘embodiment’ is not an appropriate term because it suggests ‘closure’ and ‘a body wrapped up in itself’ (2013, p. 93-94). Conversely Gaby’s movements seem to happen across her, and I hoped that for an audience her movements were not fully determined or attributable to her singular body. Perhaps, even, Gaby’s spinning movements are an example of, what Manning describes as, being ‘moved’ by the movement of ecologies or ‘milieu’ (2013, p. 32)?

Interestingly, when I used over general instructions the performers seemed less able to responsibly participate in the dynamic agency of the performance practices and there seemed to be less scope for performers to become responsive to the the performance ecology.

### ***Watch Clip 9 Over General Instruction, Bending***

I give Carragh the generalised instruction, ‘bending’, which results in Carragh doing simplistic imitations and mimes of bending: she merely bends different parts of her body without much focus on what she is doing and seems to be showing me, the spectator, ‘bending’ as opposed to *doing* bending. Gaby interprets Carragh’s movements, and Gaby’s movements are equally unfocused and forced.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Journal, 5 November 2014.



Their movements seemed to me to be over-thought, over-determined and over-performed. This less precise instruction ('bending') arguably inhibited the performers: they seemed unable to respond to the dynamic agency of the practice or be open to the performance ecology (of other human and nonhuman bodies, such as Graham, Lennon and the matches). Conversely, the open-ended yet precise instruction of 'fire the darkness' seemed to enable Gaby to join (in) with forces and trajectories within and beyond herself. By leaping and being leapt, Gaby did not show movements, but arguably moved responsively and responsibly *with (in)* the dynamic movements of agency. I think that we need to learn to tread lightly within the performance ecology and the agency of our performance practices. I want to propose the Interpretation Practice as a potential performance method for learning 'to simply and calmly perform exponentially more responsively *with . . . ecologies*' (Kershaw, 2015, italics in original), where performing *with* the performance ecology may be one strategy for learning to perform more responsively with wider environmental ecologies. Another way that this learning might occur is through our openness and responsiveness to the negative feedback from the performance ecology.

## **Responding to Negative Feedback**

I work with Graham on the movements he has been exploring during the last four rehearsal sessions of using the Interpretation Practice. On top of his usual interpretation of 'widen the air', I give him two new instructions: 'gather in the oceans' and 'shake the world'. I watch him explore new movements and I decide that these should be added to his part in the whole group activity. However, when Graham brings these new instructions in to his explorations in the context of the whole group, he and his movements appear closed. Carragh begins, as she usually does at some moment in this activity, to interpret Graham's movements, but Graham does not seem to notice Carragh and Carragh gives up trying to move with him, and is only able to watch him as an 'outsider' to the activity. This diminishment of energy, and lack of openness, spreads across the whole group. Liz and Archie have been running holding hands, exploring the directions their running takes them in and darting in amongst the other moving bodies. However, their running now becomes forced, and is reduced to jogging in a circle. Carragh would usually join hands and run with them, and then trail off to interpret Graham's or Gaby's movements, but she is unmotivated to do any of

these things. Geraldine is interpreting Pete's movements, and both performers have been twisting this way and that in ongoing spiraling explorations. Yet, now their movements are feeble and half-hearted: they are unable to find energy. The performance practice is losing its dynamics and is closing in on itself, and the performers become less and less responsive to, and responsible for, the practice. This activity usually spirals into ever-varying eddies of energy, where unexpected and unique movements emerge from the performers. The performers normally respond to each other and where the practice is going - responsibly coming in and out of the activity. There is typically a kind of whipping up of movement, and a being whipped up by the movements of the practice. Yet, now, the activity is almost non-existent.<sup>77</sup>

Graham had discovered and explored his movements in the context of moving amongst and in relation to the manifold forces and movements of different bodies. Yet, I took him out of this ecology, developed his movements in isolation from the rest of the group, and then put him back in. I had over-directed Graham and tried to, as it were, sever Graham's movements from their relations to other moving bodies. I had treated his movements as though they were isolatable from the ecology within which the movements had emerged. There was, as it were, an overproduction of Graham's movements, which I think is what caused the whole group performance activity to dissipate in dynamic and energy. An ethos in the rewilding field is for humans to be involved in environmental ecologies in non-dominating and non-damaging ways such that humans do not try to 'control' ecologies but rather work as part of their dynamics, allowing ecosystems to find their 'own way' (Drenthen, 2014, p. 159; Monbiot, 2013, p. 9). I had over-managed the performance ecology and treated Graham's movements as though they were separable from that ecology, where my extra work with Graham had, as it were, done more harm than good. I propose that the dissipation of energy across the whole group was, in fact, negative feedback from the performance ecology.

