

## **Editorial: Risking Erasure? Posthumanist Research Practices and Figurations of (the) Child**

**Guest Editors: Karin Murriss and Jayne Osgood**

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Our shared motivation for this Special Issue was in response to the apparent explosion in posthumanist childhood studies in recent years; to the deep scepticism and distrust it generates in certain quarters; and crucially our concern with detectable formulas that have emerged in such research. As with any ‘new’ paradigm shift, the readiness with which scholars seek to enact the complex approach can undermine or dilute its philosophical underpinnings. Therefore, this Special Issue was intended to slow down and pause, to re-turn to the philosophical potential of posthumanism to transform the questions and open-ended enquiries it enables.

Posthumanism deserves recognition for the important opportunities it has created, the exciting possibilities for fresh ways of thinking about and be(coming) with ‘child’. There is little doubt that ‘new’ approaches to research with, for and about child/hood are needed in our ever more complex multispecies, more-than-(Adult)human existence, shaped by the growing threat of planetary destruction as a human habitat. There is an urgent need for childhood scholars to reappraise our relationships to each other and to ‘the’ world, which posthumanism insists must be carefully attuned and attended to. The urgency with which a different relationality that disrupts Western binary logic and unilinear temporalities is needed to find ways to live (and die) well together (Barad, 2007; Tsing, 2015; Haraway, 2016) makes particular demands of childhood scholars. We face an imperative to tune into life in the Anthropocene in more ethical and responsible ways, ways that might best be informed and shaped by child-like figurations (Osgood, 2022, 2023) and diffractive childlike methodologies (Murriss, 2022, Ch 4). To that end this Special Issue seeks to elevate ‘child’ and ‘childing’ practices in research (Murriss & Borchers, 2019) so that ‘the’ world can be encountered by troubling human-centred optics and space as an empty container that can be filled (Barad, 2007). The ontological shift from Newtonian physics and Cartesian dualist notions of the self completely changes shifts (or at the very least shakes) the foundations upon which knowledge and knowing get produced.

It is by inviting a sense of serious playfulness, that posthumanist child(hood) scholars insist that a reconfiguration of ‘child’ brings other elements, actors, atmospheres and problematics into our research frames. What can Adults learn about researching differently by attuning to the figuration of posthuman child?.

