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*Water Carry (v.1)*

*Scoop water from the Bow River with cupped hands.*

*Carry the water in your hands as far as possible from the river.*

*Stop when there is no water left in your hands.*

The performance score for *Water Carry*, printed above, refers to the first in an evolving suite of performances and events collectively titled *Guddling About: Experiments in vital materialism with particular regard to water*. The performances were instigated by me and my regular (human) collaborator, Nick Millar, initially with rivers in Canada and subsequently with various watercourses in Scotland and Spain.<sup>1</sup> *Guddling About* is an on-going project where performance and performance documentation are used to explore human-water interdependencies (and by extension human-environment interdependencies) in specific material and cultural contexts. In this essay, I reflect on the potential of *Guddling About* as an ecological practice. In using the term ‘ecological practice’ I wish to distinguish our work from ecoactivist practices whose aim is to address directly issues such as human-induced climate change or to advocate for and enact ‘greener’ ways of living. Rather, I use ‘ecological’ in an expanded sense influenced by Deleuze/Guattari, Gregory Bateson, Jane Bennett and others working in the field of human-environment inter-relations. My definition of ecological entails an aspiration for a way of being in/with the universe that dissolves nature/culture and human/nonhuman binaries, but which acknowledges differences, antagonisms and contradictions, rather than seeking resolution or transcendence. *Guddling About* attempts to tangle with the messiness and paradoxes of living ‘ecologically’ (for instance, the inherent paradox of flying from Scotland to Canada to undertake an artists’ residency in ‘ecological practice’). It attempts to confront and negotiate the problematics of ‘being human’ in a more-than-human universe. The value of our practice as ‘ecological’ resides, I suggest, in the complex and shifting relationships that continually unfold among the performances and their documentation — documentation which manifests as written scores and descriptions, sets of instructions, photographs, sound recordings, watermarks, and more. I reflect on *Guddling About* in relation to other performance practices and practitioners that use

performance scores, arguing that *Guddling About* builds on the latent or more explicit materialist and ecological tendencies in some of this work. I do so through using philosopher Karen Barad's concept of the 'apparatus' (Barad 2007) to consider the interweaving and morphing of *Guddling About's* components as a paradigm that both acknowledges and troubles the contradictions of performance as an ecological practice, such as the inescapability of human subjectivity and human exceptionalism, and the extent of more-than-human agency. Ultimately, I suggest, the 'apparatus' of *Guddling About* allows space for a degree of (human) accountability in fostering attentiveness, responsiveness and flexibility, while acknowledging and surrendering to the unknowability and unruliness of the universe.

Each *Guddling About* performance is accompanied by a performance score: a written account or set of instructions for the performance. These scores sit in multiple causal, temporal and descriptive relationships with the performances themselves. Some scores pre-date the realisation of the performance. The instructions for *Mix Your Own Bow (MYOB)*, for instance, were written for a public event where participants were encouraged to carry out the actions described. Others, such as the first version of *Water Carry*, were written after the performance had first been enacted by Nick and I. They were intended to distil our actions and to share the work with a wider audience than those who had witnessed our performances. Some, such as the instructions for *Water Carry* and *Melting Species*, have subsequently been revised and re-framed after and during our repeated iterations of the actions. And, in some cases, performance scores created for specific contexts and containing references to particular material and social conditions have been rewritten in more generalised terms and disseminated with the intention that they might function both as traces of our actions and as prompts for others' enactments, whether real or imagined. The precise, minimal style in which the instructions are couched sits in contrast with the playful, improvisatory approach that Nick and I adopt in their performance. This approach is implied by our use of the title and practice, 'guddling about', a Scots language phrase that translates as 'acting without clear purpose', or 'messaging about'.<sup>2</sup> It is played out as we find ourselves negotiating, confronting and responding in unanticipated ways to the material conditions that we encounter: stumbling

on the steep and inaccessible banks of the River Manzanares, retching at the smell of Govan drains, balking as we try to swallow untreated water from streams in rural Dumfriesshire. The scores and their diverse enactments manifest human relationships with rivers and water that are specific to the material and cultural context of each location, but which also recognise and negotiate the imbued socio-cultural values and associations we attach to rivers and water as ‘universal’ phenomena. The complex and multiple relationships that exist between the scores and the realised performances exemplify some of the potentialities, contradictions and problematics of performance as an ecological practice.

### **The potential and paradoxes of performance and performance documentation as ecological practice**

Proponents of non-representational theory and new materialism<sup>3</sup> contend that performance presents an alternative to exclusively human systems of communication and ways of looking, thinking and knowing, which unsettles our persistent sense that we (humans) are exceptional. I use ‘performance’ and ‘performativity’ to include a spectrum of activities and definitions of these malleable and contested terms. These include human and nonhuman performances of ‘everyday’ life, studied within disciplines such as anthropology and human geography, philosophical understandings of performance and performativity used by Barad and others to designate modes of being/becoming, and the more consciously aestheticised performances framed as theatre, performance and visual arts practice. *Guddling About* works across this spectrum, blurring distinctions between ‘everyday’ and ‘art’ performances, between performance and performativity. Advocates of performance, in its expanded sense, argue that it might lead us towards an understanding of our place in a more-than-human universe that troubles habitual and, arguably inescapable, anthropocentrism. It does so in several ways. First, performance offers a challenge to representationalism. As Karen Barad puts it, ‘the move towards performative alternatives to representationalism shifts the focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality [...] to matters of practices/doings/actions’ (Barad 2008, 121-122). Second, performance is not exclusively

