

# The Wet Pants - Becoming an Audience with the *More than Human*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Inspired by new materialist theories, agential realism, and Karen Barad's idea of entangled intra-action,<sup>1</sup> this article explores how children, teachers, dancers, and researchers become an audience through their intra-actions with each other and with the more than human – such as a pair of wet leggings. I suggest that ways of becoming an audience are created, not just by following what humans do, but also by following non-humans, things, and how they are entangled with each other in becoming an audience. In this article, I show that knowledge production by following a pair of wet leggings also raises new ethical questions and considerations from a child-etic-perspective<sup>2</sup> and in interactive performances. This leads to considerations around how teachers, dancers, children, research practices, and materiality are entangled.

## **KEYWORDS**

becoming an audience, performing arts for young people, agential realism, entangled intra-action, diffractive methodology.

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1 Barad 2003, 2007

2 Davies 2014b

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## Introduction

“She, a sixth-grade girl, dances at the front with great energy and, after a little time, I notice that her pink leggings are wet, as if she has sat in something wet or peed her pants. It is not a small stain, but a wet stain from the dirt off the pants and down her thighs. She seems unaffected, I can hear some of them, the seventh graders talking about the wet pants. We all follow her and her movements and the wet leggings. They take the focus away from what else is happening. The wet leggings become foregrounded in the dance performance”.<sup>1</sup>

The context for this article is set at a primary school in West Zealand, Denmark and a part of the research for my PhD thesis “Listening to children – children becoming an audience in performing arts for youth”.<sup>2</sup> This is a study of how “children as audience” are created in Danish primary schools, when touring groups put on performances for young people. The study stems from a desire to invite children “to the table” of knowledge production<sup>3</sup> by raising the research question: “How do children become an audience when performances for young people visiting schools?” My ambition was to disturb the “taken for granted knowledge” about children as an audience and to reconfigure the way in which we might think about how children become an audience in school from the children’s perspective.<sup>4</sup> As a part of the Danish environment of performing arts for young people over a period of twenty years, I wanted to challenge the assumption that I was “taken for granted” as the better-informed adult, by standing in solidarity with the children and following their becoming in relation to mine as a researcher and adult. This was an opportunity to explore and challenge the more “traditional” power relationship between child and adult and child and researcher. It was a chance to disturb a power relation where I in a double sense, as both an adult and researcher, would have a very privileged position in the knowledge production process. I am aware that I hold this position, but I wanted to explore these relations, their becoming, and how they are constituted.<sup>5</sup>

However, I was also interested in opening up and engaging with the “yet to come” in an ethical question. In this sense, what we do matters and how we respond to what happens matters. I, as a researcher, have great responsibility for how the world comes to matter in

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1 From my notebook. I write my observations down during my Ph.D. project. This is from a primary school and a dance performance “With the body on discovery” visiting. Sørensen 2018.

2 Sørensen 2021.

3 Warming 2005, Davies 2014a, Spyro 2016.

4 Sørensen 2021.

5 Warming 2005.

my research and analysis of the world, and in the way I let it perform. Inspired by Barad, I can say, we are not *in* the world but *of* the world, and our becoming of the world is a deeply ethical matter.<sup>6</sup>

Barad points to “ethics as a matter of justice”.<sup>7</sup> A justice that requires openness and presence in relation to the details of the moment, so that “new life” can arise. I, as a researcher, cannot stand outside the world. I become through intra-actions with children, visiting dance performances, everyday praxis in school, with the non-human also playing its part, such as the methods I used, the chairs and tables we were sitting on, the notebook in which I wrote my field notes etc.

My ambition as a researcher is to develop an “ongoing practice of being open and alive to each meeting, so that I might use my ability to respond”, to be responsible, and “to breathe life into new possibilities”<sup>8</sup> for knowledge regarding children becoming an audience.

Matthew Reason, Professor of Theatre at York St John University writes about the young audience as an active doing. Pointing to the young audience’s “engagement with theatre and their theatrical competences and ability not only to interpret the signs and conventions of theatre but also to reflect back upon and articulate their own interpretation”.<sup>9</sup> Lise Hovik, Professor in Drama and Theatre Studies, Norway, through her own practice-led research, investigates interactive theatre for the youngest children in the performance *The Red Shoes*, Hovik proposes a concept of play as communicative musicality. This form of play serves as “rhythmical transparency” between the performers’ improvisations and children’s re-actions.<sup>10</sup>

I mention Reason and Hovik to emphasize that I know there are others who have researched the idea of children as an audience. Inspired by the material turn, Karen Barad, and her idea of agential realism, I explore how children become an audience,<sup>11</sup> as “open ended...and as more than human”.<sup>12</sup> This is to be understood as the becoming of an audience, as an open and ongoing process that changes in time and space, entangled in materiality, bodies, words, movements, and in the researcher’s methods.<sup>13</sup> All these elements are parts which play a role in the knowledge production process of becoming an audience and apply to a pair of wet pink leggings on a dancing girl.