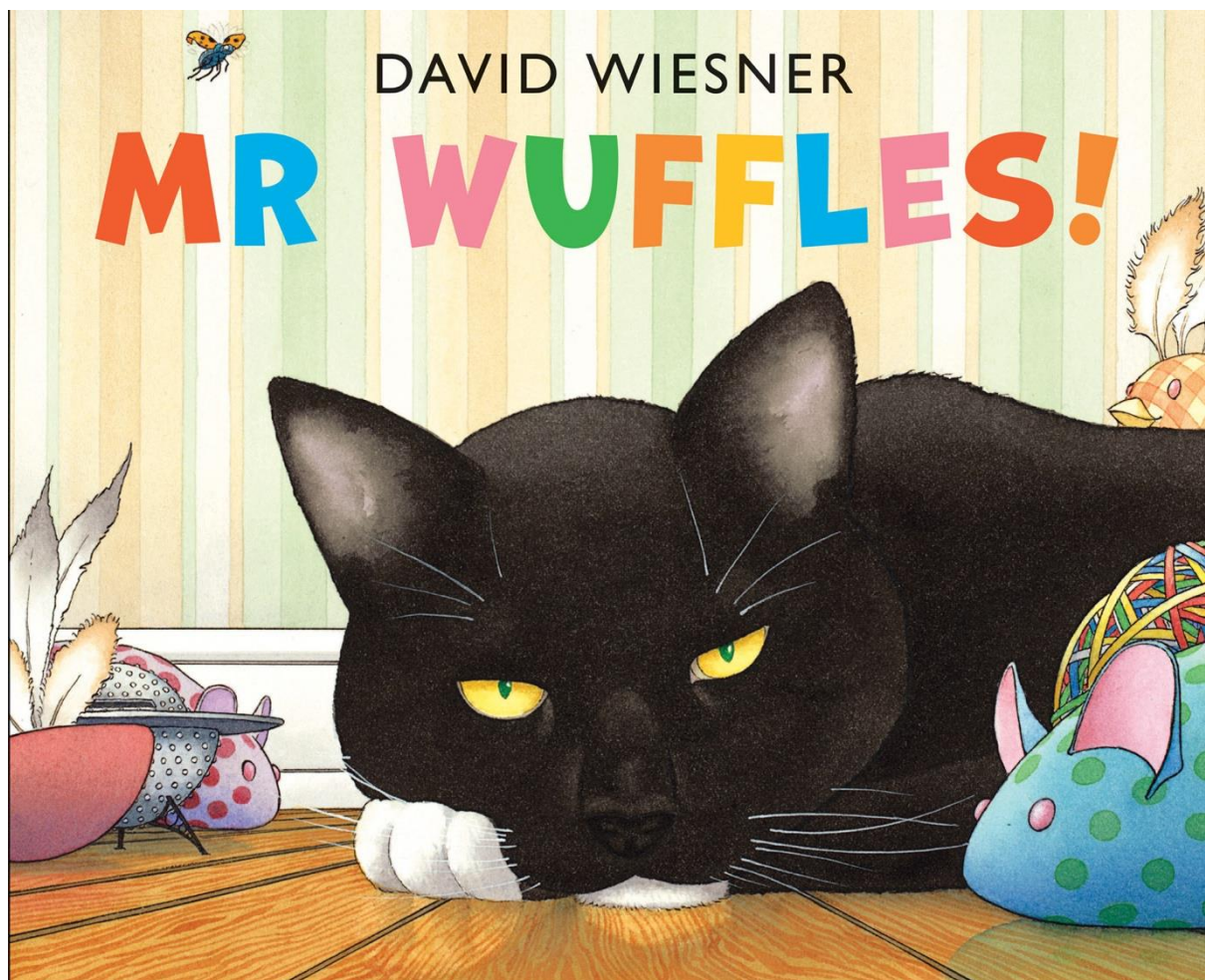
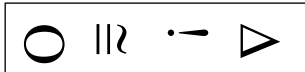


Figure 1: Mr Wuffles picturebook

*Mr Wuffles!* (Weisner, 2013; Figure 1) offers a seriously playful opening for other, non-Anthropocentric, linguistically coded ways to encounter the world. In this original picturebook, the audience is presented with “a worldless book that is full of dialogue”, but

“can’t be read”.<sup>1</sup> After coming up with the initial idea, David Wiesner struggled for many years to find a narrative he was happy with. Only after endless drawings, scribbles and doodles central to the initial ideas and in particular after finding inspiration in Marcel Duchamps’ *The Large Glass*, he invented a visual secret language for each of his characters: “I now had a small amount of human language, a whole lot of alien language, a bunch of bug language, and a bit of cat language”<sup>2</sup>.

With geometric forms and the help of linguist Nathan Sanders, seamstress Emily and Cricket the cat, the “fake” hieroglyphic languages comprise around 30 symbols. These multiple languages are not meant to be understood through signification and by cognitively depicting and referring to things in the world, but like Duchamp’s artefact, they mean what the author means (and of course this reminds us of Lewis Carroll’s play with language and nonsense in *Alice in Wonderland*).

The symbols we created as headings for this introduction are also a playful invention, although not completely random choices. Wiesner wanted the symbols to *feel* like a language and their meanings can be inferred from “the context of the pictures - action, facial expressions, body language”<sup>3</sup>. Our context is about the multiplicity of languages involved in articulating (the) posthuman child. Through the exclamation and question marks as well as the other shapes we articulate wonder, curiosity and urgency where childhood studies might turn to next in its exploration of what it means to decentre (the) child human. We wonder, and we invited contributing authors to also wonder: is decentring the same as ‘dissolving’, ‘destructing’, ‘de(con)structing’ or even ‘erasing’? As always with philosophical enquiries we are left with more questions than answers. It is with those questions the authors in this special edition have considered complex figurations of ‘posthuman child’ in early childhood research and the tensions it causes in theorising child subjectivity.