human. It is a more-than-human practice in which both human and nonhuman actors engage alongside and are intermingled with each other. In the *Water Carry* actions, for example, I felt myself immersed in a collaborative action where the water shaped and moulded my hands, escaping through my tightly clamped fingers, even as I shaped and moulded it, trying to prevent it draining from my hold. Third, this type of more-than-human co-performance can unsettle notions of human subjectivity. It can allow us, as Nigel Thrift proposes, to ‘trade in modes of perception that are not subject-based’ (Thrift 2008, 7). Again, reflecting on my experience of the *Water Carry* performances, I recall moments when my self-consciousness at walking through a busy city centre with water cradled in my hands was subsumed by my absorption in the physical demands of the activity. Fourth, performance manifests in the sensorial, affective and more-than-cognitive. It provides access to what Thrift calls ‘the many communicative registers of the body’ (Thrift 2003, 2020), which are frequently overlooked, or inaccessible, in linguistic modes. This was borne out, again, during the *Water Carry* performances, where I felt acutely attuned to my nonhuman collaborators, physically and affectively: my skin polished by the mineral-rich glacial river water; my muscles straining against a steep, stony river bank; the surprising protectiveness I felt towards the water cupped in my hands and the sense of poignancy I experienced when it had drained away.

### ***Figure 1***

And fifth, performance is generative of collaborative knowledge. It is a mode of becoming, or being, through what Karen Barad calls intra-action. Barad coins the neologism ‘intra-action’ to challenge dominant beliefs that the universe is comprised of distinct, pre-existing entities, which interact with one another. She suggests, rather, that what we perceive as entities emerge and exist only within shifting, dynamic ‘intra-actions’, in other words, they can be known or articulated only through performance:

Knowing is a matter of intra-acting. Knowing entails specific practices through which the world is differentially articulated and accounted for. In some instances, ‘nonhumans’ (even beings without brains) emerge as partaking in the world’s

active engagement in practices of knowing. Knowing entails differential responsiveness and accountability as part of a network of performances. Knowing is not a bounded or closed practice but an ongoing performance of the world. (Barad 2007, 149)

In summary, it can be argued that performance, as a more-than-human practice, troubles enduring perceptions of a human/nonhuman binary, habitual anthropocentrism and ideas of human exceptionalism, specifically those that privilege exclusively human systems of comprehension and communication.

As a counter, however, the relationship between the *Guddling About* performances and their documentation as scores, descriptions or reflections points towards contradictions and questions regarding performance as an ecological practice. For example, arguments for performance as a mode of unsettling human subjectivity and enabling more-than-human communication are undermined by my attempts to describe instances where this appears to occur. In describing these instances I, perhaps unavoidably, adopt a human subject position: ‘*I felt*’ and ‘*I experienced*’ these moments of more-than-human exchange. (For further consideration of the ‘paradoxology of performance’ see [Kershaw 2007, 98-131].) The codification of the more-than-human performances into scores or sets of instructions written in human language raises further questions about whether the agency and vitality of the nonhuman performers will always, inevitably and unproductively, be circumscribed through human framing of the performances. The scores arguably privilege human experience of the performances, suggesting an impulse to interpret, capture and archive, and to communicate exclusively among other humans.

### **Performance and performance documentation as ‘apparatus’**

An alternative understanding of *Guddling About*, however, sees the performances and performance documentation folded together in an on-going process of intra-action, with the generic sets of instructions transformed through each specific iteration of the

experiment, and vice versa. I aim to demonstrate that framing the work, *Guddling About*, in this way — as an ‘apparatus’ in Karen Barad’s terms — allows me to address the paradoxes of performance and its documentation; to consider how *Guddling About* relates to other performance practices working with scores and water; and to move towards an understanding of the potential of *Guddling About* as an ecological practice.

Apparatuses are dynamic (re)configurings of the world. Specific agential practices/intra-actions/performances through which exclusionary boundaries are enacted. (Barad, 2008, 134)

Barad’s notion of the apparatus relates to her new materialist conception of ‘agential realism’ — a rendering of agency as a performative entanglement of matter and meaning. The agency in agential realism does not reside with human or nonhuman entities, nor is it specifically attached to material objects, ideological systems or political structures. It is in flux, continually emerging, coalescing and dispersing.<sup>4</sup> As Barad puts it:

On an agential realist account, discursive practices are not human-based activities but rather specific material (re)configurings of the world through which local determinations of boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted. And matter is not a fixed essence; rather, matter is substance in its intra-active becoming — not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency (146).

Considering *Guddling About* as an apparatus sees the elements of the work — each iteration of the performances, the performance scores, the specific physical conditions and cultural contexts of each performance, this essay, each reading of this essay, and further emergent components of the work — interwoven as parts of a perpetually reconfiguring apparatus. Understood as an apparatus, the work is open-ended, ‘always in the process of intra-acting with other apparatuses, [...] enfolding [...] locally stabilized phenomena [...] that result in the production of new phenomena, and so on’ (134-135).

