



# Entanglements and Response-Ability in Intergenerational Performance Ecology: Part I

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Karen Barad presents a critical approach to ‘re-turning’: it is not a reflection or a looking back, but is a turning over and over, an ‘iteratively intra-acting ... diffracting anew, in the making of new ... diffraction patterns’ (2014, 168). These interludes re-explore, re-turn over and make new diffraction patterns of a performance research project, *Wild Life* (2014/2016), which was part of my practice-led research into how performance can be an ecological practice (Hopfinger 2020; 2018a; 2018b; 2015) (Fig. 1).

I am an artist-researcher, working between live art, choreography and performance. I approach performance-making in terms of inter-relations, movements, selves, humans, nonhumans, dynamics, energies and atmospheres, as opposed to focusing on narratives and characters. The theatrical performances I create emerge from both the process of exploring an enquiry and the particularities of those I collaborate with to explore that enquiry. *Wild Life* was a response to the questions: how can we be wild? How can we *do* wildness? I was also concerned with

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Fig. 1 Performance documentation 1

questioning and reconfiguring the hierarchies of adult–child, professional–nonprofessional and human–nonhuman power relations both in *how* we created the performance and *what* the production finally was. I collaborated with eight performers—Geraldine Heaney (27 years old), Carragh McLavin (nine), Graham Mack (52), Gaby McCann (13), Archie Lacey (55), Peter Lannon (26), Lennon Che Campbell (nine) and Liz Lumsden (57)—and with multiple nonhuman materials including rocks, water and fire. I took on the role of director and facilitator, which allowed me to explore what kinds of performance and movement practices allowed the performers to enact ‘wildness’, where wildness emerged differently across the humans, nonhumans and their interrelations (Fig. 2).

It is not possible to bring a past performance back, but the creative attempt to do so can bring about new patterns and meanings. What follows is a productive failing at bringing back *Wild Life*...

The audience enters the energetic moving of children and adults walking–running–jumping–pausing–looking–seeing–dancing–travelling to the edges and centre of the circle, echoes and differences performed across the human moving bodies. The audience sits in a circle—they are



Fig. 2 Performance documentation 2

school children, adults, older people and families. There are 60 minutes of varying speeds and slownesses of activity... performers greet the audience, travel the perimeter of the circle in different combinations—carrying each other, holding large rocks, flicking water at the audience. Geraldine dances vigorously to music, Pete swings and carries Lennon, there is a chaotic head tapping choreography, performers playfully mess up their own and each other's hair, they spin each other, drop large rocks, light matches, sit together on a circle of rocks. They follow and interpret each other's explorative semi-improvised movements, moving together-apart... Lennon lights and watches matches for a long time... some audience members are taken by the hand and run through the space in amongst the performers' moving bodies. There is a water fight, the performers get drenched, and Liz leads a stomping-tap-dancing herd-like bare-foot splashing through the water journey. Finally, stones are flung across the floor hitting into each other, the buckets and the match boxes. The movements and sounds of sliding-bashing stones end the performance.

There are planned actions, rehearsed movements, emergent relations and differences, unpredictability, spontaneity... entangled performances of child-adult-human-nonhuman-rocks-stones-matches-flames-water.

I am not sure what I am returning to. Am I returning to a past event? Past events? Events of humans and nonhumans? Am I engaging with my

memories of a process and performance? Am I engaging with my past writing about *Wild Life* (which was itself a re-turning over of the process and performance)? Am I reflecting on my reflections? Who and what am I re-turning over? If I am re-turning (to) a past performance over and over, am I changing—differentiating—what that performance was? Am I not so much reflecting, and more (re)*participating* in a performance ecology of human and nonhuman agencies?

This unsureness is critical to my approach. Cyberneticist Gregory Bateson pointed out that, with ecological thinking ‘a certain humility becomes appropriate’ (Bateson in Bottoms & Goulsh 2007, 35). Often when I begin writing or making a performance, I am in a muddle—a mess that is a state of not knowing. I do not know what I am going to write or create, or if I think I know I do not end up writing or creating what I thought I would. 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 ... to think new thoughts or to say new things, we have to break up all our ready-made ideas and shuffle the pieces’ (1972, 25). Haraway also refers to the necessity of ‘muddle’, using it as a ‘theoretical trope’ to ‘trouble the trope of visual clarity as the only sense and affect for mortal thinking’ (2016, 147). Perhaps embracing muddles is a necessary method of diffraction—muddling as a key strategy of reconfiguring patterns. Barad proposes that diffraction ‘is not a set pattern, but rather an iterative (re)configuring of patterns of differentiating-entangling’ (2014, 168). In this way, ‘there is no moving beyond, no leaving the “old” behind’, and there ‘is no absolute boundary between here-now and there-then’ (2014, 168). With these interludes I am embracing the muddle of (re)turning over a performance, of (re)working with the here-now and there-then of *Wild Life*.

I work with multiple modes of communication—creative reflections and descriptions, theoretical discussion, performative writing, images. This modal multiplicity is part of diffracting, of reconfiguring the patterns and meanings of my research. With the images, I echo Anna Tsing’s approach of using images not to show ideas directly but ‘to present the spirit of my argument’ (2015, viii). With each interlude I hope different kinds of knowledge can emerge depending on the differing apparatus (the length, form, style, physical layout) through which that knowledge is explored, communicated and made. Barad emphasises that knowledge is always already ‘knowledge-in-the-making’ (2007, 91). Embracing muddle and messiness usefully signals knowledge as unfixed

and entangled: knowledge as a case of participating in human-nonhuman intra-activity.

Doing ecological entanglement: knowledge (re) making.

You, dear reader, are perhaps doing entanglement through reading. You are taking part in these entangled performances. The ecological emerging materially through time... me writing this now which is before you who are reading this now which is in the future for me now. Your participation in the making of knowledge and meaning—your agential intra-activity—with this book and its various parts is welcome (and inevitable)! How might you, dear reader, perform with and through the questions and ideas in this book? You are invited to embrace the muddle of entangling and performing with and between its chapters!

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