For a posthumanist or new materialist, child is constituted by other human and more-than-human relations and this articulation of child subjectivity (‘[the] child’) can cause profound philosophical tensions, dilemmas and misunderstandings. Posthuman child as figuration was introduced by Murriss (2016) to articulate *the empirical fact* that child is always already in relation and doesn’t exist prior to these relations. The collection of papers in this Special Issue are variously inspired by feminist philosophers Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, Karen Barad, Jane Bennett, Erin Manning, Astrida Neimanis and others, to offer figurations of (the) posthuman child that are conceptualised and performed as *more than* a bounded body, (a) porous self, always connected, embedded and embodied, dynamic and active. ‘Posthuman child’ escapes definition and pinning down as it doesn’t signify a bounded body in the world, it must be understood as constantly being formed through relationalities. This is the reason we put ‘the’ between brackets in ‘(the) posthuman child’. But does decentring (the) child human in this way necessarily mean a ‘flat ontology’- a flattening of power relations?

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<sup>1</sup> From: <http://www.davidwiesner.com/work/say-what/>

<sup>2</sup> See footnote 1.

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 1

Indeed, as some critical voices have argued, ontologies whereby all bodies are equal, can push patterns of exploitation and concerns about justice, power and violence into the background (Åsberg & Neimanis, 2013). Lindgren (2020) also insists that in her figuration of posthuman child the removal from hierarchical categorisations in a flat ontology should not come with, for example, relinquishing individual rights. As Hackett and colleagues (2020, p.4) put it, drawing the attention to materiality, “the micro, the in-the-moment, the contingent and the situated nature of subject positions”, the “political, historical, biographical and intersectional elements with which we are all, always, inextricably tangled” can get lost (Hackett et al., 2020, p.4). Arguing against a ‘flat’ ethics, Tammi (2019, p.1326) asks: “how do different versions of child and adult emerge from the complex interplay, networking and orchestration of different natural, discursive, collective, and hybrid materials?”. On the other hand, it could be argued that positing a flat ontological plane may be precisely the ethical and political strategies we need to undermine inequities by showing they are human creations in the first place. After all, Adult human’s normative epistemologies have introduced the categorisations, binaries and hierarchies that include and exclude. They have created the binary logic child humans need to learn systematically through their schooling and posthumanism urges us to *unlearn*.

In our re-turning to the figuration of (the) posthuman child, we need to re-consider, to what extent positing (as the posthumanism we subscribe to does) that all bodies are radically entangled and have no fixed, separate determinate boundaries, we, Adults, put (the) child at risk of erasure. It is this complexity we engage with through this Special Issue.

The posthuman figuration of (the) child is not mainstream. Instead, what researchers tend to bring to their research practices are assumptions about child in *abstraction*. And it is this latter, abstract notion of the universal child that has become the signifier of all ‘young human beings’ by professionals and researchers globally. Biologically and physiologically categorised by, for instance, height, weight, neurological state, linguistic or motoric distinctives (Kennedy, 2006, pp.1-2), child human as a concept has come to signify the chronologically developing child (e.g., [the] child of the UNCRC). It has become the norm by which each young individual is measured and by using so-called natural talents, intelligence and abilities as markers of ‘full humanity’ or ‘Man’ (Wynter, 2003), the always non-innocent, ethico-political dimensions of the concept ‘child’ and ‘human’ remain hidden.

Of course, in academia, the way in which (the) child human is theorised has shifted significantly. Indeed, various attempts have been made to decouple human’s ability from age (Wall, 2016; Haynes & Murriss, 2019), and trouble the way in which younger humans are measured (by Adult humans) in reference to ‘adulthood’ through the routine use of psychological, developmental and chronological criteria (see, for example, Burman, 2008; Bohlmann and Hickey-Moody, 2019; Kennedy and Kohan, 2017). Yet, it is remarkable how resilient early childhood education practices and policies are to these changed figurations of (the) child inspired by poststructuralist and new materialist theories, silencing the political

dimension of the concept of child human itself. However, although useful background, and rightly researched extensively elsewhere, this is not our main interest here.