Harnessing Barad's conception of the apparatus also allows me to navigate further potential concerns regarding performance as an ecological practice. Commentators, such as Rebecca Schneider, have criticised aspects of the embrace of new materialist philosophies by performance scholars and practitioners, raising concerns that the practice and idea of more-than-human performance — where human and nonhuman matter performs alongside and intermingled with each other — is reductively homogenising. Schneider is by no means wholly dismissive of the new materialist turn and acknowledges its critical value (Schneider 2014). However, she does caution that considering the world as an entanglement of vibrant matter can risk reducing everything to an atomic level, negating variances and antagonisms and working against the formation of any kind of meaningfully differentiated entities. There is, Schneider contends, an undesirable 'a-historicity' and 'potential essentialism' in new materialism that, 'vacates [...] all spaces for difference'. (Schneider 2015) Apparatuses, however, in agential realist terms, are conceived precisely as practices through which differences and 'determinate boundaries' are performed, albeit fleetingly, in what Barad calls the 'agential cut'. (Barad 2007, 141) The 'agential cut', which is at the heart of Barad's rendering of material agency, is an articulation of (momentary) alterity. Considering *Guddling About* as an apparatus, then, functions against homogenisation, enabling differences, conflicts and antagonisms to be recognised, negotiated and respected as generative qualities. The practice of *Guddling About*, conversely, allows me to complexify Barad and others' new materialism and to address some of its potential problems. Schneider argues, for instance, of the dangers of the so-called 'subjectless turn' in the work of new materialists such as Barad and Jane Bennett. Schneider sees this as a move away from human/cultural/social histories to imagine 'an outside to ideology (and thus a vacating of ideological critiques)' (Schneider 2015). In the practice of *Guddling About* we flirt with these generalising and homogenising tendencies, acknowledging, for instance, that our understandings of water and rivers as 'universal' and the persistence of an image of 'pure' water are part of our imbued cultural values, while aiming to counter these tenacious and powerful associations through our attentiveness to the distinct cultural and material conditions of each performance.<sup>5</sup> We continually negotiate tensions between our (inescapable) subjectivity (*we* perform, *we* experience, *we* document, *we*

reflect), and our aspiration to unsettle that subjectivity as part of a ‘heterogeneous monism of vibrant bodies’ (Bennett 2010, 121).

### **The ecological performance score: Fluxus and beyond**

The *Guddling About* performance scores were inspired by and have an affinity with the ‘event scores’ created and published by Fluxus artists such as George Brecht, Ken Friedman and Naim June Paik (Friedman, Smith and Sawchyn 2002). A materialist or ecological sensibility detected in Fluxus’ work prompted Nick and I to borrow from the art movement in adopting the form of the performance score. There is, for instance, a vagueness in several Fluxus scores with regard to the humanity of their objects of address and their anticipated enactors. While some scores appear to be direct instructions to their (human) reader (see Lee Heflin’s *First Performance*, undated, [Friedman, Smith and Sawychen 2002, 26]), in others the intended activity and agent of the activity is less apparent and less explicitly human. For example, Friedman’s *Fruit in Three Acts*, 1966 takes the form:

- 1 A peach
  - 2 A watermelon
  - 3 A pear
- (40)

While George Brecht goes further in foregrounding nonhuman performance in *Three Aqueous Events*, 1961

- 1 Ice
  - 2 Water
  - 3 Steam
- (23)

In these and further scores Friedman, Brecht and other Fluxus artists (see Bengt Af Klintberg’s *Dog Event* (1963) and *Identification Exercise* (1966)[30]) infer or explicitly acknowledge the agency of nonhuman performers in their ‘events’. The *Guddling About*

scores, however, have a more overt (new) materialist and ecological focus, particularly in iterations which attempt to de-centre humanity from the performance and writing of the scores. The *Guddling* scores manifest in varied, evolving forms and materialities, attempting to reflect the perspectives of different human and nonhuman participants in the work. For example, the performance score that acts as epigraph for this essay is just one iteration, which conceives *Water Carry* as a performance initiated and circumscribed by humans, albeit one where the nonhuman performers are afforded agency in determining some of its parameters (the duration of the performance is determined by the time taken for the water to drain from our hands). An alternative version of the score is written retrospectively from the perspective of the water:

*Water Carry (v.2)*

*Water, once known as the Bow River*

*Makes cups of human hands*

*Finds gaps between fingers*

*Trickles through*

*Marks riverside boulders, shingle, hard-baked earth, concrete sidewalks and roads*

*Becomes vapour in the heat of the sun*

And yet others take the form of trails of drips left as a result of *Water Carry* — ephemeral, parallel scores ‘written’ by water (and other human and nonhuman authors) in nonhuman ‘language’.

***Figure 1, 2***

The *Guddling About* scores play multiple roles and occupy multiple timeframes in relation to the performances that my human collaborator, Nick, and I realised. This temporal and causal fluidity is also characteristic of the approach of some Fluxus artists. Some Fluxus scores appear to be instructions for future actions. For example, Ken Friedman’s *Twenty Gallons* (1967) consists of the instruction, ‘Cook soup for the entire

audience, Serve it' (Freidman, Smith and Sawchyn 2002, 42). Others, such as Friedman's *Webster's Dictionary* (1965), 'A series of dictionary definitions inscribed on sidewalks and walls in public places', read as descriptions of the result of a past activity (40). Friedman describes a process where his early scores came into being as documents of actions and events that he had already enacted, which he subsequently notated to constitute 'a vocabulary for the kind of art I was doing'. He describes his use of scores evolving as a method to 'create work that could be realised at a distance' and 'that others could interpret' (124-125). The origins and evolution of the *Guddling About* scores, which were first conceived as a way of rendering our actions legible to an audience that had not witnessed their enactment, finds resonances with Friedman's approach. The *Guddling* scores were initially devised for and exhibited, alongside photographs, sound recordings, and installations, at a public 'open studio' event at Glenmore Damn, Calgary. With this public, potentially participatory, context in mind we devised a new score for an event that had not yet been enacted (*MYOB*) and which was specifically intended to be performed by others. The Calgary and other *Guddling About* scores have subsequently been disseminated through talks, websites, published articles, workshops and exhibitions, mutating and evolving in response to different contexts.