As discussed in Chapter One, Kershaw suggests that ecosystems are 'open and sustained through the positive effects of negative feedback circuits' (2007, p. 53). Responsiveness to negative feedback, he explains, prevents any ecology (whether a performance or an environmental ecology such as a riverbank) from running out of control through overproduction in any one or more of their parts (2007, p. 52). By not responding to negative feedback there can be a critical loss of ecosystem diversity, dynamism and resilience. I reflected on what had happened and, in the next rehearsal, I asked Graham to let go of the

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<sup>77</sup> Journal, 20 November 2014.

solo we had worked on together and to choose the one instruction he felt most energised by. He chose the instruction 'widen the air', which was what he had already been exploring when working with(in) the ecology of the whole group. When Graham worked with his chosen instruction again and when his movements could emerge within the performance ecology of other moving bodies, the practice quickly (re)emerged as vibrant and dynamic. The performers were responsive to each other's movements and energies, and the practice seemed to open up and gather momentum, with performers taking responsibility for their parts in the ongoing dynamics of the practice. By responding to the negative feedback we were arguably able to contribute to sustaining the performance ecology. This contribution is, surely, a key aspect to wilding any ecology?

I do not think performance ecologies suffer when we over-direct them and / or treat specific elements (such as Graham's movements) as though they are isolatable - these difficulties will, I think, inevitably emerge in the process of making a performance. Rather, I think that performance ecologies suffer and cannot sustain themselves when we do not *respond* to the negative feedback - when difficulties and issues in the performance process are ignored or denied. Crucially, this feedback often emerges in the *betweens* of the performance ecology (such as between Graham and the other moving bodies). Responding to negative feedback may be a vital way in which we humans can contribute to the resilience and sustainability of performance ecologies. I think that negative feedback occurs *because* we and our practices are unavoidably entangled within the vibrant matter of our performance ecology and within the vibrant matters of other ecologies. Performance can, perhaps, be an ecological practice when it allows us to learn to attend and respond to the 'outbreaks' and 'negative feedback loops' - the difficulties - of performance ecologies? This connects with Bennett's notion that vibrant matter is not only a case of positive vibrancy but that there are also negative aspects and potentials of vibrant matter. Whilst I have considered how we might engage with these negative aspects of the ecological in terms of the creative process of making performance, these aspects also emerged in the final production.

## The Production

Whilst I did not aim for *Wild Life* to have one reading, I did structure the final production in order to communicate and *do* specific aspects of the ecological. In my role as practitioner-researcher, I wanted to see whether the final performance could enact not only the positive ecological qualities of responsiveness, openness and attentiveness, but also more difficult

ecological dynamics that had emerged over the creative process. The two sections that I have already discussed - the water fight and the sliding stones - happened during the second half of the production and were dramaturgically structured to be reflective of each other. I want to show that the performance structure of these two sections allowed for two different performances of violence: firstly, the water fight consisted of, what can be seen as, intra-human aggression and, secondly, the sliding stones proposed relational violence between the human and more-than-human.

As already discussed, the performers conducted a real water fight live onstage, through which a performance of spitting-chucking-chasing-splashing-pouring-whacking-kicking emerged. The activity was a playful one, yet involved aggressive - even violent - human actions: the *fighting* part of the 'water fight' was clearly real and happening. One audience member described this section as 'fun', 'scary' and 'alarming' because they thought the performers might throw the water at the audience too. Hayden Foreman-Smith talked about how the 'atmosphere changed' when the 'fighting started'.<sup>78</sup>



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<sup>78</sup> Journal, 24 November 2014



During the water fight in all three of the final performances, I could hear audience members not only laughing at the trickery and surprise of the performers soaking each other, but also letting out calls of ‘ahhh’ and ‘ohhhh’ with some young audience members covering themselves with their coats for ‘protection’. Listening to and watching these live vocal and physical reactions I felt that the spectators were joining in with the playful yet very real qualities of the water fight. These live reactions, along with the audience comments I have referenced, suggest to me that the water fight was a kind of safe expression of intra-human aggression and violence: the human performers were safely and playfully *doing* aggression.