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This special issue is an experiment in extending the ground-breaking work that feminist new materialists and posthumanists have made to reconfiguring human agency by focusing on decentering the human and their explorations of what this means for figurations of (the) child. The central concern is with how posthumanist research can be done that refuses erasure by (re)turning to ethico-onto-epistemological concerns including intersectionality, agency, deconstruction, situated knowledges, agency and partial perspectives. This focus seems urgently needed because there is a growing wave of scholarship that readily critiques posthumanist approaches but tends to rest upon unwarranted assumptions and superficial engagements with its philosophical underpinnings. Putting new materialism and posthumanism to work to reconfigure subjectivity and agency in research is philosophically challenging because it requires fundamental and significant ontological and epistemological shifts. Therefore, it is only to be expected that posthumanist research has been met with dismay and sometimes disdain from various quarters, for varied reasons.

The posthumanist project is committed to philosophically reconfiguring who and what counts as (fully) human and to show why and how this ontological (re)turn matters ethically and politically (Murriss, 2016; Osgood and Robinson, 2019). Yet this has rightly been called into question by Black, antiracist and Indigenous scholars who have argued that posthumanists appear unaware of their own location and make universalising claims about ‘the’ human while silent about past and present non-western or Indigenous scholarship (Hunt, 2014; Nxumalo, 2020; Tuck, McKenzie & McCoy, 2014; Todd, 2016; Watts, 2013). In essence, many people are still struggling to have their humanity recognised, hence “dissolving” the category of the human (Hackett, MacLure and Pahl, 2020, p.6) at this historical juncture amounts to White privilege and also Adult privilege (Arculus & MacRae, 2022, forthcoming). After all, the concept of ‘human’ tends to refer to Adults, not child humans. These are important considerations, the papers this Special Issue engage with, in diverse ways.

Although the political inclusion of historically marginalised groups is gaining traction in posthumanist research, the inclusion of children as political agents is not. Children might have legal and moral rights, but no political rights, because they lack the kind of speech and reason (capacities considered to distinguish humans from animals) that is presupposed by democratic institutions (Rollo, 2016). Indeed, there is a remarkable silence about ‘age’ and childism as exclusionary, ironically even in the posthumanism literature (Haynes & Murriss, 2019). Braidotti describes “the missing peoples” of humanism as “real-life subjects whose

knowledge never made it into any of the official cartographies” (Braidotti, 2018, p.21). But who is included and excluded in her list of ‘missing peoples’? The liberating ethical task *we* face, Braidotti urges, is to help turn painful experiences of missing peoples’ “inexistence into generative relational encounters and knowledge production” (p.21). But who is Braidotti’s ‘we’? Even when posthumanists refer to the phrase ‘human exceptionalism’ as something to be disrupted, they tend to assume adult humans of a particular age and their claims to knowledge based on speech and reason. Might children be amongst the missing peoples of posthumanism? Enquiring into this question, requires paying attention to the intricate details of what posthumanists mean by ‘dissolving the category of the human’ (Hackett, MacLure and Pahl, 2020, p.6) and by implication, what it means to dissolve the category of the *young* human. Articles in this special edition of the journal offer examples of posthumanist research that refuse to erase child subjectivity and that maintain a keen focus on the situatedness of childhoods as they become through relational entanglements.

We contend that the theoretical and political frame of postmodernism, postcolonialism and posthumanism involves a *deconstruction*, not a *destruction*, of the human; posthumanists are *anti-humanists*, not *anti-humans* (Ferrando, 2020, p.2). The *category* of the human is dissolved, not the human itself. Deconstruction or de(con)struction (Barad, 2017) of the human involves understanding the human as part of an intra-connected network of socio-political, material-discursive, nature-culture, human-nonhuman relations. The posthuman practice of decentring the human does not involve erasure of the fleshy individual human through (maybe) violent means (Ferrando, 2020), but centres around the conceptual work of reconfiguring what ‘the human’ (and by implication ‘child’) *is* historically and symbolically and what she can become. De(con)structing the human is philosophically complex, hence easily misunderstood.

