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## Arboreal Methodologies: Getting Lost to Explore the Potential of the Non-innocence of Nature

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# Arboreal Methodologies: Getting Lost to Explore the Potential of the Non-innocence of Nature

*Jayne Osgood, Suzanne Axelsson, Tamsin Cavaliero, Maire Hanniffy, and Susan McDonnell*

It began with an email invitation that wended its way through cyberspace  
(0.3g CO<sub>2</sub>e)  
Then a Zoom meeting to virtually connect and plan a workshop  
(0.6kg CO<sub>2</sub>e)  
Another few emails back and forth  
(1kg CO<sub>2</sub>e)  
Another Zoom meeting to work out the logistics  
(0.6kg CO<sub>2</sub>e)  
Culminating in public transport to the airport  
(2.8kg CO<sub>2</sub>e)  
A flight to North-West Ireland from London  
(145.2kg CO<sub>2</sub>e)  
Public transport from the airport to the hotel  
(2.8kg CO<sub>2</sub>e)  
It takes six mature trees to offset 160kg CO<sub>2</sub>e...

Taking arboreal methodologies to North-West Ireland was not without costs, implications, or guilt.

Arboreal methodologies (Osgood, 2022; Osgood & Odegard, 2022; Osgood & Axelsson, 2023) have emerged from childhood studies that make materiality, affect, temporality, and human connection to the more- and other-than-human central to inquiries. Unlike prevailing approaches in childhood studies concerned with making the child central to research (Osgood, 2023, in press), posthumanist approaches seek to pursue a different logic (Osgood et al., 2022) that understands the child as active in producing and being produced by the world around them. This draws into sharp focus our entangled place within the world, the limits of human exceptionalism (to know and fix the world), and crucially to our response-abilities to attune to the complexities of life on a damaged planet (Haraway, 2016; Tsing, 2015). Feminist posthumanist approaches in childhood studies are important for thinking (again) about “sustainability” and the “environment” because they shift the focus away from “nature” being in the service of the human to the complex inseparability of natureculture (Haraway, 2008), and the demands it makes of us to sit with the discomfort of knowing that we are always implicated and infected. It is impossible to take refuge in nature to escape the terrifying realities of culture—they are always inextricably interwoven—if only we create the time to notice, to attune to the world’s differential becoming.

Arboreal methodologies invite immersive, affective bodily engagements with natureculture as opportunities to experience the world differently and to take the non-innocence of nature more seriously. This is especially pressing for childhoods of the Anthropocene, the current geopolitical epoch characterized by human-induced destruction of planet earth as evidenced through the increased presence of extreme emergencies from forest fires, floods, and life-threatening plagues. Posthumanism underlines the desperate need to pursue another logic in childhood pedagogy and research—one that refuses biophilia, that is, the notion that human beings have an innate sense of connection to nature, that nature is wholesome and pure—and one that offers a sanctuary for authentic childhoods to find expression, or be rediscovered in adulthood.



Figure 1. Fleeting trees from the Airbus

## FOREST SCHOOLING: POSSIBILITIES FOR ARBOREAL PEDAGOGIES

There is a long history of valuing the outdoors as a place where children can play and develop, which can be detected in the works of Froebel, Macmillan, Isaacs, and others; there is extensive research that argues that being in the outdoors is invaluable to child development and well-being (Kellert, 2005; Lester & Maudsley, 2006; Taylor & Kuo, 2006). It is claimed that children with few pressures, free to develop in the nature-rich environments of the forest schools, were less stressed, more confident (especially in taking calculated risks), had better communication skills, were more creative, showed better emotional well-being, suffered less ill health, and had better concentration on entering formal education (Knight, 2011). Outside, children can be active and learn through movement and all their senses and, consequently, stress levels, are lower (Louv, 2008).

Other observed benefits are the reduced likelihood of viruses and germs being shared in the outdoors, and the reduced prospect of childhood obesity due to increased physical activity (Charlton & House, 2012). Exponents of forest schools claim that it is an altogether healthier environment, and helps children appreciate a world they ultimately care for, which is a vital antidote to “nature deficit syndrome” (Louv, 2008) that children who spend too much time indoors suffer, because they are out of touch with the natural world and the rhythms of nature.