So rather than focusing on what a child-audience is or what the experience of being an audience as a child is like, this is a desire to delve deeper into what we think about becoming an audience in school, doing so in a way that also decentres the human in the audience becoming process. In this article, I raise the question: “How do objects such as wet pants become entangled in the process of becoming an audience when a touring dance performance visits a school.”

### Thinking with New-Materialism, Intra-Actions and Entanglements

This thinking is particularly informed by the theoretical and methodological discussions that fall under terms such as new-materialism, posthumanism, and material feminism, designations for overlapping theoretical and methodological developments.<sup>14</sup> It is a broad and growing field that covers many different scientific areas such as childhood research,<sup>15</sup> educational studies,<sup>16</sup> philosophy and quantum physics,<sup>17</sup> art, technology, and science,<sup>18</sup> to name some of those that are central to me.

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6 Barad 2007.

7 Barad 2007, 524.

8 Barad 2007, 524.

9 Reason 2010.

10 Hovik 2014.

11 In this article, the audience is us who listen, see, experience, and participate in a theatre or dance performance, and this happens to a greater extent with theatre and that is what I want to investigate.

12 Barad 2003, 2007.

13 Barad 2003, 2007; Haraway 1991, 2003, 2016.

14 Juelskjær 2019.

15 Davies 2014a, 2014b, 2021; Lenz Taguchi 2012, 2014.

16 Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; MacLure, 2013a; St. Pierre, 2013.

17 Barad 2003, 2007.

18 Haraway 1988, 1992, 2003, 2016; Hovik 2014, 2022; Hovik & Pérez 2020.

Despite different or overlapping fields of research, what connects them is an examination of the boundaries set and taken for granted between the human and the non-human, exploring how the human is connected to a multitude of non-human forces. Next, an ambition to overcome representations of the world and phenomena as something that is “out there”, rooted in binary relations such as object/subject, art/culture, active/passive, researcher/explored, child/adult.

In this article, I am especially inspired by quantum physicist, philosopher, and feminist Barad. In her book, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Barad outlines a theory about entanglements and becoming. Agential realism frames Barad’s theory. A processual and relational thinking that breaks with a stable understanding of the world as consisting of bounded units and as something waiting to be found “out there”.

Rather than an ontology of separateness, where children, the theatre, the audience, things, the school, and the environment retain their individualising characteristics, a relational ontology focuses on what Barad calls “intra-activity”, where humans and non-humans, space and time, subject and object, discourse and materiality, researcher and researched all exist as mutually constituting forces.

Barad’s theory is based on the experiments of quantum physicist Niels Bohr, which showed how the uncertainty of waves and particles was proven precisely through observation and measurement. Applying Bohr’s theory of quantum mechanics to the social and natural world, Barad theorizes the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. She calls this entanglement “intra-activity”. Inter-activity suggests that things and people come together from separate origins. But the prefix “intra”, which means “within”, suggests that separateness is only an effect of material arrangements at particular times. Through this lens, the self is not distinct from space, time, and matter (“matter” as both meaning and materiality). The self becomes just one aspect in an entanglement that is always subject to change based on the tools of observation and the contexts of its emergence, just like the waves and particles in Bohr’s experiments. What defines new materialist theory, then, is the idea that the human is not a self-contained, separate entity with innate agency, but is rather co-constituted within shifting and distributed agencies. As a result, Barad explains that “agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Thing-Power and the More Than Human**

Barad’s thoughts about distributed agency have allowed me to foreground other dynamics and entanglements of becoming an audience at school. According to Barad, these ongoing intra-actions not only take place between humans, but also among non-human actors.