A steadily growing body of feminist new materialist and posthumanist approaches to the study of early childhood (e.g., Blaise, Duhn, Hackett, Lenz Taguchi, Malone, Murriss, Nxumalo, Pacini-Ketchabaw, Osgood, Otterstad, Rautio, Ritchie, Taylor among many others) argues for the embodied nature of such enquiry, stressing the importance of ‘situated knowledges’ and ‘partial perspectives’ (Haraway, 1988). Braidotti argues that figurations demand a sense of “accountability for one’s locations” and a “self-reflexivity” that is not an individual activity, but an intra-active process that “relies upon a social network of exchanges” (Braidotti, 2002, p.69). As she goes on to explain:

The figurations that emerge from this process act as a spotlight that illuminates aspects of one’s practice which were blindspots before. By extension, new figurations of the subject...function like conceptual *personae*. As such, they are no metaphor, but rather on the critical level, materially embedded, embodying accounts of one’s power-relations. On the creative level they express the rate of change, transformation of affirmative deconstruction of the power one inhabits. (Braidotti, 2002, p.69)

In the posthumanist mode research is characterised by a series of unanticipated, affectively charged processes that attend to what gets produced through intra-actions where human, more and other-than-human events and encounters open up enquiries and allow the everyday, taken-for-granted to be reimagined, in often deeply political, ethical, enmeshed and accountable ways (Strom et al, 2019). This scholarship is shaped by, and rests upon, a feminist commitment to ‘put theory to work’ or to ‘think with theory’ (Mazzei & Jackson, 2012) and so generate knowledge that has the capacity to tell other, worldly, stories (Haraway, 2016) that seek to address some of the silences that Braidotti’s ‘missing peoples’(children included) have been subjected to.

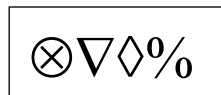
It is of concern that some critics dismiss posthumanism by critiquing posthumanist readings of research practices, without engaging directly with the theorists who have inspired the researchers. As argued by Ferrando (2020, p.1) “some scholars have promptly entered the posthuman field, without a thorough investigation of the posthuman debate itself, thus basing their arguments on unwarranted premises and assumptions, generating confusion and even dismay”. For example, poststructuralist and sociologist Eva Bendix Petersen (2018) rejects Banerjee and Blaise’s claim (2013) that their reading of non-human air as agential in Hong Kong offers something new. It is disappointing that, according to Petersen’s own admission and even justification (2013, p.7), only this one paper was examined, for “pragmatic” reasons although the critique has been taken up as if this one article was somehow representative of all posthumanist and new materialist research (Rekert, 2016). Conclusions are drawn about the value of new materialist and posthumanist research on the basis of a single paper. This is particularly worrying, because Petersen avoids engaging directly with Karen Barad’s germinal work *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007) and at the same time suggests that Banerjee and Blaise misappropriate Barad’s notion of intra-action. Such academic practices are potentially damaging because alternative (diffractive and generative) ways of engaging with colleagues’ scholarship are fundamental to the ethos of feminist posthumanist research (see [www.PhEMaterialism.org](http://www.PhEMaterialism.org)). As Banerjee and Blaise (2018, p. 11) point out in their response to Petersen’s critique, Karen Barad as well as Brian Massumi and famously Bruno Latour (2004, p. 225) in his declaration that ‘critique has run out of steam’ have been “instrumental in positing critiques that are affirmative and eventful”.

The contributions to this Special Issue affirmatively and eventfully engage in critical scholarship that works to extend complex figurations of (the) posthuman child in contemporary research by calling into question what agency is, what it means and what it does. We provoked our authors to consider the idea of a ‘flat ontology’ -i.e. “the human researcher [a]s not privileged over the nonhuman air” (Banerjee & Blaise, 2013) and invited them to consider whether (and in what ways) the inclusion of the nonhuman as a discrete and separate agential entity depoliticises the human subject (Petersen, 2013, Kipnis, 2015; Rekert, 2016, 2018) in childhood research. Increasingly postqualitative researchers are drawing on and are inspired by the ontological ‘unlearning’ that posthumanism requires. This involves calling into question the Anthropomorphic logic framing ideas about agency, i.e., willful (human) intentionality. Posthumanism insists that agencies are relational, co-constituted and constantly becoming through intra-action. Unfortunately, though, it appears

that Barad's 'intra-action', at the heart of the relational ontology of agential realism is frequently misunderstood in contemporary studies of childhood. As a result, claims made by posthumanist researchers that posthumanism offers perspectives and insights that are 'new' in research are rejected. Therefore, the articles that have been included grapple with agencies as relationally generated, hybrid, multi-layered, material-discursive, often internally contradictory, interconnected and web-like and attend to what this makes possible in attempts to extend figurations of (the) posthuman child.