The emphasis within forest schooling seems squarely *on what nature can do for humans*; the forest is understood as resource, context, provider. Viewing it in this way amounts to human exceptionalism that (unwittingly) reinscribes both extractivism and consumerism. But the forest and forest schools are never distinct and separate from the wider world. Undertaking a project of diffractively mapping the non-innocence of matter (see Osgood 2019, 2022; Osgood & Mohandas, 2021), such as the waterproof puddle-suit or the plastic welly boot needed to attend forest school, would reveal a complex and altogether disturbing and unsettling counternarrative to the conflation of childhood with nature.

Forest schools are intermeshed and entangled with capitalism, consumerism, and anthropocentrism. Romanticized accounts of childhood and its relationship to the purity of nature are fictions. Woodland is frequently carved up by highly polluted trunk roads and railway tracks. Cars are used to ferry children to forest schools; lunches are wrapped in materials that will take years to degrade; dog faeces in plastic bags are narrowly avoided by small feet—these are realities of spending time in woodland. Much woodland is heavily managed and under constant threat of further regulation and containment—what Tsing and colleagues (2017) identify as the Plantationocene.

Nature cannot be thought of as a separate space, territory, or time; rather, it is intricately and non-innocently bound up with capitalism and human-induced destruction. Yet, the “natural” setting of the forest for early childhood pedagogy is typically presented as providing a context that is distinct and divorced from mainstream (classroom-based) alternatives. It is interesting to note that predominant ideas about child development and human exceptionalism still find expression in forest school pedagogies despite this proclaimed separateness.

As Vladimirova (2021, p. 60) stresses: “forest (nature) is not only a place for an aesthetic experience, learning, playing, or calming down but also a thinking metaorganism that is encounterable ... and is co-caring with us for becoming together.” We must take seriously how “becoming together” takes shape. The narrow concern with how nature benefits child well-being, development, and learning is precisely what needs to be called to account. What does this anthropocentric logic miss? What else might be encountered by bringing the work of feminist science scholars (such as Haraway, 2008, 2016; Tsing, 2015) and Indigenous scholars concerned with place-based approaches (Kimmerer, 2013; McCoy et al., 2020; Nxumalo & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2022; Tuck & MacKenzie, 2015) to the pedagogical and research approaches taken in forest settings? How might relationalities, legacies, histories, and the vital materialism of the forest inform and shape engagements as processes of worldly-becoming rather than human developmental progress?

## ARBOREAL METHODOLOGIES IN A POLYTUNNEL

These questions and the broader counternarratives about the non-innocence of the forest found expression in a polytunnel in a forest school in North-West Ireland. It was a part of the *Head, Hands, Heart Project* intended to generate interest in environmental issues and sustainability among interdisciplinary colleagues connected to Atlantic Technological University (ATU), Sligo, Ireland. Susan, Tamsin, and Maire facilitated the *Head, Hands Heart Project*, while Jayne and Suzanne were invited to deliver an arboreal methodologies workshop that would introduce participants to post-humanist research practices as part of the project. Unfortunately, Suzanne was unable to attend due to a viral infection but recorded her contribution, which was shared, whilst Jayne delivered the day-long workshop in person. The workshop was attended by 12 adult participants including cross-faculty members from ATU and a range of external partners which included an artist, a dancer, playworkers, and early years teachers.

Ordinarily, the Woodland School provides a space for children and families to engage with the forest and with nature through learning and playing outdoors. There is no pretence of “purity” or separation from the contemporary world. It is immediately apparent that this bucolic pocket of woodland is enmeshed in and criss-crossed by the materials and technologies of the 21st century.



Figure 2. An “inside classroom” at the Forest School



Figure 3. Learning materials in the polytunnel

Less ordinarily, a sizable group of adults assemble on a cold December morning, on too-small furniture in a polyethylene tunnel that serves as the school’s indoor space when needed. We adults sit among an assortment of toys, some plastic, and an electric kettle that provides welcome hot drinks. Venturing outside, we are protected by warm clothing and footwear produced from natural and synthetic fibres (*Made in China* more often than not). Close by, we hear passing cars on the road. The faint odor of aviation fuel is vaguely detectable as planes come into land not too far away.