All knowledge is entangled in the sense that there is no knowledge outside of the connectedness to the material world, “(...) knowing does not come from a distance and representing, but rather from a direct material engagement with the world.”<sup>20</sup> These forces, where knowledge is entangled and connected to the material world, are what American researcher and philosopher Jane Bennett calls “thing-power”.<sup>21</sup> So, it concerns things too, vibrant matters, vital players in the world with the capacity to act, create effects, and change circumstances. Bennett writes: “Thing-power materialism is a speculative onto-story, a rather presumptuous attempt to depict the non-humanity that flows around but also through humans.”<sup>22</sup>

“Thing-power” is, according to Bennett, a force which can affect people. Thing-power is not human or organic and does not have a separate and essential agent. Nor is it akin to human intentionality as an external force that can be exerted by things. One way to understand this kind of agency is by including Barad’s intra-action, i.e. that nothing can be understood as a pre-defined unit, but rather as “multiple phenomena” of the relationships between people and things. Intra-actions are limited but are not deterministic realizations through which creations are stored and folded in further materializations of people and things. Intra-actions create

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19 Barad 2007, 178.

20 Barad, 2007, 49.

21 Bennett 2004.

22 Bennett 2004, 349.

and limit relationships between connected components and transmit their meaning and materiality, hence discourses are always already implied in things and vice versa.

Barad writes that intra-actions work in the following ways: “Discursive practices and material phenomena do not stand in a relationship of externality to each other; rather, *the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity*. The relationship between the material and the discursive is one of mutual entailment. Neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior. Neither can be explained in terms of the other. Neither is reducible to the other. Neither has privileged status in determining the other. Neither is articulated or articulable in the absence of the other; matter and meaning are mutually articulated.”<sup>23</sup>

Intra-actions do not depict relationships between already separated entities or identities. On the other hand, people and non-humans are portrayed as connected through multiple mutual effects.<sup>24</sup> From this perspective, children becoming audiences at school, a “both-and”, instead of an “either/or”, both discourse and materiality, is without precedent. In its own way, it pushes humans, in this case children, a little to one side in the knowledge production process and allows the non-human and things to have an active place in children’s audience formation.

One of the aspects about the non-human and things is that it can perceive how matter comes to matter. How they are entangled with each other, like the benches you sit on, the room you enter, the mobile phone in your pocket, or the leggings you are wearing and how these things become a part of and co-produce the audience-becoming process. A dance performance cannot be reduced solely to its dancers and the relationships between them, but may also be understood as an entanglement, as an intra-action between actor, text, props, scenography, the room, the audience, the light, sound etc. Nor should the audience, i.e. the children, the theatre, things, the school, or the leggings in this example, not be conceivable as separate and distinct entities. Children becoming an audience is, therefore, not thought of as a pre-existing phenomenon, their connected existence to things, the theatre, school etc. – they are co-produced, connected, and entangled with the non-human, the material, and how it comes to matter.<sup>25</sup>

### **Children as Audience in Terms of Entanglement and an Ethical Obligation**

During my research, I wanted to disturb my own well-established knowledge and knowledge production process in terms of children as an audience, to engage in an alternative mode of data creation and employ different thought processes when analysing the data, being an untypical adult following the everyday lives of schoolchildren.

The untypical adult is defined as an adult who acts in a manner that is informed by children’s perspective during their time in school,<sup>26</sup> i.e. sitting with the students, not going to the teacher’s room during breaks, not enforcing classroom rules, taking breaks with the students, and accepting invitations to join them outside to play on the swing or watch YouTube videos during their lunch break.<sup>27</sup>

I took on this position, participating in a school year alongside seventh grade children. Besides the school’s usual subjects and tasks, there were also theatre and visiting dance performances.

In this position as an untypical adult, I stand *with* the children and invite them to be co-researchers by involving them in knowledge production, by connecting and responding to their contributions. My desire is to maintain the complexity of children’s lives within a relational materialist approach, which offers a shift from the individual child and children’s social relations to multiple collections and entanglements that also consist of miscellaneous elements found in the classroom or the dance performance and in different “doings”, understood as actions and becomings.

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23 Barad 2007, 152, Barad’s italics.

24 Allen 2018; Barad 2007; Hultman & Lenz Taguchi 2010.

25 Sørensen 2021; Hovik 2022.

26 Damgaard 2015; Gulløv 2015; Warming 2005.

27 Sørensen 2021.

I follow in the footsteps of childhood researcher Alan Prout and others who came after him, who define the continued challenge in childhood research as investigating whether and how different versions of children and adults are created through complex interactions between various discursive, collective, and hybrid materialities, human and non-human relations.<sup>28</sup>

Children are not assumed to have normative positioning, instead are continuously becoming through connected human and non-human relationships in their school, classroom, or as a dance performance audience. The process is both lively and alive and is an entanglement in itself, where I as a researcher also am a part of the dynamics and relationships involved in the entanglement which are co-creative for children as co-researchers and as an audience. The intention is therefore not to interpret and explain children's actions and thoughts, but to connect more closely with their perspectives and to experiment with these entanglements as a force that seeks complexity and the aspects of becoming an audience.