It has been interesting to notice how challenging the task has been for many of the authors in complexifying posthumanist child/hood studies – in that sense articulating a 'second wave'. We kept reminding ourselves – as well as our contributors- to be guided by questions such as: 'Does posthumanist childhood research depoliticise our research practices, to an extent that 'child' drops out of the equation altogether?' and 'Where or what is 'child' when the human is 'dissolved' or de(con)structed?'. In particular we urged the authors to address the following three questions by engaging with the posthumanist and feminist new materialist literature and to illuminate their theoretical claims through examples from research and pedagogical practices:

- How can/do we keep our childhood studies political?
- How do posthumanist researchers keep (the) child in play when they neither 'follow the child' nor make 'child' central to their investigations?
- How can posthumanist research make a difference to childhood (in the broadest, worldly sense)?



This collection of articles can be understood as a diffractive practice of contestation and creation for new insights and practices to e/merge by doing justice to the complexities of in/determinate figurations of (the) posthuman child. Resisting definition, they help shift, or at least shake, the ontological ground on which specific knowledge claims are made about child subjectivity and agency in contemporary research practices.

The issue opens with a piece by Ann-Hege Lorvik, Ann Merete Otterstad and Kelly Boucher entitled 'Jeg skal sjekke ...' Urban buggy wayfaring and adventurous lines with data-ing and reconfigurations of children'. The authors refrain from referring to posthumanism, or posthuman child. Instead, they decentre "the human as the superior species in the world" and attend "to the dynamic of adults having power over children" by focusing on becoming child. By paying attention to *minor gestures* and 'sjekking/checking' what is happening they notice *what else* might become. Also inspired by Manning's praxis of *research-creation*, they think-with and respond to humans and more-than-humans as already in relation and as inseparably connected, including regarding digital technologies as co-participants in data-ing. Troubling subject-driven notions of agency ("undoing the I"), they emphasise sight, sound, affect and



motion. Arresting, de-coded and re-coded images of diffracted textured lines speculatively experiment with the movements of collective buggy walking through urbanised city surfaces. to arrive at other ways of encountering child through research undertaken in a different key.

Inspired by Jane Bennett's new materialism and her notion of 'circuits of sympathy', Gloria Quinones and Iris Duhn argue that posthuman child is neither in the centre, nor decentred, but part of the agentic physical force of sympathetic circuits and atmospheric flows that connect (the) child's body with the 'external' world. They put to work Bennett's recent work on 'influx' and 'efflux' to argue that what they refer to as 'the posthuman child' is always plugged into creative political circuits of vibrant materials and forces. Their article *Circuits of Sympathy: Posthuman Child, Vibrant Forces, Things and Places* offers performative examples of Australian pre-service teachers engaging with sympathy (e.g., pain, love and suffering) as a more-than-human force. Curated examples of their pedagogical documentation of encounters with "posthuman children" during a university early childhood education course show why it matters for the politics of childhood to finely tune into moods, affects and atmospheres created by the vibrant planetary (and other) forces of animals, plants, things and places. Diffracting through Quinones and Duhn's article, we would like to suggest that Cara Furman's 'ghosts' in her article have such more-than-human physical and atmospheric force ('thing-power').

Furman in *Ghosts in the Basement: Re-turning, Re-membering, and Facing the Incalculable in Teacher Education* argues how the ontology of the figure of (the) posthuman child articulates how children live with/in multiple temporalities and can witness ghosts as part of everyday living. By re-visiting her 'own' moving Holocaust basement ghosts in its materiality, she argues that in teacher education it is imperative that we "welcome the ghosts that some children are already engaging with and invite other ghosts to the room". This posthumanist kind of responsibility is a way of producing more just openings for other futures. For example, being open to more-than-human forces and the vibrancy of matter making us thereby more attentive "to the diverse way's children perceive 'reality'" as Quinones and Duhn suggest. Both these articles seem to regard posthuman child as a physical, fleshy entity (at least partly) given in human perception through child observation. In contrast, Theresa Giorza, also inspired by Karen Barad's agential realism, adopts temporal diffraction as her methodology, and (the) posthuman child.