In the final section of the production, the sliding of the stones happened. As already discussed, part of collaborating with the stones involved the human performers letting go of having any full control over what the stones did. The stones slid across the wet floor, violently bashing into each other, some cracking and splitting from the force of their collisions, and some even sliding under the chairs of audience members and hitting spectators’ feet. It was simultaneously a performance of *humans* thrusting-flinging-throwing and of *nonhumans* sliding-bashing-splitting-cracking-banging-hitting. Brennan described this moment in the performance as a ‘clatter of skimming stones’ that destroys the central circle (made of large rocks) by cluttering it ‘into anonymity’ (Brennan, 2014).





Another audience member specifically remembered this section of the performance because ‘there were no humans left in the space, just the stones banging into the rocks and matches, destroying what had been there’ and the sound of the stones sliding across the floor was like ‘an avalanche’ or the ‘roaring of water’ and felt ‘dangerous’.<sup>79</sup> These responses from spectators suggest to me that the audience was able to experience the violent and dangerous potentials of vibrant matter. The performance ecology, therefore, may have enacted how matter has ‘destructive’ powers and effects (Bennett, 2010, p. 54). The performance of the destructive and violent stones was not, however, a case of only the more-than-human, in that the movements of the stones was in part down to the ways that the human performers variously slid them. This section was, perhaps, not only an example of destructive nonhuman vibrant matter but also an enactment of the way violence can be *relational* between the human and more-than-human?

The water fight and sliding stones can be understood as homologous to each other, in that the structures of these performance sections similarly, yet distinctly, performed violence: one intra-human violence and the other human-nonhuman violence. Kershaw proposes that ‘there are structural ecological principles common to the “cultural” and “natural” realms that are *homologous* because they emerge through similar shared or overlapping performance

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<sup>79</sup> Journal, 24 November 2014

systems' (2007, p. 21). The two sections I have discussed could be deemed indicative of this homological connection between the 'cultural' and 'natural' realms, where the water fight focused on the 'cultural' intra-actions of different humans 'play fighting' and the sliding stones focused on a 'natural' nonhuman material. The violence in both of these sections can perhaps be understood as a 'structural ecological principle' that emerges across the human and nonhuman? The intra-human aggression of the water fight and the relational violence between the human and more-than-human of the sliding stones suggest a key idea about what it means for performance to be and do the ecological: that the ecological involves not only positive qualities but also negative ones (such as aggression and violence). In order to engage with ecology through performance practice, it may be key that we must (learn to) responsibly work with both positive and negative aspects of the ecological. Perhaps performance ecology can be a strategy for embracing, what Bateson describes as, the 'charm and the terror of ecology' (1972, p. 510)? The performance ecology, in these two sections of the production, was arguably able to, in some sense, demonstrate how we humans might safely, responsively and responsibly work *with* violence as it variously plays out across intra-human and human-nonhuman material processes.

## Conclusion: Towards an Ecological Politics and Ethics

My practice-based research explored and developed methods for an ecological performance practice. I have argued that all theatrical performance is inevitably an ecology, and that all theatrical performance (in process and product) unavoidably marks and is marked by wider Earthly ecology. I have proposed, therefore, that what is at stake when it comes to ecological performance is *how* our work - in process and product - can enact the qualities and dynamics of ecological participation. I have argued that performance can be ecological by its approaches to and methods of creative collaborative practice, with the process and the production enacting ecological qualities and dynamics in their very moments and modes of *doing*. In this conclusion, I will summarise my findings and their contributions to the different fields that my research engages with, and, in doing so, I speculate about how my research into performance (in) ecology could have political and ethical consequences within and beyond theatre and performance.

I have focused on how *Age-Old* and *Wild Life* were made and performed, revealing the complexities of a lively performance ecology that involves a diversity of distinct yet entangled human and nonhuman collaborators. I have developed two key ecological performance practices: the Instant Performances and the Interpretation Practice. These practices are performance strategies for wilding performance, where wilding performance is about *doing* ecological qualities and dynamics. The key terms of these qualities and dynamics include openness, listening, responsiveness and responsibility. Furthermore, I found that *doing* the ecological involves an openness not only to these affirmative and positive dynamics of the performance ecology but also to its more difficult and destructive dynamics, which involves engaging with qualities such as aggression and violence as they emerge across human and nonhuman actants. I think that by working *with*, and by being open and responsive to, the different (positive and negative) aspects of the ecological, performance practice can be understood as an ethical approach. I want to propose wilding performance is an ecologically ethical approach to creating and doing performance. I have developed three approaches for wilding performance: wilding performance containers, just doing-ness and the agency of practice.