The large television screen, brought in for screening the presentations and film as part of the workshop, is a jarring presence in the polytunnel. Its 1.4-metre plastic-metal-electronic bulk imposes itself, rupturing any remaining illusion of “escape to nature.” As Jayne speaks of resisting natureculture binaries—and of the entanglements of all humans, including children, in the discomforts of late capitalism—it is impossible to ignore the screen, which evokes continuing debates and concerns surrounding children’s screentime (Sakr, 2019).



Figure 4. An outbuilding at the Woodland School



Figure 5. “Screentime” in the polytunnel

Jayne’s carefully curated presentation (to the diverse audience comprising artists, outdoor adventurers, early childhood educators, parents, ecologists, and social scientists) meanders and gets lost. The polytunnel as makeshift classroom, alongside the absurdity of the giant TV, and the intimacy of the group huddled around on too small furniture, alters the atmosphere. As a consequence, the presentation is taken down another path, which necessitates dispensing with some of the theoretical concepts and skipping some of the beautiful images and powerful quotes. Instead, she speaks directly and engagingly with the audience. Her essential points are clearly made, and participants ask for copies of the published paper (Osgood & Axelsson, 2023) for further reading. The screen allows us to connect with Suzanne through her film, *Getting Lost, Gaining Wisdom* (Figure 6).



Figure 6. QR code to *Getting Lost, Gaining Wisdom*

But in many ways the intrusive TV screen becomes eclipsed in the moment by the affective intensities within the polytunnel that are agitated by the space, place, and complex relationalities between the human, non-human, and more-than-human, in the moment. After years of pandemic-induced Zoom presentations, sentient exchange—in the otherworldly context of an inside/outside polytunnel—felt fresh and vital.

The materiality of the large screen in the Woodland School provokes important discussions about how children and adults can live, learn, and play together with and in technoscapes and treescapes. The figure of the child remains tangled in hopes of redemption from planetary crisis through an unproblematic relationship with the more-than-human, *and* in fears of corruption through interactions with digital technologies. Acknowledging shared experiences of navigating life in the ruins of capitalism (Tsing et al., 2017) provides vital possibilities for thinking differently about relationalities with other humans and non-humans.

At the end of the morning, the workshop participants take a lunch break. We venture into the heart of the woodland to share a cauldron of homemade soup and sit around an open fire. The founder of the Woodland School shares stories, wisdom, and practices passed down from elders and we learn about the importance of re/connecting with nature, of “re-wilding.”



Figure 7. Boundaries to the forest



Figure 8. Learning about re-wilding

As the last remains of soup are eaten, the invitation to “Get Lost in the Forest” is taken up. The final slide on the PowerPoint from the morning session advised workshop participants that “getting lost” is a form of “childing” (Kennedy & Kohan, 2008) where “child” shifts from noun to verb and getting lost becomes an invitation “to child.” Childing insists upon a willingness to attune to surroundings, the environment, the sedimented layers of history associated with the place, and the atmospheric forces circulating in the space and to embrace a willingness to be surprised (Figure 9).

**Getting Lost in the Forest**

Attempt this exercise in *SILENCE*

- experience the forest with all your senses, deeply notice, attune, be in search of the ‘somethings else’ that are out there

Take up a *CHILDING* sensibility:

- Dwell upon things, sounds, smells that hail your attention
- Stop, pause, slow down – this is not about how far you go but how deeply you immerse yourself
- Travel backwards – literally walk in reverse, notice how it feels, what you see (differently)
- Close your eyes (use a scarf to blindfold yourself for a few minutes)
- Inhale deeply
- Spin, oscillate, digress, jump
- Make yourself small, make yourself big – view the world from different vantage points

Work with/be inspired by *CHILDREN’S LITERATURE*

- Think of the characters, plot, space, scale
- Think with scale, tempo, speed
- Think with the other worldliness of fantasy