In *Draw Yourself and Write Your Name*, Giorza dwells upon a small selection of performative encounters from a Grade R<sup>4</sup> classroom, that, when approached through a posthumanist onto-ethico-epistemological research framework, offer alternative ways of contemplating what else unfolds through literacy practices and how else 'child' might be encountered. It is by focusing on naming practices, children's artwork and the mobilisation of literacy in the classroom, that placetimetattering and be/coming together with human and nonhuman companions that the lived concept of 'reading' is extended. Children, hands, bodies, names, pages, drawings and ideas enact a literate becoming in an in-between space

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<sup>4</sup> Grade R is the gradually introduced first official Reception year of the South African national curriculum.

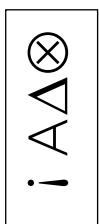
and time outside of what is pedagogically intended. Like Furman, Giorza stresses that making 'child' visible in posthumanist research involves recognising the inseparability of the child from the classroom, the learner from the learning, and furthermore that it demands that the temporal, material and spatial realities that produce 'child' involves noticing the lively entanglements of children to space, place and matter and what that does in the formulation of other ways of viewing 'child' in early childhood contexts.

In *Frictional Matterings: (Re)Thinking Identity and Subjectivity in the Coming-to-Be of Literacies*, the complexity ('frictions') of bringing into conversation with one other intersectionality, identity politics and post-philosophies, is directly addressed. Through a playful analysis of a classroom vignette, Candace R. Kuby, Erin Price, and Tara Gutshall Rucker suggest a more porous notion of beyond or post-intersectionality that refuses to pin down children's identities (e.g., race, gender, dis/abilities as well as additional reductive labels) on a fixed grid. Troubling how these tests, labels, curriculum script-guides and so on produce children and literacies, the authors suggest these grids "to un-happen, not happen, or happen differently". Pushing back at what they call "stereotypical notions of (potentially) reductive intersectional labelling", and "displacing" binaries they suggest that by giving children opportunities to work with and through materials, child is not "diminished" but reconfigured as "fully (in)human". Identity as "eventness" foregrounds relational interconnectivity between child human (and more-than-human) bodies. encounters with "posthuman children" during a university early childhood education course show why it matters for the politics of childhood to finely tune into moods, affects and atmospheres.

The article '*Grappling with the Miseducation of Montessori: a feminist posthuman re-reading of 'child' in early childhood contexts*' also invites a critical engagement with how 'child' gets produced and offers alternative readings by doing justice to the *what else* and *where else* when enacting a posthumanist approach to child(hood) studies. Through a contemporary feminist posthuman re-reading of Montessori educational philosophy as generated within three everyday field work fragments, Jayne Osgood and Sid Mohandas argue for a decentring of humanist 'child' without erasure of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation. Like Kuby, Price and Rucker, this paper offers porous accounts of the ways in which intersectionalities are produced through everyday encounters within early childhood contexts. Profoundly grappling with some of the complexities involved in reconceptualising 'child' in the context of Maria Montessori's own writings, they refuse to fix, contain and codify 'child' "against developmentalist, civilising logic". Inspired by Donna Haraway, their feminist diffractive reading of texts (in the broad sense) attunes to more-than-human relationalities and differences, offering rich material-semiotic accounts of 'child' by foregrounding affect (e.g., suspicion), matter (e.g., snot), porous bodies (e.g., iPad camera) that move (e.g., sweeping). Thus, in their deeply political take on child subjectivity, also in the context of queerness, they move 'ethnographic observation' in a Montessori classroom (and elsewhere) beyond representation towards observations that are "more childlike" by doing justice to the liveliness of the world.