My three approaches build on and extend the practices and critical discourses of 'collaboration' and 'directing' in devised performance. In *Age-Old* I found that collaboration was neither about equality between Carragh and me, nor about us contributing to the process



and performance in similar ways, but about how the dynamics between us in our intergenerational relationship might be able to lead the process and performance. In *Wild Life* I furthered this approach and discovered that collaboration most radically emerged when diverse human and nonhuman participants are understood as collaborators, whereby attention is paid to the differences, dynamics and betweenness in the performance ecology. Wilding performance containers is an approach that allows for these differences, dynamics and betweenness to lead the work. They are strategies in the form of directives, propositions, tasks, instructions and prompts that enable diverse humans and nonhumans to contribute to, and co-determine, the creative explorations and developments of process and performance. They are particular types of containers - precise yet open-ended, simple yet complex - that contain in them the potential for their own transgression and reconfiguration. It is an approach where container-ship is experimented with in order to *wild* the performance ecology, where *wilding* the performance ecology is to contribute to sustaining its diversity and dynamism. Wilding performance containers can be understood as an ethical approach to collaborative performance-making, in that they are strategies for meaningfully including diverse child and adult, professional and nonprofessional, and human and nonhuman collaborators. Perhaps the most significant aspect of this approach is that it can *enact* a politics of inclusion, whereby all the participants of the performance ecology can mark and co-determine the process and product?

Just doing-ness is also an approach for involving diverse collaborators in performance. Just doing-ness is about attending and responding to what human and nonhuman performers *do*, as opposed to focusing on what 'child', 'adult', 'professional', 'nonprofessional', 'rocks', 'stones', 'water' and 'fire' are pre-conceived to *be* and *mean*. It is an approach that gives human and nonhuman collaborators their due as vibrant and dynamic entanglements of matter. By attending and responding to what materials *do*, my human collaborators and I were able to work *with* materials in ways that allowed those materials to mark and co-determine the process and performance. Furthermore, I found that when human performers attend to the pragmatic doing-ness of a task, attention is brought to their entanglements with each other and with the nonhuman materials they are working with. Nonhuman materials are not treated as props or objects in aid of human-focused performances: rather, just doing-ness is about how the process and performance *emerges* through the inseparability and shared vibrancy across human and nonhuman collaborators. Whilst devised performance practices and scholarship entail complex and nuanced accounts and concepts of 'collaboration', there is a gap in the field when it comes to accounting for the complexities and realities of human-

nonhuman entanglement. In this field 'collaboration' is ultimately presented as a human practice in which different human 'selves' work together. By treating and presenting humans and nonhumans as collaborators, my research builds on collaborative devising practices and critical perspectives: my work offers a radical re-conceptualisation of who / what collaboration involves. My practice further contributes to the field by treating humans not as separable fixed individuals but as intra-actively produced unique and ongoing 'selves', where these 'selves' are constantly entangled and entangling with other human and nonhuman 'selves'. Importantly, emphasising entanglement does not subsume difference but rather demonstrates how differences are constantly emerging and being made: humans are understood to be distinct 'selves' precisely because we are always more than just 'us'. Just doing-ness seems to be an implicitly ethical approach in that it involves attending and responding to the vibrancy and 'aliveness' of matter, where value is placed across human and nonhuman material 'bodies'. Perhaps just doing-ness can, therefore, be considered a practical strategy that fulfills Bennett's 'ethical aim . . . to distribute value more generously, to bodies as such' (2010, p. 13)? Perhaps the political and ethical import of collaborative performance practice is that it is able to enact how humans are performers within a whole host of other (human and nonhuman) performers on Earth?

My third approach - the agency of practice - builds on conceptualisations of 'directing' in the devised performance field. Through *Wild Life*, I developed an approach where the director does not give agency to, or enable agency in, children, adults, professionals, nonprofessionals and nonhuman materials, but rather the director and human collaborators *participate* in the agency of performance practices. Considering agency as enactment (as opposed to something individuals have), then the director, human collaborators and nonhuman materials are always already participating in agency. Following this, I found that *how* we participate in the dynamics of agency is what matters. I developed a practice of, what can be called, ecological directing, which involved me aiming to work as a responsive and responsible participant in the agency of performance practices, whereby I was neither the leader nor dominant force, but a distinctive and active part of the performance ecology. My job as the director was to find strategies that allowed me and my human collaborators to responsively and responsibly participate in agency, which involved varying our involvements in activities and responding to the negative feedback from the performance ecology. I found that an ecological performance practice requires that we utilise the ongoing dynamics of (human and nonhuman) collaboration in order to heed the destructive potentials of our practices, whereby the director learns to listen and respond not only to individuals but also to the dynamics and