A similar slipperiness in defining the roles, temporalities and definitive forms of performance documentation exists in the work of Lone Twin (performance-makers Gregg Whelan and Gary Winters). In their publication, *Of Pigs and Lovers*, which includes performance scores, written reflections and photographs, Whelan and Winters describe the collected material as having 'occurred during actions or moments of public dialogue, at other points it imagines and suggests new possibilities' (Whelan and Winters 2001, 6). In a recent conversation Whelan drew attention to the contrast between the 'pithy and dry' tone of the 'pre-scores' or sets of instructions that he and Winters devised as starting points and the 'open, accessible and porous' process of the performances themselves (personal communication, October 30, 2015). He described these 'pre-scores' as 'propositions that then come into conflict with the environment'.<sup>6</sup> *Guddling About* shares something of this intentional tension between the succinct precision of the scores and their more messy, improvisatory enactment. The *Guddling* scores differ, however, in that,

unlike Lone Twin's pre-scores, which were frequently devised without Whelan and Winters having visited the location of their enactment, *Guddling* scores were initially developed in response to the material and cultural conditions in which they were first performed. The scores for Lone Twin's 'river actions' are a particular point of reference for *Guddling About*. Lone Twin explain the impetus behind their river actions:

We looked for commonalities between our locations and ourselves and we began to think about bodies of water. We thought about how water constructs a land's human geography, that where we settled was largely decided upon by its proximity to a body of water. We thought about our own bodies being more liquid than solid and we started doing things that might let those bodies of water merge. (Whelan and Winters 2001, 6)

*Guddling About* shares Lone Twin's desire to explore human-environment interdependencies through an investigation of the fuzzy boundaries of human-water interrelativity. Like Lone Twin in their river actions we, in *Guddling About*, attempt to trouble our human subject positions, and to foreground the agency of our nonhuman co-performers — while confronting the contradictions that this entails. *Guddling About* moves beyond Lone Twin's conception of their river actions as comprising the merging of two distinct, extant 'bodies', however. Considered as an 'apparatus', in Karen Barad's terms, *Guddling About* attempts to question presumptions that bodies, subjects and objects pre-exist and, therefore, that they can mingle. In Barad's proposition, intra-action — a becoming only in and through performance — supplants interaction. Rather than advocating the mingling of two pre-existing entities (humans and water) *Guddling About* proposes an exploration of human-water intra-action through an apparatus that manifests differences, exclusions and a dispersed, transient form of agency that is neither human, nor water, nor a combination of the two.

A further area of congruity between the *Guddling* scores and other performance scores, such those of Fluxus and Lone Twin, is an ambivalence in their specificity or generality. Some *Guddling* scores refer to the particular physical and cultural context of

each performance. For example, the first version of the score for *Water Carry* refers to the Bow River, not *a* river, while the score for *MYOB* includes detailed references to Southern Alberta's environmental agencies. Some Fluxus scores, such as Bici Forbes *Breakfast Event* (1664) (Friedman, Smith and Sawchyn 2002, 36), share this specificity. But, in both the *Guddling* and Fluxus scores, there is an ambiguity in the seeming specificity. For instance, a collection of Fluxus scores is published as a 'workbook', (Friedman, Smith and Sawchyn 2002) the title implying that, even though some scores reference individuals or particular locations, they are intended to be performed and interpreted by any reader. Talking about Lone Twin's work, Whelan, likewise, proposes that 'refining, re-arranging' and publishing their scores infers that they too are now available to be performed by others (personal communication, October 30, 2015). A similar aim lies behind the *Guddling About* scores, which we suggest might be interpreted as sets of instructions, adapted and enacted in any location where human-river interdependencies exist.

Yet another area of similarity between the *Guddling* and Fluxus scores lies in their functions as instructions for performances that may be both actualised and imagined. The past, present or future performances to which the *Guddling* scores refer are intended to be realised physically, as activities undertaken with watercourses, but they are also intended to be imagined and performed solely through their reading. In this, they resemble Fluxus event scores, as described by Brandon Labelle:

The event score can be seen as both poem and instruction, haiku and manifesto, for it proposes an action of both reading and doing to such a degree as to collapse the two: reading or articulating the event score is to implicitly enact the score itself. (Labelle 2002, 49)

Labelle's claim that Fluxus scores are enacted in both their 'reading and doing' suggests that they urge their reader not to make distinctions between discursive and material practices. The *Guddling About* performance scores aim similarly to challenge perceived distinctions between imagining as an immaterial practice and performing as a material

practice.<sup>7</sup> In this, they align with Karen Barad's contention that 'discursive practices and material phenomena do not stand in a relationship of externality to each other; the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity' (Barad 2007, 185).

The final and important point of connection between Fluxus event scores and *Guddling About* I wish to discuss is one that further relates our work with rivers and watercourses to that of other practitioners. This is the seam of deliberate foolishness and absurdity that runs through the movement's oeuvre. Many Fluxus scores propose actions that are playful, futile, demanding and occasionally 'impossible'. Friedman's *Bird Call* (1992), for instance, proposes making a telephone call to a bird, Milan Knizak's *Removal* (1965) instructs the reader to 'lower an island by one inch by removing an inch from its surface' while Friedman's *Family Planning Event* (1992) exhorts us to 'get pregnant for 18 months' (Friedman, Smith and Sawchyn 2002, 46 and 64). In these scores the artists propose actions that are unrealisable or which push the boundaries of human capability.<sup>8</sup> In doing so, if viewed through an ecological lens, they invite the reader to speculate on their paradoxical relationships in a more-than-human universe — the limits of human communication, humanity's presumptions of power over the nonhuman and the inescapability of human 'nature'. They do so by embracing the absurdity of these contradictory positions. This is an approach shared by *Guddling About* and Lone Twin's 'river actions'. In their river actions, Lone Twin explore ideas of 'becoming' river through melding their sweat (sometimes produced through a 'raindance' — 'a vertical version of the swimming style Breaststroke') with river water and through speaking the line 'I am becoming The Glomma, The Kattegat, The Hull and The Dart'. (Whelan and Winters, 2001, 14 and 20) The river actions suggest both an aspiration to sublimate their humanity and the ridiculousness of that aspiration. We adopt a similar approach, devising and performing actions that, in their considered foolishness, aim to open us up to the absurdity of 'being human' in a more-than-human universe.