Like a respond, not like this is how the world is, but as a "speculative respond".<sup>29</sup> An "ongoing practice of being open and alive to each meeting, so that I might use my ability to respond", to be responsible, and "to breathe life into new possibilities".<sup>30</sup> This is an ethical obligation for me as a researcher, because aspects of becoming an audience as a child are also a part of a knowledge production process which has an effect on the world and creates ways of understanding it.

Davies and Petersen suggest, with inspiration from Deleuze's understanding of ethics,<sup>31</sup> working with what they call a "child-ethical-principle". Deleuze distinguishes between morals and ethics, where morality is about judging and categorising, ethics is about being open to the other and what is to come.<sup>32</sup>

"In a Deleuzian *ethics*, which Deleuze distinguishes from *morality*, one does not look at the other to categorize and judge but does so with the simple question, *what is it to be this?* (...) In an ethics it is completely different, you do not judge. . . . Somebody says or does something, you do not relate it to values. You ask yourself *how is that possible?*"<sup>33</sup>

For me, the child ethics perspective means to be open, to ask yourself: "what is it to be this?" and "how is that possible?". I can carry out readings of the data material with a focus on what human and non-human forces create in terms of "what is it to be this?" and "how is it possible", aspects which are involved in children's audience-becomings. Not to pass judgement, but as a speculative way of creating knowledge around intra-active becomings with humans (children, dancers, me as a researcher, teachers) and non-humans (wet pants, clothes, school building, chairs, tables, notebooks).

As a part of a researcher's formal ethical obligations when conducting research with children, all children are anonymized according to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) rules. Their own researcher aliases have been created, so the names you find in this article are invented as a part of the process of them becoming co-researchers and part of the ethical considerations for researching *with* children.<sup>34</sup>

During my time in the school, I had ongoing dialogues with the children about my research. I told them about my work and position as a researcher and involved them in data production, as informed by Kampmann.<sup>35</sup> Inspired by Barad<sup>36</sup> and Davies,<sup>37</sup> I assert that ethics is about knowledge production, how it performs, and its effects on the world, and I as a researcher am responsible for the choices made and how these choices affect the way the world appears. With this awareness in mind, it is paradoxical to research *with* children, knowing that a researcher's and children's agency may no longer be seen as an individual possession, but rather as the outcome of intra-actions with other humans (other children and adults,

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28 Davies 2014a; Hohti 2016a; Lenz Taguchi 2010b; Prout 2005; Spyrou 2016.

29 Bennett 2004, 349.

30 Barad 2007, 524.

31 Davies 2014b, 2022; Petersen 2015.

32 Davies 2014b, 738; Petersen 2015, 66.

33 Deleuze 1980, np in Davies, 2014b,738. Davies' italics.

34 Sørensen 2021, 38-43.

35 Kampmann 2015.

36 Barad 2007.

37 Davies 2014a.



other researchers and readers) and non-human agents (e.g. material things such as books, classrooms, toys, theory, methods, text, articles etc.).

### **Methodology, Diffractive Reading and Data that Interrupts and Glows**

I explore becoming an audience within a diffractive methodology.<sup>38</sup> Working with diffraction as a methodology means exploring *the effect* of the difference which emerges. The effects from the intra-actions between my research technologies; the participatory observation position as an untypical adult and readings/analysis of my observation notes. The context; the school and visiting dance performance, and the seventh-grade children, plus some other children from the sixth grade in this scenario. This also implies an open-ended researcher-researched relationship, where positions are entangled — shifting and shaping each other.

Barad argues for onto-epistemology, defined as the study “of practice of knowing in being”.<sup>39</sup> A diffractive methodology operationalizes onto-epistemology by recognizing the researcher’s messy, embodied, interconnected relationship with the data and the-becoming-with-the-data<sup>40</sup> and here in this article, this applies to my interconnected relationship with children-becoming-an-audience.

The phenomenon of diffraction has been developed by Haraway<sup>41</sup> and Barad,<sup>42</sup> and originally derives from physics. Diffraction depicts the reconfigurations of ocean waves when they encounter an obstruction such as a rock or a rock opening. Diffraction describes the wave pattern as they overlap, bend, and spread. The interesting thing about diffraction is that the waves change themselves as a result of the obstruction. The original wave remains partly in the new wave after its transformation, and this process continues, wave after wave.<sup>43</sup>

“Diffraction is also an apt metaphor for describing the methodological approach that I use of reading insights through one another in attending to and responding to the details and specificities of relations of difference and how they matter.”<sup>44</sup>

In this way, diffractive methodology offers a metaphor for understanding the production of knowledge when it pertains to children becoming an audience at school. The wet leggings and the notes from my fieldwork, memories positioned as an untypical adult, constitute an obstacle that overlaps my embodied theorising so that I read diffractively one through the other. In this model, it is not possible for me as the researcher to perform my analysis from a separated position. Instead I, as the fieldwork researcher in the position of the untypical adult, the notes, the differing logic and discourses around school, the children as an audience, the performing arts for youth, all these elements are within reach, they are all intra-acting.