between of the performance ecology. This presents a new conceptualisation of ‘the director’ for the devised performance field. The politics of an ecological approach to directing are a politics of openness and responsiveness, where the director responds not only to human individuals but also to the human and nonhuman dynamics and between of the performance ecology. As such, ecological directing may be a case of an ethics of listening, where listening is expanded outwards to the dynamics and between of humans and nonhumans. Furthermore, since the agency of practice approach is about how director and human collaborators can become responsible for how we participate in the performance ecology, this approach could be considered an ethical practice of learning to responsively and responsibly play our parts in wider Earthly ecologies. This seems to correspond to Barad’s notion that ‘ethics is about accounting for our part of the entangled webs we weave’ (2007, p. 384). Perhaps the agency of practice approach to directing and collaborating can be understood as a kind of creative strategy that can prepare us ‘individually and collectively for performing ecology more ethically’ (Kershaw, 2015, p. 126)? Perhaps theatrical performance (in its collaborative creative processes and productions themselves) can be an ecologically ethical practice when it enables us humans to explore and experiment with *how* we play our parts in the performance ecology and thus *how* we play our parts in wider Earthly ecologies? Performance ecology might be a radical enactment of how we humans cannot (ever) fully control nor determine the wider ecology of Earth, at the same time suggesting how we can be responsive and responsible for the parts we play in how that ecology plays out. Performance ecology may therefore demonstrate a non-anthropocentric politics of displacing human exceptionalism at the same time as demonstrating the possibilities for humans to positively and actively *participate* in ecology.

Wilding performance containers, just doing-ness and the agency of practice will be particularly useful for practitioners who are concerned with devising new strategies for directing and collaboration that are less human centered and more suited to ecological imperatives. These three approaches can be adopted and adapted in relation to the specific (human and nonhuman) collaborators a practitioner is working with. All three approaches also offer a new contribution to the emerging, but still very marginal, field of adult-child and professional-nonprofessional collaborative practice, evidenced by the companies explored in this thesis - Quarantine, Kabinet K and Glas(s) Performance - and other companies such as Fevered Sleep whose current show *Men and Girls* is a collaboration between male professional dancers and young girls (Fevered Sleep, 2016b). These approaches may be relevant for practitioners who are already, or who wish to begin, working with children and

nonprofessionals in professional devising performance contexts, in that all three approaches enable people not normally involved in the devising and performing of professional work to contribute creatively and skillfully to the process and product. Since an intergenerational practice has not yet been conceptualised in scholarly discourse, I hope this thesis opens up this emerging practice to critical development. Furthermore, my research has made connections between intergenerational collaboration and ecological performance, a connection not yet extensively explored in practice or scholarship. In my future work as a practitioner and researcher, I hope to continue creatively and critically developing an intergenerational performance practice and exploring the connections between the intergenerational and ecological.

I have found that intergenerational performance has the potential to enact the ecological as an open and accessible experience. This aspect of my research fills a gap in ecological movement practice and scholarship, where the tendency has been to inadvertently present and discuss ecological performance in relation to specific types of people, places and activities (predominantly adult professional artists working and moving in outdoor 'natural' environments). Working with a diverse group of people between nine and 60 years and of varying performance experience has led me to realise that thinking and doing the ecological cannot, and should not, be an orthodoxy. This further presents a politics and ethics of inclusion when it comes to *doing* ecology: the intergenerational context of my work can implicitly demonstrate how the ecological is something that we can *all* think and do. I have found that intergenerational collaborative performance is a productive and radical practice through which we can explore and experiment with and, crucially, enact ecological qualities and dynamics. It is, however, important to note that, whilst the intergenerational context has been a constant throughout my research, my findings are not tied down to the intergenerational *per se*: on the contrary, I do not wish to posit ecological performance as a practice that requires a particular set or combination of collaborators. Perhaps this illustrates another aspect of the ethics of engaging with ecology: ecological engagement is always already a matter of specifics (particular people doing particular practices in particular places) but must necessarily not be limited to those specifics?