Among other practitioners<sup>9</sup> who work in a similarly absurdist register, and who address human-nonhuman relations, a further few examples resonate particularly with

*Guddling About*. Visual artist Kirsten Pieroth's *Pfützen* (2001) entailed the transportation and recreation of a series of puddles from Berlin streets to art galleries in Mitte, Berlin and Tirana, Albania. Katie Paterson's *Vatnajökull (the sound of)* (2014) explores the absurdity of human-nonhuman communication through providing an opportunity to make a telephone call to a 'dying' glacier. József R. Juhász's playful actions, *Dunasaurus* (1991) and *Human Flood Level Indicator* (2013), similarly perform a farcical and paradoxical desire to represent or communicate with the nonhuman, but here with explicitly activist intentions (Fowkes, Reuben and Maya 2015, 92-94). What distinguishes *Guddling About* from these related practices and characterises it specifically as an ecological practice, however, is the nature of the interplay between the multiple iterations of the scores, the performances and the other elements of *Guddling About*. I have argued that understanding *Guddling About* as an 'apparatus', in Karen Barad's terms, allows me to consider the work as an on-going process of planning, improvising, adapting and reconfiguring, through which phenomena momentarily materialise. Each manifestation of the apparatus involves a push and pull between planned actions (encapsulated in the precisely worded instructions, or pre-scores), and flexibility and improvisation in their enactment. The apparatus of *Guddling About* is experimental and generative. It enables us to enact, recognise and respond to our, sometimes conflicting, preconceptions and assumptions about human-water relations, in the context of specific material-cultural conditions — to 'try on' different, sometimes paradoxical, perspectives and to amend the apparatus accordingly. *Guddling About* as apparatus offers a model for (human) accountability that lies in continual attentiveness and responsiveness to changing conditions. It demands that we (humans) remain alert to the material-cultural becomings manifested through the apparatus and, therefore, to the infinite becomings that have not materialised — but which might yet. In the next section of the essay I exemplify this by describing *Guddling About* performances and performance documentation as part of a mutating apparatus — one that is continually modified and re-configured through intra-action with further apparatuses. I consider the apparatus's function in making manifest specific qualities of and tensions in human-environment, and particularly human-water, intra-action.

## ***Guddling About as apparatus***

### ***Water Borrow***

#### *Water Borrow (v.1)*

*Visit as many of the tributaries of the Bow River as possible. Ask each tributary you visit for permission to borrow some water. If you feel permission has been granted, carefully take a pailful of water, noting the date, time, weather conditions, topographical features and water quality. Remember to thank the river or creek for the water.*

The *Water Borrow* score printed above can be understood as part of an apparatus that accumulated and transformed with each repetition of the action. Other components of the evolving apparatus, such as the subjective and contradictory narrative and reflections about one performance of *Water Borrow* printed below, manifest further paradoxical and overlapping instances of human-water inter-relations:

#### *Water Borrow (v.2)*

*Mosquito Creek, 4.10pm, 5 September 2013*

*I stand with my legs braced to balance on the slippery banks of Mosquito Creek in the Canadian Rocky Mountains, an empty white plastic bucket in my hand. I am here, impelled by the performance score I wrote: the instructions for Water Borrow. My task, 'ask the tributary for permission to borrow some water' is clear and not difficult to enact. But I hesitate. How should I frame the question? How do you address a creek? I feel a little foolish and self-conscious, aware of the absurdity of ascribing agency to a river and uncertain about the proto-animist stance I am about to adopt. I am conscious that I am a white, Scottish woman anticipating an action that might be seen as co-opting indigenous practices and beliefs regarding waters.<sup>10</sup> I speak. 'Hello Mosquito Creek', I say, in a tone that I hope sounds 'genuine': friendly, light-hearted and perhaps a little hesitant. 'Nice*

*to meet you. Please can I borrow some of your water?’ I wait. I listen to the water rushing and gurgling over the creek bed. I listen intently and become attuned to a constant quality in the sound of the creek but also to variations in the tone, pitch and timbre of the water running over different surfaces. I listen to the ‘voice’ of the river. In listening, I have a sense of a temporality that far exceeds human timescales and comprehension. If I could wait long enough, would I ‘understand’ the voice of the creek? Would my relationship with the river evolve? I feel conscious of my insignificance and a sense of the unknowability of the more-than-human universe. I wait and listen some more. How long before I decide if permission for me to borrow water has been granted? Does the water have any ‘say’ in my decision?*

As I stood by Mosquito Creek, I was acutely conscious that we had tacitly decided to ‘borrow’ the water when we first devised the performance score for *Water Borrow*. I knew, when we embarked on the 220-kilometre drive from Calgary to the source of the Bow River in a truck loaded with empty buckets, that we would not return empty handed — that we ‘needed’ the water for further *Guddling About* experiments. (Specifically *MYOB*, described in the following pages.) What, then, is manifested through my performing the request to borrow water? While it has become evident to me that I am undergoing a performance of sham courtesy, which affords the water no agency in acquiescing to or refusing my request, it is only through the actual utterance of the question that the force of this realisation strikes me. In voicing my request, I also become aware that unsurprisingly, given my cultural background, it has never before occurred to me to ask for permission to ‘borrow’ water. As is common across affluent Western societies, I take for granted my dominion over water — my right to help myself to water for drinking, cooking and washing and, by extension, my implication in its use for more contentious purposes such as industrial-scale agriculture and fracking. The apparatus of *Guddling About* — the intra-action of performance score, my vocalisation of the request to borrow water, my unique physical characteristics and cultural background — makes manifest my own complex position regarding human-water interdependency. It allows me to ‘try on’ unfamiliar cultural positions, such as forms of proto-animism or anthropomorphism, to experiment with their potential to shift and critique my own