*DOCUMENT* differently – in whatever way feels response-able

- forage and gather – with care
- assemble
- photograph
- sketch

Figure 9. An invitation to get lost

## GETTING LOST, DIFFERENTLY

Tamsin: Having been invited to get lost, I imagine striding off into the distance, but my getting lost is minute—I take a few steps and am struck by a tiny flower growing out of a rock face. I find myself wondering at the 2.3-million-year-old rock sedimentation, once submerged by sea but now reshaped by persistent exposure to NO<sub>2</sub> and children’s small, dense chisels as they engage in forest school re-wilding. I take a closer look and attempt to draw. As I draw, focusing in, the world becomes smaller and more detailed. I notice a tiny white bug on the stem of the flower; a spider web caught between the leaves. Attempting to capture the outline of the leaves, I notice hairs on the leaves.

Flecks of ash from the fire float in the air—the average woodfire produces approximately 1.82 kg of CO<sub>2</sub>. But for now, carbon-ash floats through the air with the lightness of snowflakes. Birdsong is audible, interspersed with voices from the other workshop participants. It’s interrupted by revving engines—the sound of school pick-up traffic congesting—accompanied by a not-so-far-away pneumatic drill and the occasional cracking of sticks as people move around in their quests to get lost. Paper plates and wooden spoons amass in a neat (but guilty) pile just to the edge, disrupting the apparent purity of this mini-world.



Figure 10. Diffractively getting lost in scale

After the day, I was left with a heavy feeling from getting lost among trees. Jayne had spoken about a funeral procession she had been involved with as a form of activism against 182 unnecessarily felled trees on a nature reserve in London. This stayed with me. The funeral provoked anxieties about leaves still on trees—in December! Summer drought and a false autumn altered the regular behavior of plant life, and trees heavy with foliage in the depths of winter stand as a vital reminder of what it is to live life on a damaged planet (Tsing, 2015). I became haunted by a passage from my current reading:

*Arboreal-time is cyclical, recurrent, perennial; the past and the future breathe within this moment, and the present does not necessarily flow in one direction; instead, it draws circles within circles, like the rings you find when you cut us down.* (Shafak, 2021, p.15)



Getting lost in that moment, in that mini-landscape, offered capacities to slow down, to notice, to attune to long-forgotten and not-yet-told stories. The affective forces of getting lost in a miniature world agitated curiosity for the history of this woodland, attention to intergenerational storytelling, and the terrors of the Anthropocene (toxins, rock erosion, pollution, and the limitations of time's progress narrative). The discomfort of attuning to that which would routinely be overlooked (a leaf, spider web, cracking sticks, leaf hairs, fire ash) continues to resurface and demands that "sustainability" and "environmental education" must be troubled for the underpinning human-centric logic. Sustainability rests upon a logic that "man" can "fix" "nature" and "preserve" it—but for whom? For what? From whom? From what? To quote Vladimarova (2021), "we need to expand the idea of care away from aiming to save the planet and more toward learning how to respond to its call to live in all its human and more-than-human intricate complexity. This reformulation shifts the position of humans from being saviours to being response-able" (Haraway, 2016).

## GETTING LOST: IN SEARCH OF SOMETHING ELSE

I (Susan) received the invitation to get lost in the woods with curiosity. "Childing" created possibilities to engage differently, playfully, with the forest; attending to scale facilitated the discovery of "something else." Yet, attuning to naturecultures in a forest school (intended for children, but occupied by adults) also opened possibilities to take seriously the non-innocence of nature and what that might mean for our conceptualizations and practices of environmental education in the name of sustainability.

Getting lost is a curious but generative practice. Children are not supposed to get lost. In the Global North, their lives tend to be bounded, endlessly surveilled, and protected from the dangers "out there" in the unknown spaces of cities, woods, and screentime. Physically or psychically "lost" children are considered an indictment of poor parental care, or proof of their vulnerability, or of the evils of the external world. In fairy tales, children's own transgressions (*Red Riding Hood*), or the neglect of their parents (*Hansel and Gretel*) leave them lost and vulnerable to animal and human predators in the woods. They are dark tales in their unsanitized forms, but generally children's resourcefulness, with the help of human and non-human forces, bring them through their trials to safety.