My research makes a contribution to the scholarly discourses and performance approaches in the field of performance and ecology. As argued in Chapter One, the scholarship and artistic practices tend, at some point along the way, to presuppose that 'performance' and 'ecology' are separated or, at least, separable domains. Practitioners often treat 'ecology' merely as a

theme or issue for theatrical performance to represent or be about, and the scholarship often treats theatre and performance as a medium for bringing 'performance' and 'ecology', 'humans' and 'nonhumans', and 'culture' and 'nature' closer together. I have shown that, since performance *is* an ecology, the ecological is something that can neither be brought into performance nor that performance can go out to and find: I have sought to explore and develop the implicit ecological-ness of process-led collaborative devising practices, movement and choreography approaches and materials-focused performance. I have proposed that, since performance is an ecology that involves distinct yet entangled humans and nonhumans, and since we are always already (intra)acting *within* and *as part of* diverse social and environmental ecologies, we - quite literally - do not have a choice about our, and our performance practices', ecological participation. Thus, I have proposed that what matters when it comes to developing ecological performance practices is *how* we enact the qualities and dynamics of this inevitable participation. I have put forward the Instant Performances and the Interpretation Practice as methods for enacting - or, at least, potentially enacting - these qualities and dynamics. Whilst I have not denied ecology as a subject, theme or issue that emerged in the final *Age-Old* and *Wild Life* performances, I have specifically developed practices that enable the process and performance to *enact* the ecological. I have discovered methods of collaborating, directing, making and performing, which can be understood as ecological in their very *doing*.

My explorations into performance ecology also have political and ethical implications for the meanings of, and theorisations about, 'ecology' in non-performance fields. Kershaw draws on the general scientific definition of 'ecology' as the 'interdependence between organisms and environments' (2007, p. 15) and Bateson describes ecology through his argument that the 'unit of survival is *organism plus environment*' (Bateson, 1972, p. 489). The focus in scientific 'ecology' disciplines is thus predominantly on nonhuman organisms in 'the environment' and / or on the human as an organism in relation to other nonhuman organisms. However, performance ecology arguably demonstrates that thinking and doing the ecological is not only about re-focusing our attention towards nonhumans and human-nonhuman relations, but is also about the social ecologies of diverse humans. Thinking and doing the ecological through performance process and product has demonstrated to me that intra-human relations and intra-human performances are part of what it means to engage with the ecological. What is at stake with performance ecology is how to simultaneously explore and *do* intra-human and human-nonhuman entanglement.

Performance ecology also impacts on those ecological perspectives that emphasise human *enmeshment* in the more-than-human at the expense of exploring intra-human relations. For example, the image of ‘ecology’ that deep ecologists often present is largely predicated on ‘a human’ who is deeply enmeshed within the more-than-human world of nonhuman beings. Naess locates the human as deeply interconnected within a web of the more-than-human, contextualising the human as embedded within and in ‘dynamic equilibrium with other forms of life’ (1976, p. 23). The focus, for Naess, thus seems to be on presenting a singular human (who supposedly represents all humans) in their deep interconnectedness with nonhuman life forms, where intra-human relations seem to figure as less important (or even not figure at all). Conversely, the intergenerational performance ecology of *Wild Life* was able to contextualise different humans not only in relation to the nonhuman but also in relation to other humans of similar and different life stages and ages. Intergenerational performance ecology has shown me that thinking and doing ecology is not simply about shifting our focus away from human exceptionalism towards the more-than-human: there is no binary choice between focusing on the nonhuman or the human. Rather, the social relations between diverse humans is equally a part of the ecological as is the relations across the human and nonhuman. Perhaps performance ecology can remind us that intra-human relations are as of much ecological concern as human relations to the more-than-human? Perhaps performance practice can simultaneously *do* the three ecologies that Guattari posits as environmental ecology (the environment), social ecology (social relations) and mental ecology (human subjectivity) (Guattari, 1989, p. 41)? That is, maybe performance practices that involve diverse humans and nonhuman materials can demonstrate that how we *think* (mental ecology) and what we *do* (social ecology) is entangled with the more more-than-human (environmental ecology)? Performance ecology, by its inclusion of diverse humans and nonhuman materials, can perhaps be a practice of ‘group being’, a ‘new micropolitical and microsocal’ practice of the ecological (Guattari, 1989, p. 34; p. 51)?