cultural assumptions about human-water relations and to enact and acknowledge the complexities and contradictions entailed in adopting such stances. It allows me to rehearse an arrogance towards the nonhuman prevalent in Western cultures but also, paradoxically, points to our common perceptions of the more-than-human universe as overwhelming, unruly and beyond comprehension. The apparatus of *Guddling About* enables me to confront these paradoxical assumptions of human superiority/inferiority. It allows me to appreciate how deeply, and inescapably, conceptions and structures of human exceptionalism are embedded in the ways we live and think. It allows me to work both within and against this position, acknowledging presumptions of human supremacy alongside an awareness of the paucity of human knowledge and power.

The contradictions of a vital materialist stance, acknowledged and embraced by Jane Bennett (Bennett 2010, 119-122) are played out through the apparatus of *Guddling About*. The role of anthropomorphism, or even a proto-animism, in elements of the *Guddling About* apparatus is similar to that suggested by Bennett, who proposes the value of a strategic adoption of an anthropomorphic stance. Rather than condemning our (inevitable) recourse to anthropomorphism, she suggests that we might embrace it as generative and necessary in our attempts to attend to the vitality of more-than-human matter. This appeared to be borne out in *Water Borrow*. The anthropomorphism of my address to the Bow River tributaries was playful and knowing. But the sensory and affective impact its enactment had on me — the facility that my ‘talking’ and ‘listening’ to the rivers afforded me to attend to the vitality of more-than-human matter— was surprising and revelatory. In this instance, the apparatus of *Guddling About* functioned as the kind of ‘everyday tactics for cultivating an ability to discern the vitality of matter’ that Bennett advocates (119).

*I crouch and hold the bucket in the water. The strong current tugs at the white plastic container and its metal handle digs into my flesh. I feel the force of the water. I lift the part-full bucket from the stream. I thank the creek — as if it cares.*

**Figure 4**

## ***Mix Your Own Bow***

### *Mix Your Own Bow (v.1)*

*Using data from the agencies Environment Alberta and Environment Canada estimate how much water each tributary visited might contribute to the Bow River at Calgary, as a percentage. Using a water dropper and specially calibrated measuring equipment, take an amount of water corresponding to each percentage from the pails containing water borrowed from the Bow River tributaries. Mix these in a labelled sample bottle. Top up the mixture to 100% with water borrowed from the Bow River. Return the mixed water from the sample bottle to the Bow River.*

Nick and I performed the first version of the score for *Mix Your Own Bow* (MYOB) in Calgary, Alberta in September 2013, in collaboration with participating members of the (human) public; water ‘borrowed’ from the Bow River’s tributaries; the Bow River itself and innumerable more-than-human co-performers.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Figure 5***

*MYOB* was intended to provoke reflections on specific and complex human-water relations in the Bow River water catchment area, while toying with notions of water’s universality, human implication in its control and circulation and the ‘natural’ course of rivers. *MYOB* invites human participants to carry out actions that articulate humans’ habitually overlooked interventions within what is commonly understood as the ‘universal water cycle’ in a playful but potentially thought-provoking and affective way. The concept of a universal hydrological cycle has been critiqued compellingly by geographer, Jamie Linton, who argues that it is a modern invention designed to promote understandings of water as abstract and universal. This framing of water allows material and cultural specificities to be ignored and overridden. It propagates ideas of water as a generalised and quantifiable resource — ideas that have serious implications for current water management strategies and the so-called global ‘water crisis’ (Linton 2010, 105-

190). The participatory performance succeeded in prompting discussions about the ways in which the ‘natural’ tributary water is diverted, treated, managed and commodified. It also prompted remarks about the composition of Bow River water, the qualities of the different samples and concepts of ‘purity’. For instance, the blue-green, mineral-rich water from the tributaries close to the Bow’s source (Bow Glacier in the Rocky Mountains) differed visibly from the sludge brown tones of water from tributaries that flowed through agricultural land. In asking participants to return the water to the Bow River *MYOB* might also, however, be understood as promoting a belief that we are temporary custodians of the river water and that we have an obligation to allow it to continue its ‘natural’ journey downstream. In this, the instruction can be read as imposing human attributes like ‘care’ and ‘courtesy’ onto human-nonhuman relations and assuming that the water ‘wants’ to return to the body of the river. Further, the instruction affords considerable agency to the human participants in allowing them the freedom to choose where, when and if they will ‘return’ the tributary water to the Bow River watershed. In these contradictory interpretations, *Water Borrow/MYOB* raises complex issues of responsibility, accountability and ethics in its exploration of human-water interdependencies. What, then, is its value as ecological practice? Returning again to Barad and applying her agential realist understanding of causality and agency proves useful here. For Barad, causality and agency cannot be attributed to human or other-than-human entities, phenomena or networks but emerge through intra-action. In an agential realist account, ‘the notion of intra-actions reformulates the traditional notion of causality and agency in an ongoing reconfiguring of the real and the possible’ (Barad 2007, 177). Understood in these terms, the apparent contradictions regarding the causal and agential relationships among human and other-than-human participants in *Water Borrow* and *MYOB* manifests as a set of potentialities, made evident through the apparatus of *Guddling About*. The human participants’ individual decisions regarding where, when and if they choose to ‘return’ the water to the Bow River watershed each play out as one possible version of events. The multiple actual and potential versions that were enacted or imagined through the apparatus of *Water Borrow/MYOB* challenge assumptions about the singularity of the ‘natural’ or ‘proper’ course of events, where the river water is envisaged as continuing on a ‘predestined’ journey from its source in the Rocky