As a city child, I ventured well beyond the adult-designated boundaries of safety to visit my favorite (dead) tree at the edge of Epping Forest (I named it the "Lightning Tree"). The smell and texture of that tree resurfaced—hauntologies evoked from a time that has since become buried, with childing capacities deadened. Today, in the Sligo Woodland School, children learn about boundaries in the treescape by adhering to the limits marked by orange nylon string on the trees. They don't physically get lost, but they can experience moments of conditional independence outside the adult gaze. This is the space of play, the imaginative space that children are *allowed* to be lost in. Without romanticizing childhood or insisting on a "natural" capacity for play that is unattainable for adults, it may be that children's cultural positioning as playful "other" and related attunement to the "philosophy of 'as if'" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 27) produces generative potentials for "multiple possible stories of becoming-other" (Aitken, Lund & Kjørholt, 2007, p. 13) with adults, trees, screens, television shows, raincoats, microbes, mushrooms, and literature. Perhaps this is what the invitation to get lost as a form of childing makes possible for adults who have deadened capacities to attune to the complexities of the Anthropocene as it manifests through the everyday, taken-for-granted matter and stuff around and within us. Playing seriously as world-making practice (Haraway, 2008) is one modality for research and pedagogy through which both nature and capitalist technologies can be experienced simultaneously. Serious play is a way to stay with the trouble (Haraway 2016), to consider shifting ontologies, to explore ways to flourish in the capitalist ruins of a damaged planet (Tsing et al., 2017).

I took the suggestion to get lost then as an imaginative rupture, a moment of serious play, "as if" lost,

while not lost. The lostness was fleeting, the riskiness of the forest minimized. First, as a rocky cleft invited me to clamber up to begin childing, a miniature landscape hailed my attention.



Figure 11. Scales and hierarchies at play

Thinking of the provocations in Suzanne’s film, and of a passage from Jansson’s *The Summer Book*, I considered the interrelated scales and the hierarchies at play in the forest: microbe, mushroom, Moomin, child, tree.

*Between the arm of her sweater, her hat and the white reeds, she could see a triangle of sky, sea and sand—quite a small triangle. There was a blade of grass in the sand beside her, and between its sawtoothed leaves it held a piece of seabird down .... She saw the conical depression in the sand at the foot of the blade of grass and the wisp of seaweed that had twined around the stem. Right next to it lay a piece of bark. If you looked at it for a long time, it grew and became a very ancient mountain. The upper side had craters and excavations that looked like whirlpools. The scrap of bark was beautiful and dramatic. It rested above its shadow on a single point of contact, and the grains of sand were coarse, clean, almost grey in the morning light, and the sky was completely clear, as was the sea.*

*Sophia came back, running.*

*“I found a floor grate!” she hollered. “It’s big; it’s from a ship! It’s as long as a boat!”*

*“You don’t say!” her grandmother said.*

*It was important for her not to stand up too quickly, so she had time to watch the blade of grass just as the down left its hold and was borne away in a light morning breeze. It was carried out of her field of vision, and when she got on her feet the landscape had grown smaller.*

*“I saw a feather,” she said. “A piece of scolder<sup>1</sup> down.”*

*“What scolder?” Sophia said, for she had forgotten the bird that died of love.*

*(Jansson, 1972/2003, pp. 36-37)*

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1 A scolder is a long-tailed duck

Zooming in and out between various scales in the forest presents imaginative possibilities for reconsidering relationalities, kinship, and becoming-with the treescape and earthscape. What is valued and why? What are the reciprocities and interdependencies?

I experimented with spinning quickly, arms outstretched. I fell flat on my back, dizzy, looking up at the treetops as they whirled above.



Figure 12. Haptic body-forest encounters

As I waited for the world to stop spinning, I heard birds above and lay still to watch them, hundreds of years above. This engagement provoked another kind of encounter between body and forest—dizzy like Sophia’s grandmother. I looked, listened, sensed anew—encountering the forest haptically, in and among the dirt, leaves, bird droppings, fungi, lichen, and microbes. The dizziness evoked Schuller’s (2018) account of the “microbial self.” She draws attention to the pervasiveness of microbes by dwelling upon Lyme disease, a microbial “infection” that causes dizziness among a host of other unpleasant and debilitating conditions. Challenging commonly held wisdom that viruses must be thought of as invading/attacking the human body, she argues that human-microbial relations must be thought of sympoietically<sup>2</sup>. As Schuller (2018, p. 53) states, “we live our lives fully imbricated with our environments, including microbial life-forms, which not only are interdependent with us but, more fundamentally, do not pre-exist as separate entities.”