When thinking about data, I draw inspiration from Maggie MacLure, professor at Manchester Metropolitan University, and her work developing qualitative theory and methods.<sup>45</sup> She suggests a new materialistic way of thinking about data, where data no longer can be seen as a “mass” waiting to be informed by the researcher’s coding system. MacLure encourages others not to exclude strange, chaotic, or embarrassing moments simply because they do not fit into themes or meanings. Instead, let them grow and glow like crystals at the edges that work as threads in the research that help the researcher refrain from their “own banality of ethnographic and other codes that hold them in place.”<sup>46</sup> Moments that continue to haunt us can also be a constitutive force that works in ways which disrupt the researcher’s power to delineate what matters<sup>47</sup>, a threshold between knowing and unknowing that prevents data from being “...a wonder from being wholly contained or recuperated as knowledge, and thus affords an opening onto the new.”<sup>48</sup>

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38 Barad 2007.

39 Barad 2007, 185.

40 Hultman & Lenz Taguchi 2010; MacLure 2013.

41 Haraway 1992.

42 Barad 2007.

43 Barad 2007.

44 Barad 2007, 71.

45 MacLure 2013a.

46 MacLure 2013b, 229.

47 Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010.

48 MacLure 2013b, 228.

This also applies when something gets in the way, like an object or a thing; like wet leggings on a girl in a dance performance. By following the wet leggings, the becoming of an audience can be understood in other ways and offers a disturbance or transcendence of how the audience becomes through their entanglement with the thing.

I have now outlined some of my theoretical thinking. A processual and relational way of thinking that breaks with a stable understanding of the world as consisting of bounded units and as something waiting, out there. Formed by new materialist theory, I adopt this thinking to open up possibilities for understanding children becoming an audience at school, an ongoing process in a relational field, where human and non-human forces are equally at play in constituting the audience-becoming process and are also entangled with me as a researcher and my choices. Now, I will move on to the dance performance, the wet leggings, and how they intra-act with the dance performance in relation to becoming an audience.

### **The Dance Performance Arrives and Does Something with Clothing**

“When morning reading is over, the class teacher tells us, ‘The dance company Running Sculpture is coming to school today with a dance performance, and they will also be here tomorrow, when we must join in. We need to take part and to ‘move’, so it is important not to wear jeans or trousers that are too tight. Everyone must remember clothes that they can move in. The dance performance will be between 12.30 and 2.00 p.m. We are going to be a participating audience together with the sixth grade.’ Sten,<sup>49</sup> a seventh-grade student, responds. He says, ‘what a bummer’ to be a participating audience with sixth-grade students, he would have preferred ninth graders. ‘It would have been so much cooler,’ says Sten. The class teacher interrupts, ‘What do you have to remember tomorrow, Sten?’ Sten replies: ‘Clothes to move in. Sportswear.’”<sup>50</sup>

Then there is the matter of the clothes I have to wear. I am writing in my notebook for The School: “...it ends with a soft sweater and soft pants, but I think about it a lot. I think it seems too enthusiastic to put clothes on that look too much like dancewear. I have to wear the same clothes all day and I feel a sense of uncertainty as I do not want to stand out too much in my position as the ‘atypical adult’ amongst the seventh graders. I also feel an old shyness from my own school time, which is about being consistent and reserved in how I express myself. Not to change too much. I wonder if it is the same for the seventh graders that I am with? (...)”