Mountains to the sea at Hudson Bay. The apparatus of *Guddling About* here operates as a model of ecological practice that troubles our persistent adherence to narratives based on belief in the inevitable and ‘natural’ unfolding of cause and effect. It also invites us to acknowledge and query instilled narratives about the universality and abstraction of water. These narratives frequently underpin environmental arguments concerning global water crises, climate change, fossil fuel depletion and notions of the anthropocene. The apparatus of *Guddling About* articulates a more complex understanding of the efficacy of human interventions into ‘natural’ processes — a more complex ethics of human-environment, and particularly human-water, interdependency. As Barad puts it:

particular possibilities for (intra)acting exist at every moment, and these changing possibilities entail an ethical obligation to intra-act responsibly in the world’s becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering (178).

In the ethics of intra-action, we (humans) are accountable through heeding what is manifested in each configuration of the apparatus, and what is not manifested, but which might be in future iterations.

### **The open-ended apparatus: further reconfigurations (in/of space-time)**

*Guddling About*, like the apparatus of Barad’s conception, is generative. The originary *MYOB* performance, for instance, generates multiple reconfigurations and manifestations such as the variant *Mix Your Own Clyde (MYOC)*, created in response to the River Clyde in Glasgow, where Nick Millar and I live. In *MYOC*, the performance score is modified to include instructions to ‘wear protective gloves’ and ‘wash your hands’, reflecting the human-water inter-relations which exist in the specific material-cultural conditions surrounding the Clyde and its tributaries. These conditions differ markedly from those surrounding the Bow River, whose watershed provides drinking water for most of Southern Alberta and is, as such, subject to stringent controls regarding the input and extraction of water. The Bow in Calgary is a site of recreation and

contemplation, with many points along the city centre banks allowing rafters, kayakers, fishers and walkers to access the water. In contrast, the River Clyde and its tributaries have been used for centuries by humans for numerous industrial and semi-industrial processes. The Clyde in central Glasgow has been extensively modified — deepened, narrowed and canalised. It is also the repository for much of Glasgow’s treated, and a significant quantity of its untreated, sewage. Despite considerable improvement in water quality in recent decades, the Clyde in Glasgow remains heavily polluted. (See Scottish Environmental Protection Agency Clyde Area Management Plan.) Perhaps because of this, barriers run the length of its banks, a feature that, in addition to the steep quayside walls, which are a legacy of the river’s industrial modification, makes the water difficult for humans to access in the city centre. In this material-cultural context, *MYOC*, and the preparatory *Water Borrow* experiments required to carry it out, currently remain as imagined, rather than realised, activities — by Nick and I, at least. Like the Fluxus event scores referenced earlier in the essay, the performance score for *MYOC* is a set of instructions that evokes infinite possibilities for its enactment. It suggests a space-time of potential where multiple forms of human-water inter-relation might be played out, some manifesting material-cultural conditions that are more benign and others that are less favourable (from a human perspective) than those currently surrounding the Clyde.

Considering the scores as potential performances in the context of diverse material-cultural conditions thus leads to the configuration of new, related performances. These new performances manifest the specific human-water inter-relations which exist in that particular context, in that particular instance, while also pointing towards the infinite, alternative outcomes that remain as possibilities, and to further reconfigurations of the apparatus. Other *Guddling About* experiments, *Water Borrow/MYO...* have not been performed by Nick and I since their Albertan enactments, but our consideration of those scripts as potential performances in the context of different material-cultural conditions has led to the configuration of related experiments and further reconfigurations of the apparatus. For instance, the *Guddling About* performances, *Water Draw*, *Tideline (Mesolithic)* and *Watermeets* can all be understood as reconfigurations of *Water Borrow/MYO...* while *Where Water Goes (Puddles and Pours)*, devised in the semi-arid

conditions of Southern Alberta, have been reconfigured as *Puddle Drain* in Glasgow's persistently damp climate.<sup>12</sup> The different iterations of the score and the infinite possibilities for re-enactment they evoke suggest an ability to reconfigure spatiality and temporality similar to that attributed by Barad to the apparatus. Barad contends that apparatuses 'are not located in the world but are material configurations or reconfigurings of the world that re(con)figure spatiality and temporality [...] (i.e., they do not exist as static structures, nor do they merely unfold or evolve in space and time)' (Barad 2007, 146). The scores and performances, as part of the apparatus of *Guddling About*, propose an understanding of temporality and spatiality that does not conform to linear narratives or physically circumscribed locations. The space and time of *Guddling About* as an apparatus is at once as real and imagined, potential and actual, generic and specific.

## **Conclusion**

Applying Barad's conception of the apparatus to *Guddling About* allows a productive negotiation of the paradoxes of performance (and its documentation) and frames the work as a model of ecological practice. Considered as an apparatus, *Guddling About* manifests a generative and critical negotiation of the complexities and contradictions of human-water and, by extension, human-environment, interdependency. It enables productive engagement with multiple, competing perspectives — to 'try on' and complexify different cultural and ideological positions, such as those of the vital materialists who advocate for a strategic and necessary recourse to anthropomorphism and who embrace the implications of our inculcated belief in human exceptionalism. Considering *Guddling About* in terms of the essential adaptability of the apparatus — its characteristics of continual, responsive reconfiguration and mutation — offers a model for how we (humans) might 'prepare' for the future, in light of ever-changing ecological conditions. *Guddling About*-as-apparatus proposes that planning and improvisation exist in a dynamic relationship. The interplay between the performance scores, which comprise concise instructions for the completion of a prescribed task, and the extemporisation entailed in the enactment of that task, manifests a model where forward