What then becomes of the self when the body and its sensations are understood to be forged through ongoing, co-constituting relationships with microbial life? Trillions of beneficial micro-organisms are dwelling throughout our bodies—we are in processes of endlessly becoming-with, never separate, contained, autopoietic<sup>3</sup> bounded human subjects. Sensations and emotions arise from microbial entanglements. Schuller (2018) contests that these relations condition the subject in sympoiesis; it is the process of becoming-with that produces sensation, and the individuated subject (as well as hierarchies of mind and body) must be understood to be a fiction.

The dizziness then was not mine alone, but as it slowly abated, looking down, towards the earth and the forest floor, I dug my hands into the decomposing leaves and pungent humus. Semi-decayed sycamore “helicopters” were unearthed, remnants of the trees’ out-of-season seed dispersal activities.

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2 becoming-with  
3 self-creating



Figure 13. Forest temporalities

Sitting on the ground, sifting through the living and the dead, fingernails dirty, was a sensory encounter, slowing time, making human-non-human relationalities felt as layered ecologies of worlding shaped by co-emergence and mutual risk. Touch was a visceral reminder of the inaudible, slow processes of the forest, and the urgency in which engaging with those temporalities shift bodyminds to places where we can question human exceptionalism and speciesism. Returning to Schuller (2018, p. 61), fingernails dirty with mud remind us that “we are witnessing the rise of the ‘microbial self,’ or a notion of personhood in which the subject and its self-constituting sensations and affective states emerge within a network of interspecies interdependence.”

The concept of a “microbial self” suggests that these sensations and affective charges—the hauntologies awakened, the dizziness and the disorientation—do not pertain to the bounded human-subject but rather emerge from the friction of symbiotic relations. Getting lost then takes on a different complexion that involves encountering the world again. The possibilities available in surrendering to disorientation, dizziness, getting lost in down-on-the-ground moments can take our engagements with “nature” to places that assist in shifting the emphasis in forest schooling from a place to learn *about* nature and how we humans might preserve and protect it, to understanding ourselves as endlessly co-constituted and intermeshed—recognizing that *we are* natureculture—or as Haraway (1998) proposed, we are cyborgs.

### AN ABSENT-PRESENCE: LOSING THE CHANCE TO GET LOST IN THE FOREST

As organizers of the *Head, Hands, Heart Project*, we wanted to act in ways that reflected the ethos of a project concerned with sustainability and cultivate an environmentally conscious approach to our work. Providing an eco-friendlier means of transport to the woodlands involved funding a return bus from the university for attendees. Our intentions were “virtuous”—reducing carbon emissions by reducing the number of cars journeying to the “wholesome space” of the woodland. Despite our intentions, numerous attendees chose to drive, something I (Marie) was not aware of in advance. The bus dispatched just five of us at the woodlands. Wrapped in many layers to thwart the damp cold of the North-West of Ireland, we quickly became immersed with “natural” objects in the polytunnel (beeswax, seashells, leaves, and rosehip), yet the encounter with the bus and the nearly full carpark provoked the messy contradictions and tensions within this seemingly “natural” space.

Haraway (2016) urges that we take seriously sympoiesis, or making-with, rather than autopoiesis, or self-making. Accepting that human exceptionalism and intentionality can come undone at any moment involves learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying together on a damaged earth. The

endless natureculture entanglements that we were caught up in (bus, carbon footprint, mobile phone use, facilitation of an event, “use” of the forest school, “natural materials,” plastic toys, nylon-string boundaries) served as reminders of the limitations of human exceptionalism and intentionality.

Yet, we were approximately 90 minutes behind schedule as we entered the *Getting Lost* and *Becoming Together* segments of the day. I had to leave for the bus, which was not lost, but in fact very punctual—it had arrived for the return journey to campus.