In these ways, my research also builds on Bennett’s politics, where she focuses predominantly on one human in relation to nonhuman matter: she proposes that the ‘ethical task at hand here is to cultivate the ability to discern nonhuman vitality, to become perceptually open to it’ (2010, p. 14). Whilst Bennett’s politics focuses on how a human might learn to discern nonhuman vibrant matter, my explorations into performance ecology imply an ethics that involves a shift both in doing diverse human relations and human-nonhuman relations. I think that intra-human relations dynamically emerge and change when the focus is placed on the human and nonhuman in the performance ecology. In other words, the ways that human

relations are *done* is different when there is a wider perceptiveness to the more-than-human: *how* we work with each (human) other matters ecologically. Perhaps performance ecology can demonstrate an ethics of intra-human relations that reflects how these relations are inevitably entangled with(in) the nonhuman? Perhaps performance ecology is important to the wider disciplines and theorisations about 'ecology' because it can simultaneously explore intra-human relations and human-nonhuman entanglement? Performance ecology may, therefore, be a radical practice of renegotiating how to perform our human-ness and human interrelations. These ethical consequences of performance ecology also build on Barad's work, in that her theorisations also seem to neglect any sustained discussion about human relations and intra-actions. She focuses largely on the parts that the nonhuman plays in material-discursive practices, drawing on nonhumans such as the 'brittlestar' animal to illustrate her ideas (2007, p. 369). By not putting humans centre stage *and* by not losing sight of, or forgetting about, humans and intra-human relations, performance ecology offers a unique way of expressing, exploring and doing the ecological, where the ecological is as much about how we enact intra-human relations as it is about how we enact our relations beyond the human.

The ethics and politics involved in performance ecology also emerge in the ways it can perform intra-human aggression and relational violence between humans and nonhumans. I found that *doing* ecology necessarily involves not only engaging with the life-giving and positive qualities of material ecological processes but also with the destructive and violent aspects of these processes (where these processes involve human and nonhuman actants). If we are to live as part of this diverse ecology that we call Earth then perhaps we must learn to engage with its negative, destructive and violent aspects as well as its life-affirming processes? The ways that we involve ourselves in material ecological processes *matters* because the different possibilities for life-giving or destructive qualities (and all between) already exist in the ongoing material processes that continuously constitute what the world is. Therefore, how we intra-act with each (human) other and with nonhuman 'others' impacts the kinds of material processes that we and nonhumans go on. So we need to find ways to work *with* the less attractive ecological qualities (such as violence and aggression) as they play out across humans, across human-nonhuman relations and across the more-than-human.

In conclusion and in response to my initial concern of how to live as part of ecology and how to develop ecological ways of being and doing, performance ecology has demonstrated to me that what we humans need to do - the best we can hope to do - is to explore and experiment

responsibly, responsively, attentively, openly and collaboratively with the (positive and negative) qualities and dynamics of our inevitable participation in the material ecological processes that continuously constitute the Earth.



## Appendix A: *Age-Old* programme

Audience programme for the final performance, shown at Platform, 23 November 2013.

### AGE-OLD

Sarah Hopfinger in collaboration with 8 year-old Carragh McLavin



You are invited to see *Age-Old* at Platform on Saturday 23rd November at 3pm

#### ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

*We are Carragh and Sarah, younger and older, and we both have blue eyes. We stand at different points along this path. This path is older than us. The land looks different from where we each are, but if we stand still a while and look around we can see some of the same trees, mountains, and animals. If we listen hard we can hear the wind carrying our voices towards each other. We're not sure what lies between us.*

***Age-Old*** is an intergenerational duet performance exploring adult-child and human-nonhuman relations. It is created and performed by Sarah Hopfinger and Carragh McLavin. It merges children's theatre, live art, experimental performance, and choreography to create a unique dialogue between an adult and child.

Suitable for 6 years and upwards.

#### Reviews

*A tender, merry yet affecting dialogue about the distances – in noticing, understanding, believing – that grow in, and with us across years...a joyous reminder that age needn't wither dreams or optimism.*

\*\*\*\*The Herald

*A delicious 30-minute meditation exploring the differences of perspective between Hopfinger and her little friend and co-performer*

\*\*\*\*The Scotsman

For more about the performance, visit [www.sarahhopfinger.org.uk](http://www.sarahhopfinger.org.uk)

## Appendix B: *Wild Life* programme

Audience programme for the final performance, shown at Platform, 23 - 24 November 2014.

Front of programme



# Wild Life



**We will be reckless, tender, and rough.  
We will run, sweat, and rest.  
We will be quiet, loud, slow, fast, still, and always moving.  
We will carry, hold, and fling.  
We are asking what it is to be wild.  
We would like to know about it with our bodies - alone,  
together, and with what we don't yet know or understand.  
We are not just us.  
There are children, adults, water, stones, and other 'goings ons'.  
Each of us are here, and since each of us are multiple, we are  
quite a crowd.  
We would like to go into the wild life.  
You are welcome.**

Wild Life is a live performance that is a mediation and celebration of wildness. It is devised and performed by a collective of three children and five adults, and directed by Sarah Hopfinger. It is a new intergenerational performance that sits between choreography, experimental composition, live art, and contemporary performance. It is for everyone aged 6 and over.