“On the day, I am noting that many students have not changed their clothes from the day before! This means that there are many who are wearing jeans and other clothes that do not look like movement clothing, but rather the clothing that they wore the day before. They look like themselves in their choice of clothes. Sten is wearing Adidas bottoms and so are Bo and Michael. I cannot stop thinking about whether it’s easier for them, Sten, Bo, and Michael, to put on clothes to move in, since they do sport and they are often wearing clothes suitable for sport performance. Sten sometimes wears a football kit because he plays for the school team and participates in a school tournament within the municipality, whereas Bo told me that he plays handball. Today no one mentions clothing or the fact that some are wearing exercise clothing and others are not. The class teacher has soft trousers on which are similar to mine, slightly loose, everyday trousers which you can perform some types of movements in.”<sup>51</sup>

Clothes as a marker of class, status, and identity and the communicative function of clothing are discussed in cultural studies, material cultural studies, and in anthropology. Within feminist research there is a growing interest in uncovering how clothes (co-)produce gender, age, and ethnic subjectivities.<sup>52</sup> In English-speaking countries, there is a focus on how school students express individuality, suitability, and resistance when wearing school

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49 All the children have created their own researcher alias, so the names you find in this article are made up as a part of becoming a child-co-researcher, and a part of the ethical considerations for researching *with* children. Sørensen 2021, 38-43.

50 From my notebook. I write my observations down during my Ph.d. Projekt. This is from a primary school and a dance performance “With the body on discovery” visiting. Sørensen 2018.

51 From my notebook. I write my observations down during my Ph.d. Projekt. This is from a primary school and a dance performance “With the body on discovery” visiting. Sørensen 2018.

52 See e.g. Staunæs 2004; Taylor 2013.



uniforms,<sup>53</sup> and how clothes can have agency as “power-things”,<sup>54</sup> linking gender and bodies in gendered materialities.<sup>55</sup> Clothes can indicate a financial priority or status whilst the little details such as how to wear a shirt, what brand it is, or that way you roll up your trousers can be an extremely serious matter and determine whether you are included or excluded from the group.<sup>56</sup>

Clothes signal something to the outside world and are something through which you can present yourself in certain ways. I feel my-self, my-body and the desire to not stick out too much, not to make too much noise with my attire. I want to “fit in”, look like “myself” or, more precisely, the “myself” I was when I visited this school previously; not to be too visible in terms of image or too different from what I was on previous occasions. My choice of attire becomes an expression of a kind of stability as the untypical adult of myself, I think that the others can recognize this. Perhaps some of the same aspects are at stake for the three boys who appear in sportswear? Considerations of how they can find the balance between, on the one hand, being as recognisable at school as Bo, Sten, and Michael and, on the other hand, fulfil yesterday’s message from the class teacher of wearing clothes that they can move in. Maybe wearing exercise clothes to fit for the dance performance is not an expression of anything. Maybe they would have worn the same clothes regardless of the performance? This applies to everyone here. No one wants to stand out too much at school, to be too different from the day before.

In other words, your choice of clothes helps to make a person and it is something you choose to do. It matters how you appear in the class alongside everyone else, and it matters for who you can become. Clothing intra-acts with the dance performance when we are asked to wear clothes to move in for the performance. The fact that so few seventh graders put on clothes to move in upholds my experience that dance performances are something that comes to visit, something unfamiliar that falls into a different context than The School. The invitation to be an audience – wearing clothes to move in – is not visible to us as an audience. All the students look like they did yesterday. It reminds me that the dance performance was not written into the time schedule, on the board, that morning.

A student wrote the schedule for the day and omitted the dance performance. The board’s schedule said “History”, which was the subject that would otherwise have been taught. Dance clothes, dance performances were not visible in the classroom nor in our clothes, but it happened anyway!

“When we get over to the hall, we are met by one of the dancers. He wears Adidas clothes. They are the colour of grass, cut into pieces and stitched together in new ways. He moves in soft sweeping motions across the floor. He asks us to follow and tells us that we must get involved in what will happen in a little while. He tells us that we must participate.”<sup>57</sup>

The dancer’s Adidas outfit evokes a recognition in me and I think that the grass-green tracksuit is at once a negotiation of recognition and transcendence. A negotiation of being suitably recognisable – dressed – as one who has to move in clothes, like several of the seventh-grade boys, and, on the other hand, as a performing dancer. With the clothes cut and sewn together in new ways, the collage transcends Adidas as a sportswear brand and becomes a form-fitting one-piece suit. An “everyday-with-a-twist” performing costume. The dancer is disturbing the status quo with it but, at the same time, he is recognisable and over-dressed. This costume is connected to the sweeping motions and invites us into another universe, all at once recognisable and transcending – just like the green Adidas clothes he wears.

It is a dance performance where we are divided into groups with different colour headphones: red, green, and blue. The colour of the headphones determines the different groups. As the audience, we are invited to participate in the performance. A dancing, investigating,

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53 Pomerantz & Raby 2020.

54 cf. Bennett 2004.