My head, hands, and heart were alive as I stood along the roadside waiting for the bus.



Figure 14. Waiting for the bus, lost in administration

*My head* was conflicted. I felt a responsibility to the (four) attendees who had traveled with me on the bus to ensure they returned to the university by 2:00 PM, yet I was also aware of the methodological opportunities that childing might present to experience “nature” differently.

*My hands* were focused on the task—a 4G connection via data roaming, emitting radiofrequency radiation (the harms to human, non-human, and more-than-human still not fully known according to the World Health Organization, 2014)—to alert the bus company to collect the five of us.

*My heart* wished that I was childing; spinning, getting lost and dirty, disorientated, dizzy, and troubled by processes of sympoiesis. As the stress intensified—I inhaled and exhaled deeply. Big lungfuls of air: 21 percent oxygen, 78 percent nitrogen, argon, carbon dioxide, and methane and a host of other toxins (Mazzone, 2008). These potentially toxic lungfuls nevertheless prevented me from becoming lost in the administration of the project—the calming capacities of deep breathing, which underlines the porosity of bodily boundaries as I literally become what I breathe, and that in turn the trees become-with my breath.

The overriding thought I have days and weeks after our trip to the woodlands is that my obligations towards the *Head, Hands, Heart Project*, the attendees, and their work commitments took precedence over getting lost and becoming “child” in the woods. My absent-presence underlines the capacities of the complex forces of capitalism, and life in the Anthropocene, to alter the complexion of being lost. But our presence—via radio frequencies, an outbreath, footprints, molecules, microbes, a video recording, giant TV, an inbreath—linger on, haunting and reshaping all that we have touched. As Haraway (2008) asks, who and what do we touch? A simple enough question, but when approached from a feminist

posthumanist orientation, the reverberations and lasting, ongoing, intermeshment with all that we touch, and are touched by, can never be fully known.

Our shared experience of “childing” makes visible the complexities of human relationalities to “nature.” It is not our intention to offer prescriptions on how the ideas and embodied encounters should be taken up in practice with children, but the following propositions might create conditions of possibility to engage deeply with what else getting lost in natureculture might agitate:

- Create space and unbounded time for children to explore and dwell amid the dirt to ask the unasked-for questions.
- Create opportunities to deepen and extend children’s discoveries of becoming-with by following unexpected lines of inquiry (with/through art, science, local/colonial histories, folklore, fantasy, children’s literature).
- Be brave enough to encounter uncertainty and question environmental education and human exceptionalism. Explore other ways to think of ourselves as human.\*
- Value the possibilities that getting lost, attuning, and slowing down create for paying close attention; resist the temptation to rush or find immediate explanations.
- Dwell together upon where else sensing and not-knowing might take your inquiries.

[\**You Are Stardust* by Elin Kelsey & Soyeon Kim is a great book to assist in this.]

## CONCLUSION

This paper has gone some way to make visible both the complexities and the promise of getting lost through arboreal methodologies. The invitation to get lost in the forest through the lens of feminist posthumanism illustrates the potential for embodied encounters to agitate hauntings, reawaken bodily registers, and grapple with questions that surface from unanticipated, sometimes unasked-for relationalities. There were notable absent-presences throughout the workshop; for example Suzanne was unable to be physically present in the polytunnel on that cold December morning due to a viral infection, but a pre-recording was shared via the giant TV screen and a paper copy of a relevant publication (Osgood & Axelsson, 2023) was distributed. Also notable by their absent-presence were child bodies—yet, practices of childing and residues and atmospheric forces of once present children worked in profound ways to shape the tempos and scales that came to characterize the day. It was the willingness to take up childing to explore what arboreal methodologies might make possible that matters of concern with the non-innocence of nature became available. Collectively, we were reminded of the messy contradictions and tensions of contemporary education and how the machinic nature of academia can unravel ideas and practices about ‘sustainability,’ ‘preservation,’ and ‘environmental education.’ Arboreal methodologies hold the potential to encounter ‘the forest,’ ‘nature,’ and ‘child’ in more complex and confederate ways that underline the value of slowing down and sitting with discomfort; of breaking down unhelpful child/adult nature/culture binaries.

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