Picking up some of the threads offered by Kuby et al and Osgood & Mohandas, Jaye Johnson Thiel pursues thinking-with-theory as analytic process to make sense of a world where the conditions of possibility exist for neo-liberal ‘child’ to be produced through social media. In *Twitter, PreK Week, and Neoliberal Childhoods: Posthuman Re-imaginings of a Sigh* the everyday politics of childhood and the ways research can attend and attune to inequities while simultaneously engaging in an ontological flattening of the child-subject are explored. By dwelling upon, and persistently re-turning to a tweet sent by a North American state-led organisation during PreK Week, Barad’s concept of the material-discursive apparatus and Bennett’s concept of vibrant matter are mobilised to explore *neoliberal childhoods* as phenomenon. Tweets are understood as public phenomenon that become etched into a digital socio-material archive with a life of its own. By unravelling three threads of capaciousness, the visual, the discursive and the virtual work collectively to un/ravel material consequences for ‘child’. In response, the invitation to address the question *how can/do we keep our childhood studies political?* Thiel contests that posthumanism offers a theoretical and practical conduit for rethinking, reconfiguring and reimagining child-world relations while maintaining a firm focus on issues of equity and justice.

The Special Issue concludes with an article from Karin Murriss and Joanne Peers that directly responds to the Special Issue Call and the three questions it poses. The authors show how the ontological posthumanist shift (of Baradian agential realism) does not erase, but keeps the child human of colour in play, despite the inclusion of the other-than-(Adult)human in its methodologies. In *Go-Pro(blem)s and Possibilities: Keeping the Child Human of Colour in Play in an Interview* a montaging technique (Barad, 2017) is used to explore the philosophical complexity of ‘decentering without erasure’ by re-turning to data generated as part of a project about digital play in South Africa. Their agential realist reading of interview data attunes to *what else is going on*, and the difference this makes for reconfiguring child subjectivity – politically and philosophically. It also makes us think (differently) about ‘interviews’ as research instruments. The researchers literally ‘follow the child’ but in a way that refuses to exclude or erase the more-than-(Adult)human. They are introduced to the Go-Pro(blem) through their non-linear situated encounters in this informal settlement in Cape Town. It is by diffractively reading Karen Barad’s scholarship through visual and aural texts that the paper explores how posthumanist research makes a difference to childhood studies by shifting from Object and Subject to Phenomenon. This ontological shift, they argue, makes it possible for ageist, ableist, racist, extractive and settler-colonial logics in education research to explode.



## **An inevitably, multiple, in/conclusive conclusion**

Taking into account how diverse posthumanism as a philosophy is, it didn't really come as a surprise how the three open questions we invited the authors to engage with generated diverse and in/conclusive responses. The value of these differences in between the different research approaches and analyses of examples from practice and the philosophical differences between these analyses provoke further serious play with other questions and amplify the concepts that propel us in new directions. Our on-going imperative is to persist in stretching, disrupting and exploding 'common sense' notions of child subjectivity and human agency. What is urgently needed in pursuit of more liveable lives on our damaged planet is taking up more queer, expansive, embodied and affective other ways to undertake research with, for and about (the) 'child'.

### **Guest editors:**

*Karin Murriss* is Professor of Early Childhood Education, University of Oulu (Finland) and Emerita Professor of Philosophy and Pedagogy, University of Cape Town (South Africa). Her North-South research is in posthumanist child studies, philosophy in education, and postqualitative research. Karin is Chief Editor of the Routledge Postqualitative, New Materialist and Critical Posthumanist Research series (<https://postqualitativeresearch.com>) and section editor of *Routledge Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (in progress). The *Posthuman Child Manifesto* you can find on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikN-LGhBawQ>. She has led several internationally funded educational projects. ORCID identifier: 0000-0001-9613-7738. Email: [karin.murriss@oulu.fi](mailto:karin.murriss@oulu.fi); [karin.murriss@uct.ac.za](mailto:karin.murriss@uct.ac.za); Website: [www.karinmurriss.com](http://www.karinmurriss.com)

*Jayne Osgood* is Professor of Education (Childhood Studies and Gender) at Middlesex University, London (UK), and Professor II at Høgskolen i Innlandet, Norway. She is editor at the journals *Gender & Education* and *Reconceptualizing Education Research Methodology*; and book series editor at Springer (Key Thinkers in Education) and Bloomsbury (Feminist Thought in Childhood Research; and Postdevelopmental Approaches to Childhood). She is best known for her research in the post-paradigm and is committed to the pursuit of worldly justice through her research, teaching and activism. ORCID identifier: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9424-8602/> email: [j.osgood@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:j.osgood@mdx.ac.uk)

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