planning must be subject to continual revision and responsive to ever-changing circumstances. *Guddling About* proposes a paradigm where planning for the future should not be undertaken from a position of assumed knowledge. Understood as an apparatus, *Guddling About* unsettles traditional rational understandings of causality. Each performance score presents multiple possibilities but unfolds in only one way in each particular enactment, proposing a model of causality where possibility is simultaneously infinite and singular. This model challenges common narratives about the ‘natural’ or ‘proper’ course of events, where effect follows cause in an inevitable or anticipated trajectory. It unsettles assumptions about human responsibility for environmental issues such as climate change and fossil fuel depletion, proposing a different type of accountability. Instead, it proposes an ethical ‘intra-act[ion] in the world’s becoming’ (Barad 2007, 178), one that entails attending to each phenomenon manifested through the apparatus, and to the infinite alternative phenomena that could have materialised and, indeed, could still yet materialise. *Guddling About-as-apparatus* invites us to intra-act playfully, attentively, spontaneously and considerately, acknowledging our ignorance of the more-than-human universe but remaining alert and responsive to its infinite possibilities.

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<sup>1</sup> The first *Guddling About* performances took place in August and September 2013 during an artists' residency hosted by the City of Calgary Utilities and Environmental Protection and Public Art departments. See <http://www.watershedplus.com/about/> Subsequent *Guddling About* 'experiments' have taken place in Glasgow with water in/from the River Kelvin, the Forth and Clyde Canal and the waste water drainage system in Govan, 2014-15, the River Manzanares, Madrid, Spain, 2015, streams, burns and rivers in Dumfriesshire, Scotland, 2015 and 2016. See [http://www.guddling.tumblr.com](http://www.guddling.tumblr.com;); [http://www.guddlingaboutexperiments.tumblr.com](http://www.guddlingaboutexperiments.tumblr.com;); [http://www.donaldmillar2014.tumblr.com](http://www.donaldmillar2014.tumblr.com;); <http://www.then-now.org> Accessed February 19 2016.

<sup>2</sup> The Scots language phrase is also, appropriately, associated with water. An additional definition refers to the practice of catching fish by groping under rocks and riverbanks where they lurk, while 'guddling' onomatopoeically evokes the sound of water running over stones or when agitated by hand. [http://scots-online.org/dictionary/scots\\_english.asp](http://scots-online.org/dictionary/scots_english.asp) Accessed February 19 2016.

<sup>3</sup> For non- and more-than- representational theory's valorisation of performance see Dewsberry 2009. 321-334; Lorimer 2005, 83-94; Thrift, 2008. For performance and new materialism see Barad 2007 and Bennett 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Barad's conception of agential realism builds on models of dispersed agency such as Bruno Latour's 'actor-networks' and Deleuze's 'assemblages'. Barad's conception differs in that 'intra-action' assumes that no entities (however porous and unstable) pre-exist their momentary materialisation through what she calls the 'agential cut'.

<sup>5</sup> In *What is Water?* Jamie Linton argues that the abstraction of water is a 'modern', substantially colonial phenomenon propagated to support the management and commodification of water for political and economic gains. In *Guddling About* we acknowledge our inculcation in the 'crisis of modern water', while attempting to address it by attending to 'the social [and material] circumstances that make water what it is in every particular instance'. (Linton. 2010. 23.)

<sup>6</sup> Whelan cited an instance where Lone Twin proposed to walk across frozen Lake Michigan. In reality, this was not possible due to nature of the frozen ice (personal communication, October 30, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> For an other example of an artist working with materiality and text within a broadly ecological framework see Katie Paterson. 2004 – on-going. *Ideas*.

<sup>8</sup> Whelan describes a similar interest in proposing difficult or 'impossible' actions: 'the more implausible the instructions the more space there is' (personal communication, October 30, 2015). For other examples of artists working with 'impossible' ideas see Katie Paterson. 2014- on-going. *Ideas*; Francis Alÿs. 2002. *When Faith Moves Mountains* or 2006. *Bridge/Puente*.

<sup>9</sup> Yet other practitioners who are congruent with or have influenced our practice include Jimmy Durham, Jessica Rahm and Simon Whitehead.

<sup>10</sup> *Water Borrow* was partly inspired by our learning about a group of aboriginal women in Canada who walked around the Great Lakes to raise awareness of deteriorating water quality. As is customary in indigenous practices, they spoke to the water, thanking it for providing sustenance to humans and offering entreaties for its improved health.

<sup>11</sup> *MYOB* was performed as one of a suite of *Guddling About* performances and installations on the site of Calgary's Glenmore Dam and water treatment facility on 28 September 2013. The event was attended by over three hundred visitors, with over one hundred participating in *MYOB*. Nick and I engaged in or overheard conversations with over fifty participants. See [http://www.guddling.tumblr.com](http://www.guddling.tumblr.com;); <http://www.guddlingaboutexperiments.tumblr.com> Accessed February 19 2016.

<sup>12</sup> For *Where Water Goes* see <http://www.guddlingaboutexperiments.tumblr.org> Accessed February 19 2016. *Puddle Drain* has been performed repeatedly in Glasgow. See <http://www.donaldmillar.tumblr.org> *Water Draw* and *Tideline (Mesolithic)* were performed as part of Buzzcut Festival, Glasgow, March 2015. See <http://www.donaldmillar.tumblr.org> Accessed February 19 2016. *Watermeets* was enacted in August 2015, as part of the Environmental Arts Festival, Scotland. See <http://www.donaldmillar.tumblr.org> and <http://environmentalartfestivalscotland.com> Accessed February 19 2016.

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