55 Taylor 2013.

56 Pomerantz 2018; Pomerantz & Raby 2020; Staunæs 2004.

57 From my notebook. I write my observations down during my Ph.d. Projekt. This is from a primary school and a dance performance “With the body on discovery” visiting. Sørensen 2018.

guided performance that reminds me of a computer game, shaped in an interactive game dramaturgy.<sup>58</sup>

### **The Wet Pants**

During the dance performance, we must carry out various tasks in different groups, taking turns to be active and participatory and also to sit still and observe what is happening. One of the tasks consists of a kind of "Successor to the King". In the green group, which I am in, we have chosen an image out of several and we will perform three movements defined in the image. Part of the task is that one person in our group must be the front dancer, the "King". After a couple of moments of silence, a girl from the sixth grade agrees to be the King. She dances in front with a lot of energy and after a short time, I notice that her pink leggings are wet, as if she has sat in some kind of liquid or peed in them. It is not a small stain, but a wet stain from the seat of the pants and down her thighs. She seems unaffected, as if she hasn't noticed anything.

I can hear some of the seventh-grade boys who, like me, also are in the green group. They are talking about the pants and whether the girl has peed in them, or not. We dance after her and do her moves. I feel a sense of discomfort and I want to do something. To take her with me out of this situation and find her a pair of dry pants. I do not do anything and no one else does anything either.

The wet pants change the dance performance, taking the focus away from what else is happening. The wet trousers become foregrounded in a piece of choreography that otherwise involves participation and becoming an audience as an active co-creator. The wet leggings intra-act with the performance. They create a shift in my own focus and for some of the audience who put their heads together and whisper. It propagates a feeling of discomfort. A discomfort emerges in me too. I become unsure of how I can act on this.

I am aware of my ambition to be an untypical adult, which I (kind of) hide behind in the moment. I tell myself that in this situation this means not to be adult-like, not to enforce the rules and not to take adult responsibility for what is happening,<sup>59</sup> but is it fair to stick to this idea given the situation? If I was her friend, what would I do then? If I had known her a little better, (she was in the 7th grade where I am doing my research) would I have done something? I think about the girl with the wet pants. I think about how exposed she is in a particular kind of way and how it would create a lot of attention around her were I to intervene. Next to this, I think there must be someone, another adult in this room, who knows her and maybe knows if there is a reason why her pants are wet, someone who can take care of her in the right way.

I can ask, "what is it to be this?",<sup>60</sup> being exposed, being in a particular position of being more exposed towards the other audience in the dance performance. Something which the wet pants make visible. They materialize the specific visibility that lies in going to the front, being centre stage, because the pants and the wet stain remain visible to all. It also indicates that clothes do something, co-organize, and have thing-power.<sup>61</sup>

And "how is this possible?"<sup>62</sup> In this reading, the wet pants become more than a pair of pants. They become wet pants on a girl whom I pity because she is spoken of as the one who peed her pants and because she is in such an exposed position, separate to the rest of us, and because my own relationship of inaction to the situation challenges my ethics. I am looking for different explanations; did the pants become wet because she sat in some kind of liquid? Is she someone who is ostracized from the group since no friends have said anything to her? Or have they? Does she know her pants are wet and does not care? The wet pants intra-act with the girl, becoming the dualistic separation between where the human individual and the non-human clothes dissolves. The wet pants show the vulnerability inherent in the exposure, which can point to a loss of control since the girl acts like she does not know at all,

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58 Lehmann, 2007

59 Damgaard 2015; Warming 2005, 2011; Sørensen 2021.

60 Davies 2014b, 738.

61 cf. Bennett 2004.

62 Davies 2014b, 738.

dancing on with her wet pants untouched.

In a counter-narrative, the girl and her wet pants become a “killjoy”,<sup>63</sup> dancing with wet pants, knowing that the rest of us are thinking “everything possible” about the wet pants and her. That she, as a killjoy, has chosen to be careless, to not care about the wet pants. The dance performance gives her the opportunity to become this. To be completely indifferent and to continue wearing the wet pants as a comment of some kind, as in to “kill joy”. To kill the joy of others positioning her as someone to pity. To kill the joy of an inter-active dance performance, where the wet leggings intra-act with her in the audience, opening up a dilemma – should someone act regarding the wet leggings? And, in this case, who?

Moving towards the philosophy of Karen Barad, I have asked what this material turn towards a more-than-human looks like in terms of becoming an audience? To be able to answer this question, I have to look closer at the agency of more than human actors in the dance performance. To regard the physical dimensions, qualities, and materials present in the space, as actors equal to human actors, and to work together with the environment, adding a new consciousness of being entangled with, not separated from, our material world.