Wild Life is co-produced by Platform and Catherine Wheels Theatre Company. It is part of Sarah Hopfinger's practice-led PhD at the University of Glasgow, which is focused on developing an intergenerational and ecological performance practice.

Collaborators & Performers: Lennon Che Campbell, Geraldine Heaney, Archie Lacey, Pete Lannon, Liz Lumsden, Graham Mack, Gaby McCann, Carragh McLavin.

Production Manager, Lighting Design & Sound: Suzie Normand

Special thanks to: Matt Addicott, Laura Bradshaw, Paul Fitzpatrick, Dee Heddon, Susan Milligan, Eoin McKenzie, Jack Nurse, Adrienne Scullion, Jodie Wilkinson, Morven Williams

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## Appendix C: Age-Old review

Four star performance review by Mary Brennan, 'Buzzcut/ Por Sal y Samba, Summer hall, Edinburgh', Herald Scotland, 5 February 2013. Available at: [http://www.heraldsotland.com/arts\\_ents/13090933.display/](http://www.heraldsotland.com/arts_ents/13090933.display/).

*Take the warren of interesting spaces that exists at Summerhall, add in the programming flair of Glasgow's Buzzcut, with its emphasis on new work by radical young artists, and you have a really enterprising start to Manipulate 2013 - one that flags up the potent energy of visual imagery in performance.*

*Sarah Hopfinger's Age Old revisited an earlier solo where she gently melded childhood memories of place with shifts in outlook brought about by an adult perspective. This new episode saw her in cahoots with the unselfconsciously-forthright Carragh McLiven, aged seven. Again, a core strand was the natural world both real and as filtered through the prism of a child's imagination. But Carragh was no mini-Sarah, even when she echoed Hopfinger's movements or picked up on games-playing cues. What emerged was a tender, merry yet affecting dialogue about the distances - in noticing, understanding, believing -that grow in, and with us across years. The footage of them attempting to fly, with air-filled plastic bags as wings, was a joyous reminder that age needn't wither dreams or optimism.*

*Murray Wason's Automaton, originally a durational process, is now a handsomely distilled solo full of mischievous humour and profound humanity. And if his discourse on machines, his intense anthem of memories to a much-loved Grandfather, underline the automaton's inability to feel emotions he still celebrates the fact that to be fascinated by their technology is only human.*

*For Carles Casallachs and his dance partner in Por Sal y Samba, the slinky-sexy Latin American moves swiftly shimmy from flirtation to power struggle and a physical brutality that leaves him retching, and some onlookers feeling wretched at the well-crafted cruelty. Not Strictly - but very Manipulate.*

## Appendix D: *Wild Life* review

Four star performance review by Mary Brennan, 'Wild Life, Platform, Glasgow', Herald Scotland, 26 November 2014. Available at: [http://www.heraldsotland.com/arts\\_ents/13191174.Review\\_\\_Performance/](http://www.heraldsotland.com/arts_ents/13191174.Review__Performance/).

*Hey! Hey! Everyone is running and jumping, children and adults alike - as if the Platform studio was their playground. We are sitting in a circle round them, a part of the game-plan that Sarah Hopfinger has initiated with the group, because Wild Life is a far-reaching reminder of who we are, and where we come from in time and landscape.*

*Hopfinger's gung-ho wild bunch is a mix of ages and performance experience: two children, a teenager, five adults (including two men of mature years) who plunge wholeheartedly into what it means to be "wild".*

*There are animalistic lumberings, hints of pack behaviour - like childhood "Simon says" capers - alongside the beginnings of tribal rituals. Is the hefting of large stones a test of stamina, or the start of henges past? If a cross-generational community emerges through the mischief and collaboration of games-play, individual "wild" selves can, and do, surface, never more joyously than when Geraldine Heaney cuts loose and dances. The groove is pure 21st century, the energy and exhilaration is timeless.*

*Gradually, as significant elements - stone, water, fire - come into play, simple tasks take on complex meanings and the "archaeology" of Wild Life jigsaws into images of how our roaming ancestors settled into hearth-land ways.*

*An outburst of mutual drenchings now feels like the anarchic predecessor of ancient mid-winter rites. Soaking, the group clusters in the stone circle that has become home, the flaring light of their short-lived matches vanishing into the darkness of history. When a clatter of skimming stones clutter that circle into anonymity, you realise how easy it is to walk past, without noticing, the traces of humanity in the wild.*

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