This approach, to try to decentre the human self and the focus on individuality, is to question human supremacy in the world. In this dance performance, it would mean regarding all material actors as living agents participating together as an entanglement. Not to mention those carried by the participating audience.

This material consciousness is already included and part of the dance performance, such as the headphones we as the audience have. This divides us into different groups and makes us move in different patterns guided by actors dressed up in the same colour as the headphones. But, how about the wet pants, how are they allowed to act? It is only possible to notice the wet pants on the dancing girl because the performance is an interactive performance.

“Within the interactive performing arts, there is the latent possibility of theatre *for* children becoming theatre *with* children, and sometimes even theatre *by* children, that is when children are allowed to activate their own play culture.”<sup>64</sup> Lise Hovik, a Norwegian drama and art professor, writes about the Sesam project where she and Nagel investigated inter-active theatre.<sup>65</sup>

They argue that it requires other skills than those of a performer in participant-based performing arts. Nagel and Hovik set up a six-step continuum going from the silent observer to the co-creative participant with room for children’s audience participation, which may include play and children’s own creative skills: “Interactive theater for children moves in the span between full artistic control and children’s (from an adult’s perspective) chaotic play. The performers’ need for control over tools such as time, space, narration and grades can thus come into conflict with the children’s co-creative imagination and need for physical play. As the theater really opens up children’s play, at the same time, a risk zone is created which can be artistically challenging for the performers.”<sup>66</sup>

Nagel and Hovik point out that as an actor or dancer, you must be aware of the unexpected, “to perform interactively for children, you must be able to grasp the unexpected in children’s imaginations or physical inventions.”<sup>67</sup>

But becoming an audience entangled with the clothes you are wearing also requires an arena for how the-more-than-human intra-acts, such as in the case of the wet pants on the girl. Thing power,<sup>68</sup> things as vital players in the world as they intra-act with the performance, but which is also connected to a participating audience, the particular exposure of the girl in a discursive-material reading where wet pants can be a thing to pity or empower. The wet pants point to an opening in the thinking surrounding becoming an audience and allow for the possibility for intra-active becoming as an audience with the performance, with the

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63 Ahmed 2018.

64 Hovik 2022, 41.

65 Nagel & Hovik 2014.

66 Nagel & Hovik 2014, 2.

67 Nagel & Hovik 2014.

68 Bennett 2004, 349.

other audience members, and the non-human things that make the unexpected elements even more complex. Anything can happen when you are a participating audience, not only because of human actors but also because of the non-human.

In this case, it is an expression for “a thing”, a pair of wet pants intra-acts with the concept of the performance and it challenges me, provoking an ethical dilemma: should I intervene? And, also as a researcher, should I write about them?

### **Summing Up, Like Waves**

In this article, I wanted to reconfigure the way in which we might think about how children as an audience come into being at school. The dancing girl with the wet leggings, as an audience, does not pre-exist the relation; she comes into being when “existence is not an individual affair”, as there is no “independent, self-contained existence” in the world, says Barad.<sup>69</sup> From this point of view, an audience therefore does not pre-exist their interactions in the world, rather they emerge because of them. Looking at the more than-human can help us keep in mind that the line of becoming an audience emerges from both the human and non-human and it is not simply out there ready to be collected as a single whole.

I want to contribute to thing-power and the new-materialist perspective on becoming an audience by raising the question: “How do things, such as wet pants, become entangled in the process of becoming an audience when a touring dance ensemble visits a school?” I have focused on data that glows<sup>70</sup> (in this article a pair of wet leggings) as a part of a diffractive methodology that also implies an open-ended researcher-researched relationship, where positions are entangled — shifting and shaping each other. A performative approach — meaning my performance of research emerges in the same movement as the children as an audience becoming *with* the world. It is in these intra-actions (between me, children, school, dance performance), where troubles, cluttering, possibilities, diversions, or enforcements occur, and in which set off new directions in the research process.

To disturb the “taken for granted” knowledge. To open up to the new in the gap between knowing-and-not-knowing, this work orients me to engage further; in this case clothing that entangles with my own concerns dressing for an interactive dance performance, the wet leggings and how they become a part of becoming an audience entangled with The School, and one exposed audience member in an inter-active performance. In this, materiality overlaps with ethical discourses as a researcher, dancer, friend, teacher, my own feelings of soft clothes, memories, and that which connects to you, the reader, and your memories, feelings, and worldly relations. From this perspective, children becoming an audience is a never-ending enfolding of thing-power, non-human and human, and speculative practices. It is open-ended and you, as the reader, are now a part of it. Like waves, wave after wave.

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69 Barad 2007, xi.

70 cf. MacLure 2013b.

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